

Attacks on Bengali culture WILL NOT GO VERY FAR

RAMENDU MAJUMDAR

SHAH ALAM SHAZU



Renowned thespian and Ekushey Padak winner, Ramendu Majumdar, has been an essential figure in the theatre arena of Bangladesh. He is one of the pioneers in Bangladesh's theatre movement and is part of one of the most popular theatre troupes, 'Theatre'.

The renowned cultural personality is the current honorary president of the International Theatre Institute (ITI). Previously, he was the two-time president of the ITI.

Recently, a legal notice has been issued against 'Mongol Shobhajatra'. Speaking to The Daily Star, Ramendu Majumdar shared his thoughts on the issue.

"On the first day of the Bengali New Year, we all come together. This day belongs to all Bengalis. Everyone celebrates this day, irrespective of religion or caste. On this special day, for the welfare of people, 'Mongol Shobhajatra' is also celebrated. That's why I will say that 'Mongol Shobhajatra' is also for everyone."

"If this is mixed with religion, it will be unfair. They are two different things. The 'Mongol Shobhajatra' has even been recognised by UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage."

"Pahela Baishakh is the main non-communal festival celebrated by Bengalis. So many things are tied with this festival. From the perspective of the Bengali consciousness, this is a very important day. It's that one day everyone celebrates together, which is not possible during other festivals. Pahela Baishakh is very important for our national life."

"A legal notice has been served opposing the celebration of 'Mongol Shobhajatra'. However, I believe this will not last. I don't know who is behind this, but it has also happened in the past. Since the time of Pakistan, they have been trying to suppress the Bengali consciousness. Thankfully, we are protesting against this notice and this will continue to grow louder. The collective cultural alliance has come forth to protest this notice."

"I believe that this notice will have no impact on the upcoming festivities of Pahela Baishakh. Rather, more people will gather on this day than ever before. Because it's a day for all Bengalis. These attacks on Bengali culture will not go very far. But it must be actively stopped, because evil forces like these need to be defeated. In the end, the truth will always win."

"How many times have we been hit? Many years ago, our language was attacked. But those evil forces were vanquished. We won. We were able to move from a cultural battle to a political one back then. And we will do it again."



PHOTOS: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED



Nusraat Faria calls Bhabna's painting a 'masterpiece'

Nusraat Faria loves collecting paintings and is an art enthusiast by heart. Recently, she shared a picture on her Facebook account, where she posed in front of a painting by actress Ashna Habib Bhabna.

The actress would also write a heartwarming caption to go along with the photo. In the picture, Nusraat Faria can be seen in a stunning off-shoulder orange dress.

"The picture I am standing in front of speaks for me and a lot of women in general. I am so happy Ashna Habib Bhabna allowed me to have her masterpieces all over my home. Thankful and blessed," read the post.

The *Bibaho Obhijaan* actress has collected about five paintings by Bhabna.

Rihanna becomes most followed woman on Twitter



Global icon Rihanna has overtaken

Katy Perry to become the most-followed woman on Twitter. The *Umbrella* singer is now the fourth-most followed person on the platform in the world.

Following her worldwide success in the music, fashion, and cosmetics industries, the news marks a huge milestone in the pop icon's career.

According to Social Blade, the *Me Up* singer has 108,278,326 followers on Instagram.

After Rihanna, Justin Bieber, is third with 113,171,252 followers. Former President Barack Obama, is second with 132,941,739 followers while Elon Musk, the new owner of Twitter, is in first place, with 134,341,896 followers.

NEWS

Deadliest first quarter for Med migrants

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"The complete absence of response to a seventh case claimed the lives of at least 73 migrants," it said in a statement, adding that non-governmental organisations' search and rescue efforts have markedly diminished in recent months.

"Over the Easter weekend, 3,000 migrants reached Italy, bringing the total number of arrivals so far this year to 31,192 people," the IOM said.

The UN agency's Missing Migrants Project is also investigating several reports of cases in which boats were reported missing, where there are no records of survivors, no remains and no SAR operations.

The fates of more than 300 people aboard those vessels remain unclear, the organisation said.

"Saving lives at sea is a legal obligation for states," said Vitorino.

"We need to see proactive, state-led coordination in search-and-rescue efforts. Guided by the spirit of responsibility sharing and solidarity, we call on states to work together and work to reduce loss of life along migration routes."

