



YOUR RIGHT  
TO KNOW

SECOND EDITION

THE DAILY

Star

ON FRIDAY

DHAKA FRIDAY APRIL 14, 2023

Plus 8-page supplement on Pahela Baishakh

REGD. No. DA 781

VOL. XXXIII No. 90

BAISHAKH 1, 1430 BS

www.thedailystar.net

RAMADAN 22, 1444 HJRI

16 PAGES PLUS TOGGLE : Tk 15.00



**P5**  
**The sweetness  
of Pahela  
Baishakh**



**P7**  
**KSA, Syria  
welcome thaw  
in ties**



**P11**  
**Mash agrees  
2023 big for  
Bangladesh**



**B1**  
**Electronics  
sales down  
this Eid**

"I'm not concerned about the leak, I'm concerned that it happened but there is nothing contemporaneous that I'm aware of."

BIDEN  
on leaked US documents



# Eid trip to north gets expensive

Bus service providers overcharge, take advantage of no set fare, poor monitoring

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY and SAJJAD HOSSAIN

Coaches are overcharging people heading for the north by up to Tk 900, taking advantage of the Eid rush, poor monitoring, and no set fare for long-haul air-conditioned buses.

Operators of non-AC buses have also joined the bandwagon, taking up to Tk 200 extra per trip.

They are able to get away with ripping off people already under economic stress as government initiatives to stop overcharging have largely failed.

Tens of thousands of people leave Dhaka, Gazipur, and Narayanganj every Eid to spend the holidays with their loved ones in other districts and the authorities have never been able to stop them from being taken advantage of.

Even Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader at a meeting on April 9 admitted that coach service providers were overcharging.

"Charging [the passengers] extra has not stopped. In some cases, it has come down slightly but it has not stopped. Many vehicles take passengers away from the bus stations where there is monitoring," he told reporters.

According to an estimate by Bangladesh Jatri Kalyan Samity, a passenger welfare platform, around 1.2 crore people will leave only Dhaka ahead of this Eid.

Sujan Ahmed, who works at a firm, bought two AC bus tickets of Hanif Enterprise on April 10 to go to Rangpur on April 19. He was charged Tk 2,400 for each ticket that had a premium of Tk 900.

"Price of each ticket was Tk 1,500 even a few days ago," he told this correspondent yesterday.

Speaking to this paper, another person wishing anonymity said an SR Plus Paribahan April-17 ticket to Rangpur cost Tk 2,400 on April 9.

"Tickets for April 18, 19 and 20 were also being sold for Tk 2,400," the person said, adding that the usual price is Tk 1,800.

The situation at Shohoz.com, where many buy bus tickets online, was no different.

For instance, a person going to Gaibandha yesterday on Alhamra's AC coaches was charged Tk 900, but the same trip would cost Tk 1,600 on April 18.

Hanif Enterprise charged Tk 2,100 for yesterday's trip to Panchagarh on its AC coaches, but a trip on the same bus would cost Tk 2,900 on April 18.

Jubaer Hossain, vice-president (business) of Shohoz said, "Bus operators fix the ticket prices and we just provide them ticketing services. We have nothing to do regarding the fares."

Hanif Enterprise General Manager Mosharref Hossain told The Daily Star yesterday, "We have increased the fares like other AC bus operators on the northern routes. Because the hot weather and possible jams on the highway during the Eid rush will increase our expenditure."

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

**Sujan Ahmed, who works at a private firm, bought two AC-bus tickets of Hanif Enterprise on April 10 to go to Rangpur on April 19. He was charged Tk 2,400 for each ticket that had a premium of Tk 900.**



Students readying sculptures at Dhaka University's Fine Arts faculty last night for the Mangal Shobhajatra today. The Mangal Shobhajatra, a colourful mass procession brought out in the morning of Pahela Baishakh, has long been considered an expression of the nation's secular identity and a way to promote harmony. It was declared an intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO in 2016.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

## Embracing Baishakh, embracing harmony

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In keeping with the spirit of secularism, the nation today celebrates Pahela Baishakh, the first day of Bangla New Year.

In the capital, programmes begin with a musical soiree by the Chhayanaut cultural institute at the Ramna

SEE PAGE 10 COL 4

### HOLIDAY NOTICE



The Daily Star offices will remain closed today on the occasion of Pahela Baishakh. Therefore, the newspaper will not come out tomorrow.



## REAL ESTATE FBCCI calls for blanket amnesty to black money

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry yesterday demanded the reinstatement of the scope to invest black money in real estate without any question for five to 10 years to curb capital flight.

The demand came at a pre-budget discussion organised by the National Board of Revenue and the FBCCI.

Earlier in February, the Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh made the same request considering the depressed state of the sector.

The scope to clean black money through investment in real estate without any question asked about the source of income provided a certain amount of tax is paid as per the size and location of the properties ended on June 30, 2021.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

## 5.5pc growth is not insignificant

Says top IMF official on growth forecast for 2023

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The 5.5 percent growth forecast made by the International Monetary Fund for the Bangladesh economy would be decent given the pressure emanating from the external side, said a top official of the multilateral lender yesterday.

"The growth you have right now is not insignificant," Krishna Srinivasan, director of the IMF's Asia and Pacific department, told a virtual press briefing as part of the World Bank-IMF spring meeting taking place in Washington DC from April 10-16.

In its flagship World Economic Outlook, the Washington-based multilateral lender maintained that the Bangladesh economy would at best grow at 5.5 percent in 2023 -- behind only the Maldives and India in South Asia.

This comes after the WB and the Asian Development Bank earlier made growth forecasts of 5.2 percent and 5.3 percent respectively for this fiscal year, which ends on June 30.

The government though is maintaining the growth this fiscal year would be 6.5 percent.

"It [growth] has been affected by what is happening on the external demand and the risk coming from slowing markets in the US and Europe, which will bear upon on Bangladesh's exports and so on," Srinivasan said.

In the first nine months of the fiscal year, exports brought home \$41.7 billion, up 8.07 percent year-on-year but missing the periodic target by \$542.4 million, according to data from the Export Promotion Bureau.

"As these external headwinds ease, there should be an uptake on upside potential to growth," Srinivasan said.

Subsequently, the IMF forecast growth will bounce back to 6.5 percent in 2024.

"Bangladesh is one country which was severely impacted by the war in Ukraine. The terms of trade moved against Bangladesh. It led to stresses on fiscal and external accounts. In response to that, Bangladesh proactively

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

## BORO PROCUREMENT Govt set to buy 16.5 lakh tonnes in 4-month drive

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has decided to buy 16.5 lakh tonnes of Boro rice and paddy in a four-month drive beginning next month.

The decision was taken during a Food Planning and Monitoring Committee (FPMC) meeting, held at the Secretariat yesterday with Food Minister Sadhan Chandra Majumder in the chair.

The meeting also proposed to raise the procurement price by Tk 2 per kg.

The price of paddy will be Tk 30 per kg, up from Tk 28 per kg last year. The parboiled rice will be procured at Tk 44 per kg, which was Tk 42 per kg last year.

The minister said the price has been hiked to benefit farmers.

"It is a proposal and will be finalised upon the consent of the prime minister," he said, adding that the procurement will begin on May 7 and will continue till August 31.

In this Boro procurement season, 4 lakh tonnes of paddy and 12.5 lakh tonnes of parboiled rice will be procured. The government also has set a target of buying 1 lakh tonnes of wheat at Tk 35 per kg.

Last year, the government could fulfil its target of procuring 11 lakh tonnes of parboiled rice, Food Secretary Ismiel Hossain told The Daily Star.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

## Nation pays tribute to Zafrullah

He will be laid to rest after Juma prayers today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A torrent of tributes poured in from people of all walks of life for valiant freedom fighter and Gonoshasthaya Kendra founder Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury at the Central Shaheed Minar yesterday.

Eminent personalities, politicians, civil society members, environmentalists, social and cultural activists started arriving at the Shaheed Minar with wreaths before Zafrullah's body was brought there around 10:00am. Despite the scorching heat, the long queue of people reached the nearby Nursing College Gate.

Zafrullah died on Tuesday night at Gonoshasthaya Nagar Hospital. He had been suffering from kidney, liver and other health problems.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2



A guard of honour is being given to Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury, Liberation War veteran and Gonoshasthaya Kendra founder, at the Central Shaheed Minar in the capital around 12:30pm yesterday. Before that, people paid their last respects to Dr Zafrullah.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

## GRAFT CASE Charges framed against Tarique, Zubaida

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday framed charges against BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman and his wife Zubaida Rahman in absentia in a graft case filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission in 2007.

Before the charges were read out, Judge Md Asaduzzaman of Dhaka Metropolitan Senior Special Judge's Court dismissed a petition, filed by the couple's lawyer Masud Ahmed Talukder on March 29, seeking permission to defend them in their absence.

