

## Critical views against govt can't be termed 'anti-establishment'

Observes Indian SC

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

India's Supreme Court today observed that critical views against the government cannot be termed as "anti-establishment" as an independent press is necessary for a robust democracy.

The court made the observation as it set aside the government's refusal of security clearance to a news channel, reports our New Delhi correspondent.

The SC bench, headed by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud, quashed the Kerala High Court order which had upheld the Indian government's decision to ban Malayalam language news channel MediaOne's telecast on security grounds.

The top court said the Indian Home Ministry raised national security claims in "thin air" without facts.

The state cannot impose unreasonable restrictions on the press as it would have a chilling effect on the freedom of the media, the bench said adding "national security claims cannot be made out of thin air and there must be material facts backing it."

### MADARIPUR ROAD CRASH

## Why families of 19 victims won't be compensated?

HC seeks explanation from authorities concerned

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday issued a rule asking the authorities concerned to explain why they should not be directed to give adequate compensation to the families of 19 victims who died in Madaripur road accident on March 19.

In the rule, the court also asked the respondents to show causes why they should not be ordered to ensure the safety of people who move on the roads and why their inaction to

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina poses with the vegetables that were grown in Tungipara as part of her own special initiative. The vegetables were brought all the way to the Gono Bhaban for her to inspect. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: BSS

### ELECTRIC VEHICLES

## Govt finally makes guideline for registration, operation

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The government has finally approved a guideline for the registration and operation of electric vehicles.

It aims to have at least 30 percent vehicles electric by 2030, according to a Road Transport and Highways Division circular issued on Tuesday.

Electric Motor Vehicle Registration and Operation Guideline 2023 will come into effect after a gazette of the guideline is published in a few days, said Nur Mohammad Mazumder, chairman of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority.

The development comes more than four years after a draft guideline was submitted

to the division in November 2018. The division then sent a four-member delegation to India to gain experience. The guideline was formulated as per section 124 of the Road Transport Act 2018.

As per the guideline, electric vehicles are those that are run by one or more electric motors powered by electric charge or rechargeable batteries. Battery-run rickshaws, vans and bicycles are not in this category.

Moreover, the battery-run easy-bikes, which saw a sharp rise over the years, will be outside the purview of this guideline, said the BRTA chairman.

Only the models of vehicles approved by the government committee will be

considered electric vehicles, he told The Daily Star yesterday.

### WHY THE GUIDELINE?

The importance of electric vehicles is growing. Bangladesh, under Nationally Determined Contribution, has promised to reduce emission of 3.4 million tonnes of carbon dioxide from the transport sector by 2030, reads the guideline.

In this given situation, at least 30 percent motor vehicles will have to be electric ones by 2030, it added.

Currently, BRTA provides registration and receives fees from electric vehicles following an executive order by the Road Transport and Highways Division, said a

SEE PAGE 10 COL 4

## Officer's body recovered from family planning headquarters

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The body of a family planning officer, whose salary had been stopped for over two years, was found hanging in the accountant's room at the Directorate General of Family Planning headquarters in the capital.

Manowarul Islam, of Bogura, was a medical officer of the DGFP. He used to live in the capital's Narinda area with his wife, two daughters, and a son.

A divisional enquiry was underway against him for an allegation of financial misappropriation when he was attached to Raipura upazila family planning office in Narsingdi, according to police.

The law enforcers recovered the body on Tuesday from room no 1201 on the 12th floor of the DGFP headquarters in Karwanbazar.

The body was sent to Shaheed Shuhrawardy Medical College Hospital for autopsy that night.

Shah Alam, inspector (investigation) of Teigaon Police Station, said, "We primarily suspect it to be a death by suicide." He said they were investigating to see if it could be something else.

After autopsy, the body was handed over to the relatives yesterday, sources at the hospital said last night.

Manowarul's brother Monirul Haque, however, claimed that his brother was killed.

An unnatural death case was lodged with the police station, said the inspector.

The Daily Star could not reach DGFP officials for comments.

## AL leader seeks to files case under DSA against journo

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

An Awami League leader of Rangpur at a court sought to lodge a case under Digital Security Act against a journalist and two others yesterday.

The court directed the Police Bureau of Investigation to file a report after investigation.

Zakaria Alam Shiplu, general secretary of Tajhat Thana AL and councillor of ward 15 of Rangpur City Corporation, said Jamuna TV reporter Mazaharul Mannan Rangpur and ex-RCC councillors Shafiul Islam Shafi and Nur Mohammad had a report run against him on April 1 and 2 with false allegations that tarnished his and his party's image.

## Govt to help

FROM PAGE 1

was organised to receive Tk 316.91 crore as first and second instalments of the loan provided by the government for the construction of Padma Bridge.

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader handed a cheque of Tk 316,90,97,049 to the PM for the loan instalments. The loan was taken from Bangladesh Bank at a low interest rate under an agreement signed between the Finance Division and the Bangladesh Bridge Authority.

