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# Another heritage site to bite the dust

## 125-year-old Railway Hospital being demolished

**HELEMUL ALAM**

After the demolition of century-old Neelam Ghar and Jahajbari, another heritage building – the old Railway Hospital, which was established 125 years ago – is set to be demolished.

A significant part of the Railway Hospital’s west side, now known as Shorkari Karmachari Hospital (Government Staffers Hospital) building, has already been demolished. The rest will crumble soon, as work has been ongoing for around 15 days.

The authorities have gone ahead with the decision despite the High Court’s directive in 2018 ordering them not to change, modify or demolish 2,200 British era heritage buildings in Old Dhaka, which includes the old Railway Hospital.

The two-storey building in Fulbaria remained functional as a hospital till

March this year. After that, hospital authorities issued a notice to empty all its wards and move them to an adjacent new building from March 19 to March 28. This newspaper has obtained a copy of the eviction notice.

Mamoon Mahbub, assistant secretary of Shorkari Karmachari Hospital, said they will construct a reservoir and green space at the site, as the old building has become fragile.

When asked about the HC directive, he said he was not aware of it.

Taimur Islam, chief executive of conservation organisation Urban Study Group, said this building was constructed as part of the new civil station from Fulbaria to Farmgate to make Dhaka the capital of the Eastern Bengal and Assam province during Bangabanga (the first partition of Bengal) in 1905.

“The building should be protected

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Yet another heritage building in Old Dhaka is being demolished. The western side of the old Railway Hospital building, a 125-year-old British-era structure at Fulbaria, has already been demolished to the ground, and the rest is soon to crumble. Conservationists have condemned the move and demanded the building be protected for its historical significance as per the HC directive. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

## PM to visit Japan on April 25

**DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT**

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will pay an official visit to Japan from April 25 to 28 at the invitation of Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio.

She will be received by the Emperor of Japan, said the foreign ministry in a statement yesterday.

According to the foreign ministry, Fumio will hold a meeting with Hasina and then host a working dinner in her honour.

Hasina is scheduled to attend an investment summit and a community reception along with few bilateral meetings.

A number of memorandums of cooperation are expected to be signed during the visit.



### MY DHAKA



## An act of kindness by ALEYA HIJRA

**RBR**

She is in her mid-fifties. Sombrely dressed in a white-green sari, hair parted in the middle and tied in a bun, Aleya Hijra has a betel leaf-stained smile. She lives at Diabari, Uttara in a rented house with her disciples; she is their “Guruma” or leader.

“I take from the public and give back to society. The general people are like my father-mother; they’re my guardian, my sole source of living. I salute the fact that they give us charity and in turn, we try to make contributions when the need arises. Kindness is the cycle of life,” said Aleya.

Recently, she came into the limelight after donating her hajj savings to stand beside the calamity-stricken traders of Dhaka’s Bangabazar. Her gesture made the headlines because she thought about the traders who were empowered only a few days ago and are now on the streets with the stroke of bad luck.

“If Allah wishes, I’ll go to hajj someday, but for now, this is my hajj. Deep down, I feel happy and proud that I could do something for them. If I had more, I would’ve happily shared my savings with them. This is my Eid,” she says.

Aleya is active in charity work. She donates to mosques and madrasas, and gives air conditioners to local mosques. During Eid, she pays her zakat and fitra. Aleya recently bought lungis and saris to be distributed among the needy.

Following the death of her parents, Aleya came to Dhaka at the tender age of nine from her village in Mymensingh. It was during the 1988 flood that she started working as a household help in an MP’s house. Her friends and family used to always tease Aleya for her feminine mannerisms, calling her a hijra. So, she decided to leave a particular way of life and join a hijra group.

About 25 years ago, she joined Rahela hijra’s group in Uttara, and

since then, she has been dancing on occasions like childbirth and weddings and collecting donations from shops.

“Everyone knows me in the Uttara sectors. I’m even invited to a cup of tea at police stations,” she says, smiling.

Straightforward and law-abiding Aleya feels obligated to stand against evil; she cannot be part of any misgivings.