In the order, the judge said the defence had no jurisdiction to file such a petition for defending the fugitives accused in their absence.

The court fixed May 16 for starting trial of the case. During the hearing of the petition, Masud cited different rulings of the higher courts in which a fugitive accused can get their lawyer if they are unable to appear before the court concerned due to security reasons.

ACC Public Prosecutor Mosharraf Hossain Kajol opposed the petition, saying that both the High Court and Supreme Court had settled the issue and ruled that a fugitive cannot get any lawyers to defend them in court in their absence.

Tarique and Zubaida have been in London since 2008. While Tarique is also accused in 15 other cases, mostly during the caretaker government in 2007 and 2008, Zubaida has been indicted in only one. No other case was filed against her in the country.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



## India opens new probe into BBC

REUTERS, New Delhi

India's financial crime fighting agency has opened an investigation into alleged violations of foreign exchange rules by the BBC, a source told Reuters yesterday, months after tax officials searched the broadcaster's Mumbai and Delhi offices.

The tax raids in February had come close on the heels of the release of a BBC documentary about Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership of the state of Gujarat during riots in 2002. At least 1,000 people were killed in the riots, most of them Muslims.

The latest investigation is being conducted by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) under India's Foreign Exchange Management Act. The agency issued a notice to the BBC in March and questioned some employees earlier this month, said the source, who declined to be named citing the sensitivity of the matter.

British Foreign Minister James Cleverly, during a visit to New Delhi in March, raised the BBC tax searches with his Indian counterpart.

Relations between India and Britain, who are working to seal a delayed free-trade agreement, have also been strained by protests outside the Indian High Commission in London last month.

## CAAB suspends pilot Sadia's licence

RASHIDUL HASAN

Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) has finally suspended the privileges of commercial pilot license (CPL) of Sadia Ahmed, a first officer of Biman Bangladesh Airlines, for her alleged forgery of Higher Secondary School Certificate.



A recent letter to Sadia, signed by Air Commodore Shah Kawsar Ahmed Choudhury, member (Flight Standard & Regulations) of CAAB, said, "An investigation has been initiated on the report in The Daily Star on March 1 regarding your HSC examinations details. CAAB, hereby, suspends all the privileges of your CPL#470 till further notice."

Sadia, who was suspended from Biman, in connection with the forgery, reportedly left the country late last month without appearing before a probe body of the national flag carrier.

SEE PAGE 10 COL 3



A 70-year-old woman patient, who according to her family members suffered a stroke, is being transferred from a small boat to a launch heading for Dhaka at Monpura ghat of Bhola to be treated at a hospital in the capital. It takes around 14 hours for the launch to reach Sadarghat terminal in the city. The photo was taken around 2:00pm yesterday.

PHOTO: HASHIBUR REZA KALLOL

## 5 killed as bus hits three-wheeler in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Five people were killed and another was injured in a head-on collision between a bus and a CNG-run three-wheeler in Chattogram's Boalkhali upazila yesterday morning.

The accident took place in Raykhali Bridge area of Arakan Highway in the upazila, said police.

The dead are all the passengers of the three-wheeler. Police arrested bus driver Jakir in this connection.

The dead are Mohammad Selim, 45, of Boalkhali, Anjana Akhter, 35, Babul Dey, 60, and Rohingya man Abu Faye, 25. Rest of the dead could not be known immediately.

Injured Abdur Jalil was admitted to Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH).

Abdur Razzak, officer-in-charge of Boalkhali Police Station, said, "A CNG-run three-wheeler, carrying six people including the driver, collided head-on with a bus coming from the opposite direction around 9:00am. Four people died on the spot."

On information, police and fire service personnel rushed to the spot and started rescue operation. Traffic movement on the road was halted for around an hour.



Witnesses said reckless driving of the bus driver caused the accident.

"The bus was reserved and came to Chattogram from Netrakona taking shrine devotees in Boalkhali. While returning, the bus hit the three-wheeler triggering the tragic accident.

"Bus driver Jakir had no idea about the road. So, he was driving fast as if it was a highway. After the accident, locals nabbed him and later handed him over to police."

A victim's family member filed a case accusing Jakir in the evening and he was shown arrested in this case, the OC said.

## Dhaka swelters thru' hottest day in 8 years

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

City dwellers yesterday experienced the hottest day in the last eight years, with a heatwave sweeping over the country for more than a week.

Dhaka's temperature was recorded at 39.9 degrees Celsius -- the highest in the last eight years. The previous highest temperature in Dhaka [40.2 degrees Celsius] was recorded on April 14, 2014.

"There is no possibility of the temperature decreasing till April 16. It may then decrease slightly in a few places, but will continue [overall] till April 23," Md Omar Faruq, a meteorologist of Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD), told The Daily Star yesterday.

He also said the people are feeling the scorch of the heat more than usual due low levels of humidity.

According to the Met office, the humidity may increase from April 16.

It further said country's the highest temperature yesterday was recorded 41.3 degree Celsius in Chuadanga and Satkhira.

The Met office further said the medium heatwave turned into a severe one as the temperature crossed over 40 degrees Celsius.

## Charges framed

FROM PAGE 1

The same court on November 1 last year had issued arrest warrants against the duo after accepting the charges brought against them.

On June 26 last year, the HC declared Tarique and Zubaida "fugitives" and rejected their writ petitions challenging the filing of the graft case.

Earlier on September 26, 2007, the ACC filed the case with Kafrul Police Station against the two and Zubaida's mother Syeda Iqbal Mand Banu, on charges of amassing assets worth Tk 4.82 crore through illegal means and concealing the information of Tk 2.16 crore in their wealth statements.

The investigation officer of the case pressed the charges against the three with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court in Dhaka on March 31, 2009.

However, trial proceedings against Zubaida's mother were rescinded.

Earlier, Tarique was sentenced to life in the August 21 grenade attack cases.

He was also sentenced on different terms of punishment in two other cases, including the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case.

## FBCCI

FROM PAGE 1

Now, there is no scope to legalise untaxed wealth.

If the blanket amnesty to illegally earned wealth is allowed for the next five to 10 years, a substantial amount of money will remain in the country and the real estate sector will flourish, said the apex trade body.

A lot of money is flying out of the country as many are buying a second home abroad, where the source of the money is not asked.

And this will continue to grow in the absence of the amnesty, the FBCCI said.

In fiscal 2020-21, a total of 11,859 taxpayers legalised their black money by paying Tk 2,064 crore in tax, according to data from the National Board of Revenue. Of the sum, Tk 343 crore came from 4,514 land and flat owners, showed NBR data.

## Nation pays tribute to Zafrullah

FROM PAGE 1

Around 12:30pm, Zafrullah was paid a guard of honor led by Hedayetul Islam, additional deputy commissioner of Dhaka District Administration. His body was then taken to Suhrawardy Udyan where his third janaza was held.

A fourth janaza took place at Dhanmondi Gonoshahstha Nagar Hospital at 4:00pm.

His coffin will be at Gonoshastha Kendra in Savar from 10:00am to 12:30pm today for people to pay tribute. He will be laid to rest there after juma prayers.

At the Shaheed Minar, Planning Minister MA Mannan said, "Zafrullah Chowdhury was an ideal Bangalee. He was a brave freedom fighter. Some newspapers wrote 'people's doctor'. He was not just a doctor. He was also a pure, genuine Bangalee... He is the pioneer of our current healthcare system."

"He is also a pioneer of the drug

policy that benefitted us. Bangalees were trying to make a lawful, democratic, and non-communal society where all citizens enjoy equal dignity. Zafrullah Chowdhury was a frontline soldier in that great war. Today, I pay my respects to him."

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said Zafrullah was one of the greatest sons of this soil.

"I have known him since my student life. He embarked on building the nation soon after independence. The nation benefited immensely from his valour and initiatives. Gonoshastha Kendra is the best example of it. We don't know whether we will ever get such an outspoken and democratic-minded figure again," he said.

Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon said, "Today we are proud to export medicines worth \$300 million. He put in unwavering efforts to formulate

the drug [policy] and it has been possible due to those efforts.

"I would say that he did not participate in politics, but remained the voice of conscience in politics and took people forward. I pay my deepest respects to him."

Cultural personality Nasir Uddin Yousuf said Zafrullah could have lived in comfort in a western country, but he chose to join the Liberation War.

"In times of disasters, he always stood by the people. His initiative helped poor people access medical treatment at affordable costs. His drug policy was remarkable. His political views were different to mine, but patriotism was what we had in common," he said.

Social activist Khushi Kabir said, "Zafrullah dedicated his whole life for the people. He had love for the oppressed. The whole world will miss him, not just Bangladesh."

will take place in the second half of 2023, when the IMF staff team will assess the programme's quantitative targets and progress of reform implementation, Rahul Anand, the IMF mission chief, told The Daily Star.