Terming the Bangabazar fire a very tragic incident, Hasina said it is too much to bear the suffering of so many businesspeople ahead of the Eid.

She said the government had taken up a project to construct a planned market at Bangabazar following the fires in 1995 and 2018. But some people obstructed the move and filed a writ petition with the High Court, which put a stay order in place, the PM added.

If the process was not halted at that time, the government could have built a good market there, and such a terrible accident would not have happened, Hasina added.

The PM, however, criticised some unruly people who attacked the Fire Service headquarters nearby.

Firefighters rushed to the scene after the fire broke out.

The premier said she asked the authorities to identify the attackers and take proper action against them.

Hasina said if anyone attacks members or vehicles of the fire service or other public properties in future, they won't be spared.

## Bangladesh abstains

FROM PAGE 1

the country's energy infrastructure, could constitute crimes against humanity, reports Reuters.

Russia, which refused to address the Human Rights Council on Tuesday, vigorously denies committing atrocities or targeting civilians in Ukraine.

"The scope and brutality of Russia's atrocities in Ukraine are simply beyond any human comprehension," Ukraine's ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, Yevheniia Filipenko, told the council ahead of the vote.

"We strongly believe that the continued work of the commission in further investigating, documenting and reporting human rights violations and international crimes committed against the people in Ukraine could save more innocent lives [and] could contribute to accountability for perpetrators and justice for victims."

## Goodbye, gentle soul

FROM PAGE 1

assist women was to make them financially independent and hence devoted her energy to making them enter business as she was very confident about women's business abilities and opened institutions for entrepreneurship training and funding.

It was this Rokia Rahman that became the chairperson of the Mediaworld, the owning company of The Daily Star, in 2002, at the demise of her husband, Azimur Rahman, a highly respected business person and the founding chair of Mediaworld. The Daily Star got a new chair and I got a new guide and over time a committed fellow traveller for free media and a personal friend. As the

CEO of the company, my interaction with the new chair was both regular and intense. There were two things that struck me immediately and have grown deeper over the 21 years while she ran Mediaworld – her exceptional business acumen and respect for free media.

With her extraordinary business expertise, she guided The Daily Star's revenue growth and made the paper financially strong. She insisted on the highest standard in accounting and strove to bring the most innovative business practices to the organisation. It would be a different kind of pride that she would exude while receiving the highest taxpayer award as the company's chair.

## A trailblazer for women in business

FROM PAGE 1

entrepreneurial prowess that left an indelible mark on the country's business community, inspiring others to pursue their dreams. She was determined to help women entrepreneurs break barriers and succeed in a male-dominated business world.

Rokia was the vice president of International Chamber of Commerce – ICC, Bangladesh. She was the chairman of RR and Arlinks groups of companies. She was also the chairman of MIDAS Financing Limited.

She undertook initiatives in different sectors and left a lasting legacy in the media, insurance, real estate, and financial institute sectors. In 2001, she became an adviser to the caretaker government.

Rokia's career, however, started with a job at a commercial bank in 1962 – pre-independence period.

At the time, women working in banks was a rarity and Rokia became one of the very few female bankers. Within two years, she became the first woman bank manager of the country and also led the first female-only customer branch in Dhaka.

After a few years of banking Rokia took another bold decision: to leave the career she had worked so hard to build and look after her children.

But the entrepreneurial spirit that lay dormant in her could not be ignored for long.

In 1980, she ventured into the agro-based industry, setting up a cold storage in Munshiganj.

But the path to success was riddled with unexpected obstacles.

Remembering that time, she had said in an interview that she would

have to cross a river on a public launch to visit her business.

"It was a three-hour journey from Dhaka, but it was a beautiful experience. I used to have jhaalmuri (spicy puffed rice) and other mouthwatering foods during the journey.

"However, I sometimes experienced storms. I would be terrified when the launch would sway to one side and everyone would rush to the doors so that they could jump into river in case the situation got worse."

Of the 15 cold storage owners in that area, she was the only woman.

"The villagers were eager to help me, but they wondered if a woman could actually run a business."

But soon enough they realised how serious and capable she was as they benefitted from her cold storage, which allowed them to store their produce all year round.

In 1982, she joined the board of MIDAS, which provides loans to SMEs.

Rokia helped the MIDAS board implement her idea of collateral-free loans for women entrepreneurs.

"In 1991, we launched a collateral-free loans project and we got tremendous response. Many women started to set up boutique businesses. We used to inspire the new loan takers by telling the success stories of others women," she said in an interview.

"Although many big businesses default on their loans, our recovery rate was almost 100 percent. A woman even came to pay her installment by rickshaw during a hartal."

Rokia also helped MIDAS introduce marketing assistance for women entrepreneurs by launching

Her empathy for the staff was both deep and natural. After her occasional meeting with me and the senior members of the administration at the office, she would go down to the newsroom and engage with both senior and junior colleagues to enquire about their family situation. She unfailingly attended our annual staff day celebrations and spend hours with us.