“People are scared of us. It’s natural. They don’t know us and some hijras are undisciplined and disruptive; they take money from people on the streets but do not belong to any of our groups. There is good and bad in every community. We are also afraid of reporters

“ If Allah wishes, I’ll go to hajj someday, but for now, this is my hajj. Deep down, I feel happy and proud that I could do something for them. If I had more, I would’ve happily shared my savings with them. This is my Eid.

because some engage in yellow journalism,” she said, clarifying her stance.

People from the hijra community are a close-knit, simple clan of ill-treated citizens. They left their own homes because of rejection and embraced their Guruma as a guardian. Aleya Hijra has shown that in times of crisis, they too are willing to come forward and help people in distress.

*Every nook and cranny of Dhaka has stories waiting to be told. “My Dhaka” gives interested writers the platform to share experiences of city life. Only selected stories will make it to our print edition and digital platform. Send your Dhaka story (within 450 words) to raffat@thedailystar.net*

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## DIGITAL SECURITY ACT ‘It’s creating an environment of terror’

### Experts tell webinar, urge govt to repeal it

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

Eminent jurists, academicians, and journalists yesterday underscored the need to come together and raise voice to make the government repeal the Digital Security Act (DSA).

In a webinar organised by Forum for Bangladesh Studies, they said any amendment to the law could exacerbate the already stifling situation in the country.

Ali Riaz, a distinguished professor of Illinois University, said DSA was enacted for immediate political gain. It serves as a protection tool for individuals and groups in power, and the ruling party.

Over the last four and half years, since the enactment of the law, citizens’ rights have been violated and an atmosphere of terror has been established, he said. “DSA

has set the stage for vigilante justice, where anyone can sue anybody. The situation has reached a point where no lawsuit is required to pick up anyone, and this is going to be severe in the coming days.”

Badiul Alam Majumdar, secretary of Shujan, a citizens’ platform, said DSA is a repressive law. The law itself is the problem. “DSA is hanging like a sword over our heads. It’s being used to create an environment of terror.”

He observed that the government will use the proposed three laws – including those centring OTT platforms and data protection – ahead of the election.

Eminent jurist Shahdeen Malik said that laws relating to defamation, and hurting anyone’s sentiment were removed from the criminal procedures in

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## Eid rush leads to soaring air ticket price

**RASHIDUL HASAN**

Monirul Hasan, who works at a private organisation, had planned to go to his village home for Eid by air to avoid the hassle of a time-consuming journey by road and railway.

But Monirul was forced to abandon his plan. Even after trying for two days, he did not see a ticket that was within his budget.

Like Monirul, many holidaymakers could not get air tickets due to the high price or unavailability.

Apart from domestic routes, demand for air tickets for popular holiday destinations – especially the Maldives, Dubai, Singapore, Thailand and India – have increased right before Eid holidays.

The country will enjoy a holiday for five days – from April 19 to April 23. If Eid is celebrated on April 23, people will get six days of holiday.

Sources at different airlines said the extended holiday has prompted people to take aerial routes for tourist destinations with their near and dear ones.

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## ‘Threat to press freedom’ Journalist orgs condemn attempt to attack Prothom Alo office

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

Various journalist organisations condemned and expressed concern over the attempt to attack Bangla daily Prothom Alo’s office, demanding the perpetrators be brought to book.


In a joint statement, Awami League-supported Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) and Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ) expressed their shock and concern.

On Monday, a few miscreants infiltrated the Prothom Alo office in the capital’s Karwan Bazar and attempted to mount an attack, threatening security staff. They fled before police arrived at the scene.

“This type of action triggers terror within the journalist community. There are recognised norms for protest... There is no scope to flex muscle,” the statement read.

The statement urged the government to bring perpetrators to book and ensure safety and security of journalists and employees of Prothom Alo.

Meanwhile, BNP-supported BFUJ and DUJ leaders also issued



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On this auspicious occasion of the bank’s 41<sup>st</sup> anniversary, we wish to thank our customers, partners, stakeholders, regulators and well-wishers for being with us at all times, without whom none of our achievements would have been possible.