An IMF staff team will visit Bangladesh from April 25 to May 2 to discuss recent economic developments and policy implementation under the IMF-supported programme, an IMF spokesperson told The Daily Star.

On April 8, PM's ICT Affairs Adviser Sajeeb Wazed Joy criticised the expulsion of two African-American minority US state lawmakers, sparing another one over their gun control protests, questioning the fairness of democracy in the US.

"US State legislature votes to expel two minority lawmakers, while keeping a third who was white. This is the state of democracy in the US," Joy said in his verified Facebook account.

He added, "The US State Department are nothing but a bunch of hypocrites."

The lawmakers were later reinstated. Hours after Hasina's remarks, Momen and Blinken met in Washington.

## UP member hacked to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj

Some unidentified criminals yesterday hacked a union parishad member to death in Chapainawabganj's Shibganj.

The victim is Alam Ali, 50, member of ward 9 at Nyalavanga Union Parishad in the upazila.

Around 1:30pm, Alam was heading towards his home from the union parishad. He was attacked with sharp weapons at Nawab Mor, said police.

He was rushed to 250-bed General Hospital in Chapainawabganj where doctors declared him dead, said Sukomal Chandra Debnath, inspector (investigation) of Shibganj Police Station.

Police sent the body to the hospital's morgue for autopsy.

The victim might have been killed over previous enmity, suspected the OC.

## DSHE amends its directive on Pahela Baishakh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education has amended its directive that made Pahela Baishakh rallies compulsory for students of educational institutions today.

According to the new directive, the Bangla New Year should be celebrated in proper manner in all educational institutions preserving the sanctity of Ramadan and maintaining religious sentiments.

The new decision was announced in an order of the DSHE yesterday, a day before the Bangla New Year.

## Ex-civil servant found dead at home

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police recovered the bloodstained body of a former official of Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research from his home in the capital's Shekhertek yesterday afternoon.

The deceased, Nurul Alam, 74, was the former deputy chief scientific officer of BCSIR, Shaker Mohammad Zobair, officer-in-charge (investigation) of Adabar Police Station, told The Daily Star.

He said Nurul's son Ittekhkar Alam Sumon was detained for interrogation. Sumon is an assistant director at the environment, forest and climate change ministry.

The body was sent to Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College morgue for an autopsy.

## Asean condemns Myanmar air strike

AFP, Jakarta

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) "strongly condemns" recent air strikes in Myanmar in which dozens of people were reported killed, said a statement issued yesterday by Indonesia, the current Asean chair.

"All forms of violence must end immediately, particularly the use of force against civilians", said the statement.

A statement from the Asean chair does not necessarily indicate the agreement of all member states.

## Eid trip to north gets expensive

FROM PAGE 1

As per Road Transport Act-2018, Bangladesh Road Transport Authority is to set fares for public transport following government permission.

But AC coaches and public transport with special amenities are not under its purview, according to section 34 (2) of the act.

However, the government or the BRTA could take steps to set the fares if there are allegations of overcharging, section 34 (2) says.

But the authorities never fixed the fare for AC coaches. "Taking advantage of the situation, bus operators are charging at will," a BRTA official said, wishing anonymity.

**NON-AC BUSES OVERCHARGING** Many non-AC bus service providers have started overcharging.

Al-Amin Hossain, a labourer of Mirpur in the capital, said he bought a ticket for Rangpur from Shyamoli Paribahan for Tk 650. The usual fare is Tk 500, he said.

"I asked about the reason behind the hike when Eid is 10 days away, but

the staffers at the counter did not give any reason," he told this paper at Gabtoli terminal.

During a visit to the terminal between 9:30am and 1:00pm yesterday, no monitoring by government agencies was seen.

Abu Raihan, general secretary of Bangladesh Bus Truck Owners' Association, told The Daily Star yesterday, "Usually we charge less than the fixed rate to compete. Now we are charging the fixed rate, but passengers are alleging that we are overcharging, which is not true."

Asked about the AC bus fares, he said, "We have to charge extra as our buses return to Dhaka empty during the Eid rush."

Right before every Eid, the overcharging worsens and this time it is expected to be even worse as strict ticket checking on trains is expected to increase demand for bus tickets.

The Daily Star could not reach the BRTA chairman and Road Transport and Highways Division secretary for comments.

## Govt set to buy 16.5 lakh tonnes

FROM PAGE 1

"Since the target for rice was achieved last year, we're hopeful of fulfilling the target this year too," he added.

The government, however, has lowered the target of paddy procurement by 2 lakh tonnes to 4 lakh tonnes this year.

"We could procure only 2.86 lakh tonnes of paddy last year," said Ismiel, adding that they could not fulfil the target though paddy was available. That's why new prices have been proposed to make an adjustment with the market price.

Farmers and millers have a tendency not to sell rice to the government, said Agriculture Minister Muhammad Abdur Razzaque. "It is not that farmers will feel encouraged to sell their paddy to us because of the price hike. We need an adjustment."

Food Minister Sadhan Chandra said they have proposed the prices considering production costs.

"After the government subsidy in

fertiliser and irrigation, the average production cost for each kg paddy would be Tk 28.29. It is a scientific estimation but the actual production cost would be much less," he said.

Replying to a question, he said there will be no impact on the poor as the government operates different food assistance schemes, including open market sales and Food Friendly Programme.

Asked whether the price increase will impact the limited income people who buy rice from the market, Sadhan said there will not be any impact on people.

"Farmers should be given fair prices since fertiliser prices and cost of transportation and labour have gone up. There are OMS, Food Friendly Programme and VGF [Vulnerable Group Feeding] for people who face troubles," he said.

The government has a stock of 17.29 lakh tonnes of food grains, according to the food ministry.





SEAMASTER AQUA TERRA SHADES  
Co-Axial Master Chronometer

EVERY SHADE OF YOU

With the Aqua Terra Shades collection, Eddie Redmayne has embraced the power of colour to express his personal style. Just like the actor, these OMEGA watches have mastered a variety of roles, offering different tones to match the mood you're in. Discover the 38 mm range in stainless steel, which includes five exclusive choices, all backed by the trusted precision of a Co-Axial Master Chronometer movement. Whichever look you desire, there's a shade to tell your story.



AVAILABLE AT: SACO WATCH CO: Iqbal Center, Banani • Tel: 01868985756  
Bashundhara City • Tel: 01703254435 • Jamuna Future Park • Tel. 01714082196







RAMNA BATAMUL BOMB ATTACK

22 years gone,  
justice still elusive

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

Both the victims and convicts of Ramna Batamul bomb blasts have been deprived of final justice due to legal tangles, even 22 years after the gruesome incident.

Different issues, including repeated adjournments and reconstitution of High Court benches, have unusually delayed disposal of the case filed for killing of 10 people in the blasts.

Besides, it is still uncertain when the appeals filed by the convicts and death reference, which have been pending with the HC for the last nine years, will be heard and a judgement will be delivered, as there is apparently no extensive initiative in this regard.

At the same time, another case filed under the explosives act is still pending with a Dhaka court. Its trial proceedings are ongoing there.

Contacted, Attorney General AM Amin Uddin told The Daily Star that the death reference and appeals are pending with the HC.

“Hearing of this case will be held only after the chief justice assigns a bench of the High Court for this. I don’t know when the chief justice will assign the bench. The attorney general’s office can do nothing to start hearing,” he added.

Two bombs exploded during the Pahela Baishakh (Bangla New Year, 1408) celebrations at Ramna Batamul, organised by Chhayanaout on April 14, 2001. Ten people were killed and dozens injured.

A Dhaka court on June 23, 2014 handed down death penalty to eight militants of Harkat-ul Jihad al-Islami (Huji), including its top leader Mufti Abdul Hannan, for the killing. Six other militants of the banned Islamist outfit were sentenced to life imprisonment.

If a lower court sentences any person to death, its judgement is examined by the HC through hearing arguments for confirmation of the death sentence.

The case documents and judgement reach as death references to the HC from the trial court after the latter delivers the verdict.

Mohammad Shishir Manir, a defence lawyer of the case, told this correspondent that the death reference has been registered with the HC in 2014.

“Till date, it has not been disposed of by the High Court. The government has sought adjournment of hearing repeatedly, as many as 376 times. Last time, the death reference was sent to the chief justice, and till date, no bench has been assigned for hearing the matter,” he said.

“Since there is no concrete evidence

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3



A worker moves a colourful bunch of shoes from a small factory in Fulbaria to the wholesale market, located in the same neighbourhood, from where they will be sent across the country. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Country got  
less water  
from Ganges  
in the first  
half of March

Says JRC member

BSS, Dhaka

Bangladesh got a little less water against its fair share in the first quarter of March from the common Ganges river, said Dr Mohammad Abul Hossen, member of the Joint Rivers Commission (JRC), Bangladesh, yesterday.

“The Joint Rivers Commission of Bangladesh and India will hold a meeting in May, and we [Bangladesh] will ask whether India is diverting water from the river,” he said.