Like her husband and other members of the Board, her commitment to the freedom of press, independent journalism and to the independence of the institution of the editor was total. She never hesitated to personally call and often visit me to extend her full support through all the legal and

MIDAS Mini Mart and MIDAS Trade Fair.

Apart from her achievements in business, she championed the cause of women by helping countless of them become self-reliant.

In 1994, the first Women Entrepreneurs Association was formed in Bangladesh with Rokia as the founder president. She was also the founder president of Bangladesh Federation of Women Entrepreneurs launched in 2006. She formed Women in Small Enterprises to further help women get a firm footing in small enterprises and industries.

For the women she helped succeed, she was a torchbearer and guardian angel.

Sadequa Hassan Sejuti, an entrepreneur who closely worked with Rokia for many years, said, "The women who came to get assistance from her were never turned away. When a new women entrepreneur would come to show their first products, she would collect most of the pieces as their first buyer."

"She would also leave no stone unturned to market and brand those products."

Mentioning Rokia's innate humility when interacting with people despite having such a stellar career herself, Sejuti said, "We have lost an idol, a legend."

Her family members too said she would always keep in touch with the farmers she worked with and treated everyone equally, whether they were village farmers, top business leaders or government officials.

But for Rokia, there were more positions waiting for her to fill.

She was a staunch supporter of

political harassments that I faced while running this paper. For me, she was a great source of courage. She was most regular in communicating her sincere appreciation for the bold journalism that this paper practised. Her trust in the editor was unquestioned and never during her 21 years of chairmanship was any question ever raised about the editorial position that the paper took.

Roki to her friends and Roki Bhabi to her admirers including me, she was the epitome of gentleness, care and courtesy. With the never-fading smile on her face, inexhaustible energy, and tremendous sensitivity to other people's feelings, she would lead business bodies, participate in

free media, serving the boards of the country's top two Bangla and English-language dailies.

She was the chairperson of Mediaworld Ltd, the owning company of The Daily Star, and a director of Mediastar Limited, the owning company of Prothom Alo.

She was a board member of MRDI, a leading media training organisation based in Dhaka, and a member of Brac's governing body.

"She always backed ethical journalism and encouraged women journalists," said Hasibur Rahman, executive director at MRDI.

In 1999, she was appointed a director of Bangladesh Bank, becoming the first woman in South Asia to hold such a position. She was the president of the Bangladesh Employers Federation and was also a director of Reliance Insurance Ltd. She is the former president of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industries – MCCI, Dhaka.

Born in 1941 in a respectable Muslim family in Kolkata, she had her schooling in the Lorreto House. She then went to St Joseph's Convent School in Karachi, after which she graduated from St Joseph's College in 1962. Two years later, she received a diploma in banking from the Institute of Bankers of Pakistan. She then went onto studying management at Tufts University in the US in 1995.

Her father late Ali Afzal was a former secretary of the Bengal Legislative Assembly and joint secretary of the then Pakistan National Assembly. Her grandfather Khan Bahadur Fazle Rabbi was the Dewan of Murshidabad during the British rule.

women empowerment activities, innovate new ways to assist struggling businesses, especially women entrepreneurs, extend a helping hand to young people lost in the corporate world and reach out to people and organisations devoted to helping the underprivileged.

Her elegance stood out wherever she went. Her integrity and honesty captured most people she interacted with and her humility and modesty made people wonder how could a single individual have so many qualities. The Almighty was indeed most generous in endowing her with many magnificent qualities. We pray to Him now that she be Blessed with Eternal Peace.

In 1964, Rokia married Azimur Rahman, former chairman of Arlinks Group and founder chairman of Mediaworld Ltd and Mediastar Ltd.

He passed away in 2001.

Despite all her successes in the business world, at home she was a devoted mother and doting grandmother to her two grandsons and three granddaughters, with whom she shared a special bond.

She loved to cook, never failing to make her signature Kashmiri mango pickle and guava jelly every year and distribute them among relatives amid her busy schedule. She was modern and progressive in her outlook but also deeply religious.

Self-effacing and soft spoken, her demeanour belied the toughness of an astute business leader who has left a legacy of showing the world how enterprising and innovative women can be, if given the right opportunity and support.

Throughout her illustrious career, it is no surprise that Rokia received numerous awards, including the Leading women entrepreneurs of the world, Monte Carlo 1999; Businessperson of the Year 2003 by the American Chamber of Commerce in Bangladesh; the Priyadarshani award in India, and the Deshbondhu Award for Women Empowerment

Rokia Afzal Rahman's namaz-e-jaanaza will be held in the capital's Gulshan Azad Masjid on Friday after Asr prayers. Her family has requested all her friends, family and well wishers to join. She will be laid to rest at the Banani graveyard the same day.

A Dua Mahfil was held at The Daily Star Centre yesterday evening to pray for the salvation of her soul.