The IOM said the situation in the central Mediterranean reinforced the need for predictable state-led SAR, putting an end to the "ad hoc response" since the end of the Italian navy's Operation Mare Nostrum in 2014.

Countries needed to support the life-saving efforts of NGOs and end the "criminalisation, obstruction and deterrence" of those who do come to the rescue, it said.

"All maritime vessels, including

commercial ships, have a legal obligation to provide rescue to boats in distress," it added.

The agency also called for tougher action to dismantle criminal smuggling networks and to prosecute those responsible for "profiting from the desperation of migrants and refugees by facilitating dangerous journeys".

Even as the IOM released its findings, the Tunisian coastguard said yesterday that 10 migrants had drowned off the coast after their boat was wrecked in the Mediterranean.

"Seventy-two migrants were rescued and 10 bodies recovered after Tuesday's shipwreck" off Tunisia's second city of Sfax, spokesman Houssein Jebabli said, adding that the dead were all from sub-Saharan Africa.

Give it to us before you publish

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announced that the BRTA will publish reports on road accidents from now on.

Until January this year, BRTA used Bangladesh Police's data on road crashes. But the BRTA started publishing its own accident data in January. The data from these two government agencies do not match.

According to the BRTA, 636 people were killed and 752 others injured in 630 road accidents in January and February. Police say 542 people were killed and 420 others injured in 557 road crashes during the same period.

However, the numbers are much lower than that provided by NGOs working on road safety.

Over the last five years, the country has witnessed three major movements, including a massive one in July and August 2018, demanding safe roads. Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader on many occasions admitted his failure to bring discipline on roads.

On Tuesday's letter, BRTA said different non-government organisations have been publishing road accident data only on the basis of newspaper and TV reports.

Although the sources of all these organisations are almost the same their data on road accidents vary from each other, which is creating confusion among people, it reads.

Road Safety Foundation says 564 people were killed and 1,097 injured in 486 road accidents in March this year while Bangladesh Jatri Kalyan Samity said 538 people were killed and 1,138 injured in 487 road accidents in the same month, it mentioned.

BRTA claimed that it has scrutinised Road Safety Foundation's documents which show 460 people were killed and 322 injured in 322 road accidents. BRTA also believed that the number would be less if it is checked on the spot, it said.

"In this given situation, it is requested to check the information regarding road accidents on the ground and inform BRTA before releasing such data on the basis of newspapers and electric media reports," reads the letter.

Asked about the allegations, Saidur Rahman, executive director of the Foundation, said they collected the data from newspaper reports.

As per the newspaper reports they counted, 502 people were killed in 362 road crashes on spot in March, he said.

But many accidents, particularly in rural areas go unreported and many injured people died at hospitals later, he said.

So, they added 124 accidents, 4 accidents per day, with 362 and 62 deaths, two per day, with 502 deaths, making the total number of accidents 486 and deaths 564, he told The Daily

Star yesterday.

"We have given the clarification to the authorities," he added.

Contacted, Mozammel Hoque Chowdhury, secretary general of Jatri Kalyan Samity, said the is a strategy to give pressure on them.

"They [authorities] have failed to control road crashes and now they want to intimidate us so that we don't publish road crashes data," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Contacted, Ilias Kanchan, chairman of Nirapad Sarak Chai, said if the government takes such a decision, they will comply with it.

"There should have a scope to verify data," he told this correspondent yesterday.

Mahbub-E-Rabbani, also the spokespersons of BRTA, said they did not forbid the organisations to publish data but requested them to authenticate the data before publishing.

Asked whether BRTA can give such directives to non-government organisations, he said, "Can't we ask them to publish genuine data if they publish false data? We are not giving pressure but want them to publish genuine data."

Asked if anyone questions BRTA data as it mismatches with police data what they will say, he said, police data is based only on the cases and FIR filed over the accidents.

Over half of Rana Plaza survivors unemployed

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15,000, while around 19.5 percent have a monthly family income between Tk 15,001 and Tk 20,000, and 11 percent get more than Tk 20,000 per month, indicating that that the household income of majority of the respondents is insufficient to cover their family expenses.

Nearly half of the survivors reported a monthly expenditure of around Tk 15,000, while many respondents do not have any savings to rely on in case of unforeseen expenses, such as a health emergencies.