However, Bangladesh has received a good volume of water from Ganges this year, Dr Hossen added.

“Considering the baseline data of the historical water flow of the river for 40 years [1949-1988], it can be said that Bangladesh has received a good volume of water from Ganges this year,” he told BSS.

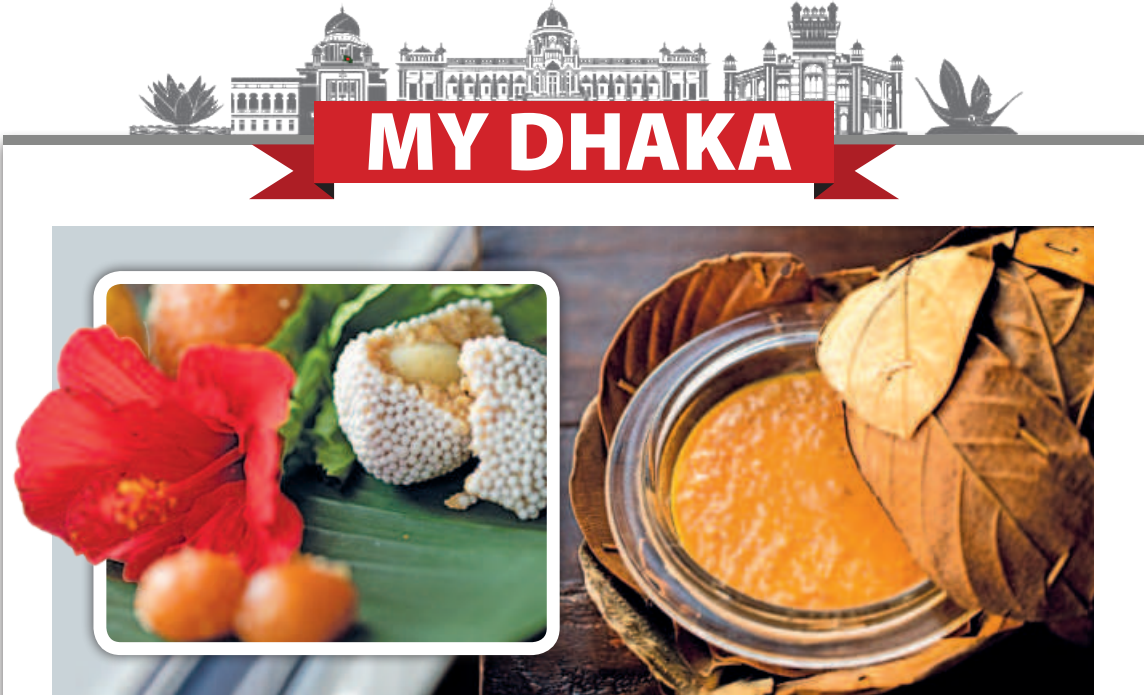
According to the Ganges Water Sharing Treaty 1996, Bangladesh and India share water of the Ganges based on every 10-day period from January 1 to May 31.

The treaty was signed by the then Indian Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda and Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on December 12, 1996, in New Delhi.

It established a 30-year water-sharing arrangement and recognised Bangladesh’s rights as a lower-level riparian.

India and Bangladesh share 54 common rivers. The JRC of India and Bangladesh was established in 1972 as a bilateral mechanism to address common border and trans-boundary river issues of mutual interest.

The treaty states that if the volume of water is 70,000 cusecs or less at Farakka Point, both Bangladesh and India will get equal share of water (35,000 cusecs).



The sweetness of  
PAHELA  
BAISHAKH

RBR

It’s a tradition to usher Baishakh on a sweet note, and so, sweetmeat once again takes centre stage in our celebrations. From that van vendor at the corner of any local bazaar or park where children crowd for sugary treats, to branded and popular sweetmeat shops – all are busy making their special offers.

Mostafa Taher, 50, is a computer programmer with a sweet tooth, and every Baishakh he buys sweetmeat for his friends and family.

“This has been a tradition of our household for decades,” said Taher. “Rather than going for sweets from renowned shops, I buy goodies like kodma, murki, and goja from street vendors. The gift serves as a reminder of our childhood, and for me, it’s the perfect Baishakhi gift.”

Halkhata, or opening of new accounts by traders, which is an integral part of Baishakhi revelries, is almost unthinkable without sweets. Jewellers and traders



**A wide range of traditional sweets is made from chhana (cottage cheese). The list is endless and each district of our country has its own specialty. To name a few Dhaka favourites, chhanar jilapi is made from cottage cheese, khoya, and flour. It resembles the spiral of a jilapi and being soaked in sugar syrup makes it soft. Kalojaam has a pink interior; gurer shondesh comes in the shapes of beetle leaf, fish, and nakshi flowers; a drier version of shondesh is pera.**



observe the occasion with a grand spread of mawa laddu, coconut sweet balls, luchi and niramish.

Keeping the seasonal demand in mind, the chain stores that throughout the year specialise in traditional Bangladeshi sweetmeats also carry pitha and naru in their menu. Corporate gift boxes with local Baishakhi delights are now ubiquitous with Pahela Baishakh celebrations, and popular shops in Dhaka are providing various options.

Syed Ashraful Islam, senior manager at Premium Sweets, Gulshan, said, “Customers or

corporate clients can choose from our assortment and order. We have a Baishakhi box starting from Tk 2,000, but people prefer to customise their orders according to their budget.”

Despite offers from city’s sweet-shops, Dhakaiites still crave regional culinary delights like roshmalai from Cumilla or buffalo milk curd from Bhola. Any chance people get to travel, they take the trouble of stopping at village bazaars for their unadulterated fresh sweetmeats. Dhakaiites often do not mind travelling a distance to buy fresh sweets.

One such small village sweetmeat store is a 10-minute detour on the way to Mawa Ghat; you take the left to Lohaganj, Halda Bazar, and inside a quiet green hamlet is a tin shaft store called Shree Durga Mistanna Bhandar. Ganesh Gosh, the store owner said that for Baishakh they will have a special menu because he has orders from Dhaka.

A quintessential Baishakhi meal of ilish paturi or shorshe shojhe chorchori must be wrapped up with a sweet. We Bangladeshis have a sweet tooth; a meal without something sugary is always half done. So, this Baishakh, indulge a little and count your calories tomorrow!

Shubho Noboborsho!

PM to open  
Indian Ocean  
Confce May 12

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh will host the Indian Ocean Conference (IOC) in Dhaka from May 12 to 13, said foreign ministry spokesperson Seheli Sabrin yesterday.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will inaugurate the conference at a city hotel on May 12, the spokesperson told reporters at a weekly media briefing.

The sixth edition of the conference is being organised by India Foundation in association with the Bangladesh foreign ministry.

With the theme of “Peace, Prosperity and Partnership for a Resilient Future”, the conference would bring together a luminary gathering of key stakeholders to chart the roadmap for strengthening the Indian Ocean Region.

60pc of Eid  
holidaymakers  
to leave Dhaka  
by road

Says report

UNB, Dhaka

About 1.5 crore people are expected to leave Dhaka – including Dhaka North, Dhaka South, Gazipur and Narayanganj city corporations – on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr, says a report.

Sixty percent of them will go by road and the rest by waterways and railways, according to a report of Shipping and Communication Reporters Forum (SCRF) released yesterday.

However, the organisation said that the report may not be fully accurate, as there is no complete database in this regard.

It said the road transport sector has no capacity to ensure smooth journey of such a large number of people in an orderly manner in the nine days from April 13 to 21.

According to SCRF’s observation, toll is collected manually on many roads including national highways, some places of several long distance roads are dilapidated and there are a significant number of risky turning points across the country.

Apart from this, motorcycles will run on the highways during the Eid, there is a possibility of severe traffic jams at various points and unexpected accidents.

Hearing on arms  
case against Arav  
Khan on May 7

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka tribunal yesterday fixed May 7 to hear arguments in an arms case filed against Rabiul Islam alias Arav Khan.

Judge Murshid Ahmed of Dhaka’s Special Tribunal 14 set the date after completing all formalities in the case.

In the order, the judge said the self-defence statement of the accused was not recorded as he was earlier declared a “fugitive”. So, the next date was fixed for arguments.

Earlier, the tribunal recorded the statements of 10 witnesses, including the complainant of the case.

Arav Khan is also an accused in a case filed in connection with the murder of a police inspector in 2018.

According to the statement of the arms case, Arav Khan went to the home of his father-in-law Sekendar Ali in Moghbazar on January 28, 2015, to collect money at gunpoint. However, Arav was arrested in front of the house by Ramna police. Police also seized a revolver from him.

Later, a case was filed against him under the arms act with Ramna Police Station.

Arav Khan, who runs a jewellery store in Dubai, is currently facing an Interpol red alert.

ACC sues ex-MD of  
Pragoti Industries

Case filed over forgery,  
misappropriation of  
Tk 39.8 lakh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has filed a case against former managing director of state-run Pragoti Industries Limited (PIL) Touhiduzzaman for getting a job through forgery and misappropriating about Tk 39.8 lakh.

ACC’s assistant director Mahbubul Alam filed the case.

According to the case statement, Bangladesh Steel and Engineering Corporation (BSEC) issued a circular for job opening in March 2011.

“Accused Touhiduzzaman did not apply for the post of additional engineer within the deadline. Besides, he created fake documents and submitted an application with the abetment of unscrupulous staff,” reads the case statement.

Touhiduzzaman, who was later promoted to the chief engineer of PIL, was project director of Pragoti Tower.

There is an allegation against him of violating respective rules and appointing consultants in projects, embezzling about Tk 39.8 lakh.

Haileybury  
Bhaluka launches  
scholarship funds

STAR REPORT

The first premier international boarding school in Bangladesh, Haileybury Bhaluka, launched an “Academic Excellence Scholarship Fund” to support the Bangladeshi students yesterday.

The scholarship, worth USD15 million, was launched at a programme in a city hotel. This school lifetime scholarship is applicable only for students joining Haileybury Bhaluka.

Speakers at the programme said the fund is open will offer up to a 100 percent merit scholarship, which would be given through all years of the awarded student’s school tenure.

Students aged above 11 years can avail of the scholarship followed by an application process. It will also require a Cognitive Abilities Test (CAT4).

PRAYER TIMING		APRIL 14			
Fazr	Juma	Asr	Maghrib	Esha	
AZAN 4:20	12:30	4:45	6:23	7:45	
JAMAAT 4:30	1:15	5:00	6:33	8:15	
SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION					
SEHRI, IFTAR TIMING					
RAMADAN	APRIL	SEHRI	IFTAR		
22	14		6:23		
23	15	4:14	6:24		
24	16	4:13	6:24		



EID JOURNEY VIA  
BANGABANDHU BRIDGE

New Eid, same old  
fear of gridlocks

MIRZA SHAKIL

Home-bound passengers travelling to the north for Eid this year may face the same old issue of heavy traffic jams at both ends of the Bangabandhu Bridge. Despite the concerns raised by transport workers, passengers and other parties concerned, the authorities have failed to provide assurance of a hassle-free journey.

As per sources, at least 18,000 to 20,000 vehicles of 116 routes in 26 districts, including 16 from northern districts, travel through Bangabandhu Bridge east-link road in normal circumstances every day, which increases to 50,000 to 60,000 vehicles before Eid.

The additional number of vehicles often leads to traffic congestion, which is further intensified by road accidents, reckless driving, breakdown of vehicles, and adverse weather conditions.

According to passengers and authorities concerned, vehicles can run on the 55-km new highway from Chandra in Gazipur to Elenga in Tangail quite comfortably.

However, their speed slows down when the vehicles enter the two-lane 13-km Bangabandhu Bridge east-link road, creating gridlocks.

To reduce traffic pressure on the east-link road, vehicles, especially goods-laden trucks, will be bypassed through Bhuapur area, said Shafiqul Islam, officer-in-charge of Bangabandhu Bridge East Police Station.



"Heavy trucks move slowly and this often causes traffic congestion. That's why we came up with this plan," he explained.

Meanwhile, a footbridge at Elenga bus-stop was recently destroyed. As a result, individuals cross the street by gesturing with their hands for vehicles to stop, slowing traffic, according to locals. They are concerned that this may contribute to even worse traffic jams during the approaching Eid journey.

Confirming the development, Elenga Highway Police Outpost In-Charge Jahid Hasan said, the road department

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



MAKING THE MOST OF SUMMER... As the scorching heat of summer hits its peak, a group of children have found solace in a nearby pond. The water, although not very deep, is refreshing enough to take a dip and get some respite from the heat. This photo was taken in Keraniganj of Dhaka yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Rebuilding from the ashes

Bangabazar traders brave scorching heat;  
lack of customers a downer

HELEMUL ALAM

The Bangabazar traders are struggling to get back on their feet after the devastating fire that burned everything in its path. The second day of reopening through makeshift arrangements has not been easy for them, with sales remaining low.

Yesterday around 12:30 pm, Mohammad Rubel, staffer of a shop housed at the fire-ravaged Bangabazar complex, sat there trying to sell products from their makeshift shop.

Unfortunately, he could only sell one piece of clothing, as the number of customers was extremely low.

The Dhaka South City

Corporation (DSCC) Mayor Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh inaugurated the makeshift stalls, set up on wooden "chowkis" on Wednesday.

Traders are selling their goods under the scorching sun, with a giant umbrella providing shade.

Out of around 2,900 shops at the complex, around 600 to 700 traders have resumed their business on the ground, where the three-story structure once stood.

"We resumed our business through this makeshift stall on Wednesday and could only get Tk 1,000 that day. But usually, we sold products worth an average of Tk 8 lakh every day during Ramadan," said Mohammad Rubel, a staffer of

Seven Star Collection.

He said their owner (mohajan) faced a loss of Tk 1.5 crore due to the fire as three of his shops were affected by the flames.

"We could save some products worth around Tk 3 lakh, which were kept in a godown in a nearby market. Now, we are trying to sell all of those before Eid, but the number of customers is very low while shops are under the open sky," he said.

Rubel also mentioned that around 10 staffers used to work at the three shops of their owner, and all of them are now in serious trouble as they are not getting any salaries or bonuses.

"Around 20,000 staffers were working in the around 3,000 shops

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

People of all  
religions live  
freely in country

Says CHT minister

UNB, Dhaka

Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs Minister Bir Bahadur Ushwe Sing yesterday said people of all religions live freely in Bangladesh.

"The bad people don't belong to any party or religion. Those who are criminals and terrorists in society will no way be spared. The government will in no way tolerate such bad people," he said.

The minister made the remarks while addressing as the chief guest at a puja at the auditorium of the Small Ethnic Group Cultural Institute in Bandarban Sadar, said a PID handout.

Ushwe Sing also took part in a colourful procession there to celebrate Sangrai, one of the main traditional ceremonies of the Marma community. The procession started from Bandarban Rajar ground and ended on the premises of the institute, after parading major roads of Bandarban town.

The minister urged all to work in unison for the country, welcoming the new year (Bangalee year).

Leaders of the small ethnic communities and officials of the district administration were present.

Khuki no more

STAR REPORT



Dil Afroze Khuki passed away while undergoing treatment at Mother Teresa Homes in the city yesterday afternoon. She was 63.

She was a newspaper hawker and was known for her struggles for self-reliance, living a dignified life and charitable activities.

She passed away at 1:20pm, Shamsul Islam, an assistant commissioner of Rajshahi district administration, confirmed.

"Sister Adhelika from the homes informed me of her death," Islam said.

Rajshahi Deputy Commissioner Shamim Ahmed said he would visit the Mother Teresa Homes shortly and the district administration will arrange her proper burial.

Giving away her hard-earned income to the destitute, Khuki had chosen a life of constant battles. She was a newspaper hawker in the northern city for 30 years.



**Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh**  
Office of the Divisional Mechanical Engineer  
Carriage and Wagon  
Bangladesh Railway, Chattogram

**e-Tender Notice (OTM)**

Memo No. 54.01.1500.265.05.035.2022-2023-13      Date: 10.04.2023

SI No.	Tender ID No.	Tender Ref No.	Name of the works	Tender closing date & time	Tender opening date & time
1.	809145	54.01.1500.26 5.05.035.2022 - 2023-13	Firefighting equipment for CGMY sick line.	26-April- 2023 & 15:30	26-April-2023 & 15:30

This is an online tender where only e-Tender will be accepted in e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, please register on e-GP System Portal (<https://www.eprocure.gov.bd>).

**Shajeed Hassan Nirjhar**  
Divisional Mechanical Engineer  
Carriage and Wagon  
Bangladesh Railway, Chattogram

এস(২৩)(১২৩)  
জিডি-৬৯১

Seven sent to jail  
for snatching  
away accused

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

A Thakurgaon court yesterday sent seven people -- who were held over snatching an accused of a drug trading case in the district's Haripur upazila on Wednesday evening -- to jail.

Judicial Magistrate Md Ariful Islam passed the order when the arrestees -- Md Sohag, 28; Dulal Hossain, 26; Fazil Uddin, 52; Rubel Islam, 28; Moklesur Rahman; Dulal Hossain, 26; and Hamidur Rahman of Dilgaon village -- were produced before the court.

Citing the case, Haripur Police Station Officer-in-Charge Tajul Islam said after apprehending Mainuddin, when two police officers wanted to put handcuffs on him, he started shouting for help from his relatives.

Responding to his call, his relatives and neighbours rushed to the spot and attacked police with sticks and injured them. They also snatched Mainuddin from them.