Farah Kabir, country director of ActionAid Bangladesh, said, "There have been positive changes but many of them are suffering both physically and mentally. The most important thing is they have not been able to find

economic opportunities to move on. Rana Plaza survivors need support to find an alternative livelihood."

Tuomo Poutiainen, country director, ILO Country Office for Bangladesh, said, "It is important to recognise the significant strides made in occupational safety and health in the garment industry following the Rana Plaza tragedy. It is the responsibility of the government to implement the policies and regulations to ensure the safety of all workers."

Julia Jesmin, joint inspector general of Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments, Rajekuzzaman Ratan, general secretary of Somajtantrik Sramik Front, and Wajedul Islam Khan, general secretary of Trade Union Centre, among others, attended the event.

Tributes pour

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"The nation will remain indebted to him."

Zafrullah was a vascular surgeon alongside a public health expert. He was the architect of the National Drug Policy-1982, which aimed to supply expensive medicines at a cheaper price for ordinary people.

He had been suffering from kidney and liver ailments, and also septicemia after contracting Covid-19.

The ruling Awami League also expressed deep sorrow at his demise.

The BNP, in a condolence message, said Zafrullah was a great hero of the Liberation War and contributed to the welfare of the country and the people throughout his life.

Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, the party's secretary general, said Zafrullah always came forward as a fearless soldier during all the crises faced by the country.

Rashed Khan Menon, president of Workers Party of Bangladesh, said Zafrullah's demise caused an irreparable loss to the civil rights and public health movement.

Sushashoner Jonno Nagorik in its message said Zafrullah worked for the people's welfare till his last breath.

Gonosshasthaya Kendra Trustee Board Chairperson Prof Altafunnesa Maya said Zafrullah earned due respect from every member of the

Gonosshasthaya family because of his dedication, morality and diligence.

"Gonosshasthaya has lost its guardian. The country has lost a legend."

Among others, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan, Agriculture Minister Muhammad Abdur Razzaque, Information Minister Hasan Mahmud, Fisheries and Livestock Minister SM Rezaul Karim, Education Minister Dipu Moni, Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi, State Minister for Labour and Employment Begum Monnujan Sufian, State Minister for Cultural Affairs KM Khalid, and Deputy Minister for Water Resource AKM Enamul Hoque Shameem mourned his death.

Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury's body will be kept at the Central Shaheed Minar for three hours, from 10:00am to 1:00pm, today (Thursday) for people to pay their last respects.

He will be given a guard of honour there, Altafunnesa Maya said at a briefing yesterday.

From Shaheed Minar, his body will be taken to Suhrawardy Udyan, where his first namaz-e-janaza will be held at 2:30pm.

Tomorrow (Friday), his body will be taken to the Gonosshasthaya Kendra in Savar at 10:00am for his second namaz-e-janaza after Juma prayers.

New Year

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celebrated Biju, the festival of the Chakmas, and Bishu of the Tanchangyas by offering flowers in the Shankha river at sunrise yesterday.

This is the biggest social festival of the 11 ethnic minorities in CHT.

Tariqul Islam, superintendent of Bandarban police, said security measures have been taken on the occasion of the New Year celebrations.

[Our Rangamati and Bandarban correspondents contributed to this report.]

2,000 judges

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Court last year. Of them, 79,000 were disposed of. That means 95 percent cases were settled, he said.

"We are hopeful that the judges will be able to solve the cases by working hard," he said.

Supreme Court Registrar Tofail Hasan, Jhenaidah District and Sessions Judge Md Nazimuddoula, and Deputy Commissioner SM Rafiqul Islam, among others, were present.

New Israeli spyware

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computers and cellphones by phishing communications and backdoor exploits, and can survey and transmit information on the phone back to an operator without the user's knowledge.

The White House said in late March that Pegasus has been used by governments "to facilitate repression and enable human rights abuses."

Citizen Lab said that, one placed on a user's phone or computer, QuDream's spyware can record audio from a phone call, record external sounds from a device's microphone, take pictures from cameras, and search the device's files, all without the user's knowledge.

The spyware can also generate its own two-factor authentication codes to enable continual access to the device owner's cloud accounts.

The spyware includes a self-destruct feature to hide its previous presence once it is no longer used, Citizen Lab said.

Citizen Lab identified servers in 10 countries that received data from victims' devices, including Israel, Singapore, Mexico, the United Arab Emirates and Bulgaria.