On information, a police team went to the spot, rescued them and admitted the officers to Haripur Upazila Health Complex.

Later on Wednesday night, SI Rashedul Islam, one of the officers, filed a case, accusing 75, including 25 named persons in this connection.

Police arrested the seven during overnight drives at the village and adjoining areas, OC said.

One dead,  
three hurt in  
road crash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna


A worker was killed and three were injured when a speedy brick-laden truck hit a three-wheeler at Pakuria Haat area in Pabna's Ishwardi upazila yesterday morning.

The deceased -- Golam Hossain, 45, of Rajshahi's Bagha upazila -- was a farm worker and was working in a Banana orchard in the upazila's Lokhmikunda shoal area.

Arbinda Sarkar, OC of Ishwardi police station, said a group of banana-orchard workers from Rajshahi were going to their farms in a three-wheeler.

When they reached Pakuria haat around 7:30am yesterday, the truck hit the vehicle carrying Golam Hossain. He died on the spot.

**Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh**  
Office of the Executive Engineer, RHD  
Netrokona Road Division, Netrokona  
Phone: 02-996651285, Fax: 02-996651479  
E-mail: [eenet@rhd.gov.bd](mailto:eenet@rhd.gov.bd)



Memo No. 35.01.7200.455.00.000.23-534      Dated: 13-04-2023

**e-Tender Notice**

This is to notify all concern that the following tender have published through e-GP Portal.

Sl. No.	Tender ID, Package No. & date of publishing	Name of work	Date & time
01.	Tender ID: 809972 Package No. e-GP/Rev/49/ NRD/2022-23 & APP ID 186306; Scheduled Tender/ Proposal publication date and time; 10-Apr-2023 10:30	Bridge Painting work at Different Km. of Netrokona- Madan-Khaliajuri Road (Z- 3701) under Road Division, Netrokona during the year 2022-2023	Tender/Proposal document last selling/ downloading date and time: 24-Apr-2023 16:00 Last date and time for Tender/ Proposal security: 25-Apr- 2023 11:30 Tender/Proposal closing & opening date and time: 25- Apr-2023 12:00


The interested persons/firms may visit the website [www.eprocure.gov.bd](http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) to get the details of the tender.

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required.


Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk ([helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd](mailto:helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd)).

**Shahriar Sharif Khan**  
ID No. 602247  
Executive Engineer (CC), RHD  
Netrokona Road Division, Netrokona

GD-589



**Govt. of the People's Republic of Bangladesh**  
Bangladesh Jute Research Institute  
Manik Mia Avenue, Dhaka-1207  
[www.bjri.gov.bd](http://www.bjri.gov.bd)  
Phone: 58151241, E-mail: [dg@bjri.gov.bd](mailto:dg@bjri.gov.bd)



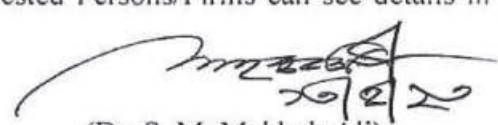
Ref. no. 12.23.2680.006.07.121.19. 3227      Date: 13.04.2023

**e-Tender Notice**

e-Tender is invited in the national e-GP system portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement as below:

SL No.	Tender ID	Procurement Method	Name of Works	Tender Publication Date & Time	Tender last selling Date & Time
1	815812	OTM	Upgrading of networking system	10-Apr-2023 15:30	26-Apr-2023 16:00

This is an online Tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. Interested Persons/Firms can see details in the website: <http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>

  
(Dr. S. M. Mahbub Ali)  
Director (Admin & Finance)  
BJRI, Dhaka

GD-686



**Biman Flight Catering Centre** বিমান ফ্লাইট ক্যাটারিং সেন্টার

Ref: 30.34.2600.63.e-GP Tender.44.2023      Date: 13-04-2023

**e-Tender Notice**

e-Tenders are invited in the National e-GP Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of following goods:

Tender ID No.	Invitation Reference No.	Description of goods	Publication date & time	Last security submission/ selling date & time	Closing/ opening date & time
798318	30.34.0000.063.18.007.23 Date: 24-01-2023 e-GP Tender No. 45/2022-23 dated 02-03-2023	Procurement of Meat & Fish (08 Line items).	16-04-2023 at 19:00 hrs	25-05-2023 at 11:00 hrs	25-05-2023 at 12:00 hrs

This is an online tender where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted.

To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. The fee for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered branches of bank.

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) and e-GP help desk ([helpdesk@procure.gov.bd](mailto:helpdesk@procure.gov.bd)).

For more details, please contact with the signatory.

**Dy-General Manager, BFCC**  
Telephone: 88-02-8901760-64 Ext-13

GD-685



## BILL TO CLIP CJ'S POWERS

# Pak govt, judiciary in new standoff

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan's government yesterday rejected a panel set up and headed by the chief justice that is due to rule on a draft law clipping his powers, claiming conflict of interest, the latest standoff amid months of economic and political turmoil.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's government is involved in a row with the Supreme Court over the holding of snap polls in two provinces where former leader Imran Khan had dissolved the local governments this year in a bid to force early elections.

The government says it is not economically viable to hold snap elections first ahead of a general election due in October. Chief Justice (CJ) Umar Ata Bandial on Wednesday set up a panel of eight judges, to be headed by himself, that yesterday started discussing the draft law, according to the court's cause list.

The draft law, which has been passed by parliament and sent to the president for assent, cuts down the chief justice's powers to constitute panels, hear appeals or assign cases to judges in his team, according to a copy of the bill. "We reject this panel," Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar, flanked by all of the government's coalition partners, told a news conference in Islamabad.



## PENTAGON LEAKS US spying on UN chief over Russia: report

AGENCIES

Leaked Pentagon files indicate the United States was monitoring UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres because it believed he was too soft on Russia after its invasion of Ukraine.

The documents appear to reveal private communications between Guterres and his deputy that focused on a Black Sea grain export deal, which, according to the leaked papers, the UN chief was eager to preserve and willing to accommodate Russian interests to make happen.

"Guterres emphasised his efforts to improve Russia's ability to export, even if that meant working with sanctioned Russian entities or individuals," the leaked US document said, according to a BBC report.

Ukraine and Russia signed the export deal in July. They committed to allowing the export of grain, fertiliser and other farm goods across the Black Sea while they are at war. Guterres and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan mediated the talks, which they said would help ease a global food crisis.

During discussions in February, Guterres was "undermining broader efforts to hold Moscow accountable for its actions in Ukraine", the leaked document alleged.

Another document said Guterres expressed "dismay" after a call with EU chief Ursula von der Leyen in which she said EU intended to increase its production of weapons mmunition for Ukraine, reports Al Jazeera Online.

# Ukraine forces cut off inside Bakhmut

## Says Russia, Kyiv denies; Moscow delivers fresh warning over grain deal

AFP, Moscow

Moscow said yesterday that Russian forces were "blocking" Ukrainian forces from getting in or out of the frontline hotspot of Bakhmut.

But, a Ukrainian army spokesman rejected Moscow's claims. "This does not correspond to reality," Sergiy Cherevaty, spokesman for Ukraine's eastern forces told AFP.

He said Ukrainian forces were able to "deliver provisions, ammunition, and medicines" and take out wounded troops.

However, the head of mercenary group Wagner, which has spearheaded much of the fighting for the city, said it was "too early" to say Bakhmut was surrounded.

"Airborne troops are providing support to advancing assault troops, blocking the transfer of Ukrainian army reserves to the city

and the possibility of retreat for enemy units," the Russian defence ministry said in a statement.

The statement said "Wagner assault units were continuing high-intensity combat operations to oust the enemy from the central quarters" of the city in eastern Ukraine.

The Wagner mercenary group says it has spearheaded the Russian attack on Bakhmut.

Recent days appear to have pointed towards gains in Bakhmut for Moscow, with several Russian correspondents publishing images from inside the city.

The Russian-installed head of the eastern Ukrainian region of Donetsk, Denis Pushilin, also made a trip to Bakhmut this week.

Bakhmut had a population of 70,000 people before Moscow launched its offensive.

Both Russia and Ukraine are believed to have suffered huge

losses in the battle, despite analysts saying the city has little strategic value.

Russia delivered a new warning to the West over a grain deal with Ukraine yesterday, saying a number of conditions must be met for Moscow to extend it beyond May 18.

Negotiated in July by Turkey and the UN, the agreement has given Ukrainian grain shipments a safe corridor in the Black Sea after they were blocked amid the conflict with Russia.

Russia, whose economy has been hit by a raft of Western sanctions, has repeatedly threatened to walk away from the agreement if obstacles to its own exports remained.

The Russian foreign ministry said yesterday that "it is hard to talk about the further extension of the 'Black Sea initiative' after May 18" if Moscow does not see any progress.



US President Joe Biden, left, is welcomed by Ireland's President Michael D Higgins and his wife Sabina at the Aras an Uachtarain in Dublin yesterday, during his four-day trip to Northern Ireland and Ireland to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the "Good Friday Agreement".

PHOTO: AFP

## KSA, Syria welcome thaw in ties

### Agree to facilitate Damascus' return to the Arab fold

REUTERS, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia and Syria's foreign ministers on Wednesday welcomed a thaw in bilateral ties, including steps to resume consular services and flights, and agreed to cooperate to fight drug trafficking and facilitate Syria's return to the Arab fold.

Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad landed in the Saudi Red Sea city of Jeddah on Wednesday in the first visit by a senior Syrian diplomat to the kingdom in more than a decade, a major sign that Syria's regional isolation is nearing an end.

Gulf heavyweight Saudi Arabia cut ties with Damascus amid Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad's brutal crackdown on peaceful protests in 2011, and backed rebel groups that fought to remove Assad from power. Syria was also suspended from the Arab League.

The resumption of Saudi-Syrian ties marks the most significant development in moves by Arab states to normalize links with Assad. It comes weeks after Mekdad met with the top diplomats of Egypt and Jordan, also for the first time in over a decade.

Assad, with the help of his main allies Iran and Russia, regained control over much of Syria, and Saudi Arabia has said isolating him was not working.

In a joint statement at the end of Wednesday's visit, both sides agreed on need for Syrian state to assert its control over its territories "and end the presence of armed militias".

The two ministers also discussed steps needed for a political settlement to Syrian crisis.

## AGRICULTURE, FOOD SYSTEM

# World would gain \$1tn by closing gender gap: UN

AFP, Paris

Closing the gender gap in the agriculture and food system, where women still earn less than men, would add \$1 trillion to the global economy, a UN report said yesterday.

The report, updating the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) 2011 study into the matter, found that women continue to occupy a "marginal" place in agrifood systems.

Women must "cope with work conditions that are often more difficult than those of men, in that they are confined to jobs that are casual, part-time, informal or low-skilled", it said. Women represent more than half of the agricultural workforce in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, and just under half in Southeast Asia.

Around the world, they are lagging behind when it comes to access to land, resources like fertilisers and seeds, financing or technology "The share of men who hold the rights to property or are guaranteed rights of agricultural land is two times higher than that of women," in more than 40 percent of countries that provide data on women's land ownership, the FAO said.

## MIGRANT SHIPWRECK

# Tunisia recovers 14 more bodies

AFP, Tunis

Tunisia has recovered 14 bodies of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa in the Mediterranean, bringing to 24 the number of dead after their boat headed for Europe sank, the coastguard said yesterday. The coastguard had announced on Wednesday that it had recovered 10 bodies of sub-Saharan African migrants after the shipwreck the day before off the coastal city of Sfax. But yesterday, it said 14 more bodies of migrants were discovered, including six women, during search operations, as well as the body of the boat's Tunisian captain. Faouzi Masmoudi, the spokesman for the court of Sfax which is investigating the tragedy, told AFP that the 15 bodies had been trapped under the boat. The spokesman for the National Guard also announced yesterday that 41 Tunisian migrants, including five women and nine children, had been "rescued" off the coast of Sousse. Dozens of migrants, mostly from sub-Saharan Africa, have drowned off Tunisia in recent weeks in desperate attempts to reach Europe. The country has long been a favoured spot for migrants attempting the journey.

## NY appoints first-ever rat 'czar'

AFP, New York

New York appointed its first rat "czar" on Wednesday, tasked with cracking down on one of the more unappealing aspects of life in the Big Apple. The appointment of Kathleen Corradi comes four months after the city posted a tongue-in-cheek advert seeking "somewhat bloodthirsty" candidates for the role. Rats are regularly seen in America's largest metropolis, often spotted scurrying between subway tracks and sniffing around garbage bags on sidewalks. Legend has it that there are as many rats as humans -- around nine million -- although that figure has been debunked as a myth by a local statistician. Even English novelist Charles Dickens complained about the rodents when he visited New York in 1842. One of the critters shot to internet stardom in 2015 when it was filmed walking down the stairs of a subway station with a full slice of pizza in its mouth. "New York may be famous for the Pizza Rat, but rats, and the conditions that help them thrive will no longer be tolerated -- no more dirty curbs, unmanaged spaces, or brazen burrowing," Corradi said in a statement. The former teacher and expert in waste management will be paid \$155,000 a year, according to The New York Times.

# Trump to testify under oath in fraud lawsuit

AFP, New York

Donald Trump was due back in New York yesterday to answer questions in a civil case that accuses the ex-president and three of his children of business fraud.

The deposition comes a week after Trump's historic arraignment on criminal charges in a Manhattan courtroom in a separate case.

The 76-year-old Republican was due to be questioned under oath in the lawsuit brought by New York state attorney general Letitia James, the New York Times reported.

Trump himself appeared to confirm the deposition, his second in the case, in a post on his social media platform Truth Social.

He said would be "heading downtown to meet with a Racist who leaked that I would be there at 9:30 AM."

Trump has repeatedly called New

York prosecutors who are Black and investigating him racist.

James sued Trump, Donald Trump Jr, Eric Trump and Ivanka Trump in September last year alleging they committed "incredible" fraud at the Trump Organization.

Her lawsuit asserts that they lied to tax collectors, lenders and insurers for years in a scheme that routinely misstated the value of Trump's properties to enrich themselves.

James said they provided fraudulent statements of Trump's net worth and false asset valuations "to obtain and satisfy loans, get insurance benefits, and pay lower taxes."

Trump, the frontrunner for the Republican nomination for the 2024 White House race, has used his common refrain of "witch hunt" to describe the case.

HBL

HABIB BANK

হাবিব ব্যাংক

নতুনের শুরু

বৈষম্য ভুলে নববর্ষকে বরণ করে নিতে উৎসব আয়োজনে মেতে ওঠে দেশের সব মানুষ। শুধু নতুনকে বরণ করে নেওয়াই নয়, দিনটি বাঙালি হিসেবে আমাদের ঐক্যবদ্ধ শক্তিরও জয়গান গায়। শুভ নববর্ষ, সবাইকে!

0088 01977742523 | www.hbl.com/bangladesh



## Baishakh comes with good cheer

We must carry new year’s optimism forward and be united for greater good

Yet another Bengali New Year in the middle of Ramadan. This must be acknowledged that it comes at a time of declining morale amid ordinary people’s continued struggle with high food prices, with businesses also witnessing a slump in clothing and sweetmeat sales which were supposed to pick up by now. The celebrations this year are also likely to be tempered down in consideration of the holy month of restraint as well as the sweltering heat outside. Yet, this Pahela Baishakh – the second to be celebrated publicly following two years of pandemic-induced closures – we have ample reason to look forward to the coming days with optimism. We welcome the familiar sights and sounds of festivities at the historic Ramna Batamul, and elsewhere in the country, and hope that the pluralistic spirit that these represent will endure and carry us through to a better future.

Pahela Baishakh is not just an occasion to rejoice. It is much more than that. It is an idea that brings a renewed awareness of what we are, what we used to be, and what we can achieve if we start together. It gives us a chance to renew our commitment to our collective wellbeing. Bangladesh, in the past year, has seen much suffering thanks to the combined fallout of the pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war. It has also seen deep divisions along religious and political lines threatening to rip apart the very fabric of our society. These issues may continue to trouble us for a while more. But as we have seen many times in the past, when faced with apparently insurmountable challenges, we as a nation are capable of doing what’s necessary to overcome them.

Right now, what we need more than anything else is unity, despite all our differences. Pahela Baishakh, which, unlike any Eid or Puja, comes without a religious tag, teaches unity through diversity. Its secular message guides us to find common ground so we can live with some degree of respect for each other and work together for the greater good. On this day, Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Buddhists and people of other faiths come out in unison celebrating their common ancestral roots. Meanwhile, Mangal Shobhajatra and other festivals serve as a call for peace, harmony and good tidings. All this can strengthen and reaffirm the bond shared by all of us, regardless of what faith or community we come from. As a symbol of resistance against intolerance, bigotry and communal hatred, the celebration of Pahela Baishakh has become all the more significant in our present climate.

So let us all join together to bid farewell to 1429 and welcome 1430, wherever we may be and in whatever manner we feel comfortable. Let us focus on our strengths and utilise them, while trying to minimise our weaknesses and differences. Let us strive together to take our nation to greater heights. This should be our goal going forward.

We wish our readers and patrons Shubho Noboborsho!

## A puzzling BRTA diktat

BRTA must work collaboratively with all stakeholders to ensure road safety

We are quite concerned to learn that the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) has asked four road safety organisations – Nirapad Sarak Chai, Bangladesh Jatri Kalyan Samity, Road Safety Foundation, and Save The Road – to inform it before releasing data on road crashes and casualties. At a time when the government’s failure to prevent such incidents is being criticised from all sections of the public, particularly road safety campaigners, such an instruction is quite baffling. Reportedly, the BRTA has sent a letter to these organisations saying that their data on road crashes and deaths are creating “confusion” among people as they differ from each other. The organisation asked them to “check the information regarding road accidents on the ground.”

We wonder whether the BRTA has given such instructions with an aim to ensure credible data on road crashes, or if it is just an attempt to discredit or intimidate the road safety campaigners, as we have witnessed in the past.

While it is true that there are some gaps in the data prepared by different road safety organisations – which basically prepare them based on various newspaper reports – the data prepared by the government are not reliable either. For example, recent road crash data prepared separately by the BRTA and Bangladesh Police did not match. While according to the BRTA, 636 people were killed and 752 others injured in 630 road accidents in January and February this year, police data say that a total of 542 people were killed and 420 others injured in 557 road crashes during the same period. Therefore, the accuracy of both sets of data can be questioned. Moreover, these numbers are much lower than those provided by the NGOs working on road safety. Clearly, the need for reliable official data cannot be stressed more.

The government has a plan to implement the National Road Safety Strategic Action Plan 2021-2024 to reduce 20 to 25 percent of casualties by 2024, and to halve the casualty number by 2030. The question is, what or whose number will that be? To achieve this goal, the government will need authentic data. And to ensure this, relevant government agencies need to work in coordination with not just each other but also with those private organisations. Therefore, it will be a mistake on the part of the BRTA to try to deal with them with an aggressive or combative attitude, or to vilify them for the work they do. We also hope that the government organisations, particularly the BRTA, will be open to discussions and suggestions on road safety issues so that they can plan and act properly.

Bangladesh has one of the highest road crash rates in the world. So, the government must stop treating the issue casually or victimising others for its own failure. It must work sincerely to develop a national database on road crash casualties and injuries with assistance from all the stakeholders. Only a positive approach from the government can help ensure safe roads in Bangladesh.

# Try and be someone like Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury



Dr Bijon Kumar Sil is an internationally reputed scientist and researcher.

BIJON KUMAR SIL

Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury, a fearless freedom fighter and founder of Gonoshasthaya Kendra, passed away on Tuesday. As I live abroad, the news of his death reached me about an hour late. Words fail me as I am trying to describe the feeling of deep sorrow that washed over me upon hearing the news.

While we get bogged down by a simple bout of fever, it was incredible to see how Zafrullah Sir kept working despite his age and many physical ailments.

I worked with Zafrullah Sir for two years. During the pandemic, he contracted Covid and I observed him closely during that time. We were conducting research at the Gonoshasthaya Kendra laboratory in Savar and were finding success in our research on antigen and antibody testing kits. It was around Eid and most scientists were on leave. I, along with my associate Sagar, was working in the laboratory when Zafrullah Sir called me on my phone and said, “Bijan, I have a fever.”

I apprised him of the symptoms, to which he replied, “Yes, I think I have them.”

I asked him to send over a sample. Owing to the sparse traffic, the sample reached us within 45 minutes from Dhaka. We used our homegrown antigen kit to conduct the test and found him to be Covid positive. I tested the sample four more times, and the result was the same each time.

Confused about my next course of action, I called Monju Bhai (Dr Mohibullah Khandaker Monju). He asked me to keep the matter under wraps and assured me that he would take care of it. I turned my phone off since I knew Zafrullah Sir would call me to know the test results. I didn’t know what to tell him. After returning home from the lab, I eventually dozed off, but woke up soon to see that TV channels were broadcasting the news of Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury being infected with Covid, with my reference.

I called him immediately. From the other end, he asked, “What happened, Bijon? Where is your mobile phone?” I replied, “It ran out of charge.” He questioned, “Is it a drained



Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury

PHOTO: COLLECTED

battery, or is it that you do not want to tell me directly? Do you think I will die of Covid?”

I replied, “I mean, no, not that...”

“Listen, Covid can’t kill me. You should continue your work properly,” replied an unfazed Zafrullah.

To anyone infected with Covid back then, death felt imminent. But it didn’t affect Zafrullah’s willpower. In spite of his multiple health conditions, the manner in which he dismissed his Covid diagnosis rendered me speechless. I requested him to stay safe.

I have met many individuals, both home and abroad, but very few of them possessed the mental prowess of Zafrullah. I witnessed many, younger than him, fearful and demoralised when they were infected with Covid. But Zafrullah was a different kind of survivor.

His courage was evident in all his endeavours. When we announced our intent to make the antigen kits, almost everyone was against us. Even the World Health Organization (WHO) said this kit cannot be used for tests; it won’t be able to detect coronavirus.

Dr Zafrullah asked me, “Bijon, are you 100 percent confident about your kit?”

I told him, “Yes, 100 percent.”

“Then don’t fear anything. Since you know the subject matter, you should continue your work. Never think about the money. Regarding any issues, talk to me directly.”

In Bangladesh’s context, this was a rare course of action. Zafrullah had an innate ability to work and understand the nature of research. If anything was

a lot of people opposed the antigen test, Zafrullah Sir stood by us and continued to show strong resolve.

I first met Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury in 1992 or 1993. Gonoshasthaya Kendra had a vaccine development centre. As I was interested in vaccines, I went there after returning from abroad. After an interview, he and Dr Abul Kashem Chowdhury offered me a job there, but as the government had sent me abroad for PhD, there were some restrictions, and eventually I could not join there.

I met him again in January 2020. Even after all those years, he recognised me instantly, and said, “You have returned, after all this time?”

Gonoshasthaya Kendra is the brainchild of this man. He had many dreams around it, and was able to fulfill most of them.

The role Gonoshasthaya Kendra played in the Cox’s Bazar Rohingya camps is remarkable. Almost 1,200 staff members worked there, but most of us don’t know about these efforts.

He tried to stay connected with each and every noble effort. After hearing about the fire at Bangabazar, he went there too. He dedicated his life towards the betterment of people in this country. I don’t think the country will ever be blessed with another individual like him.

Many people say many things about him. But I would like to urge them to first try and be like Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury; try to replicate his epic efforts. If possible, like Zafrullah, dedicate your own life to the betterment of people.

Death is inevitable. His departure is part of life’s natural course. But we have to hold steadfast to his ethics. This duty falls upon each and every member of Gonoshasthaya Kendra. If we want a joyful afterlife for him, we must take his brainchild forward, and that progression has to follow the path shown by none other than Zafrullah Sir himself. Gonoshasthaya Kendra and all its various institutes should be led under able leadership.

My request to the government and each and every individual of Bangladesh is to help Gonoshasthaya Kendra continue its journey of serving humanity.

*(During the pandemic, Dr Bijon Kumar Sil worked at Gono University researching antigen and antibody test kits under the tutelage of Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury. The kit was successfully developed, but due to several complexities, it could not be marketed.)*

Translated from Bangla by Mohammed Ishtiaque Khan.

# Besides forex reserves, nature needs replenishing too



Kazi Amdadul Hoque is a climate, development, and humanitarian activist. His Twitter handle is @KaziAmdadbd

KAZI AMDADUL HOQUE

The recent foreign exchange reserve crisis in Bangladesh has the best of experts worried. Besides maintaining the financial stability of the country, forex reserves also ensure that the country has enough moolah to import food in case of a sudden crisis – including climate-related ones, to which Bangladesh is quite prone – and buy emergency medical supplies or arrange for fuel, as seen in recent times. But what does a country do to fight an unpredictable climate crisis? What other ways does it have to become a more adaptive nation?

As the current climate situation threatens the existing financial protocols and the ways in which the economy works, the world is finding new ways to address these issues. To some environmental experts, the answer is simple. The Covid pandemic has delivered a harsh lesson across the world. Nature wants to be treated right and climate change impacts will become even harsher if positive changes are not incorporated in

the current practices. This includes replenishing more than just monetary reserves; it means replenishing natural water and forest reserves, restoring forests and wetlands, and reversing air pollution. Savings need not, or rather, should not, solely be financial.

Think of it as something akin to the happiness indicator. A number of unconventional criteria help measure how happy a nation and its citizens are. For a disaster-prone country like Bangladesh, a security indicator might work, where the ecological reserves (such as land, forests, water bodies, and biodiversity) and how well they have been preserved can be used to measure how independent and secure a nation is in the advent of a climate-change-induced natural calamity.

Historically, when people did not have the financial ability to buy food, they would often dig up potatoes from their yard or fish from their ponds to manage the day’s nutrition. They also had the option to sell these wares, or

even part of their livestock, simply to survive the difficult days. If this culture can be revived, fewer people would face economic hardships and would have another, easier means of survival. This solution does not need to remain restricted to individual homes; entire communities could work together to ensure their own nutrition through similar processes.

Urban citizens, too, can do much to preserve natural resources. Those who can avail the space on their rooftops to build gardens should take up the responsibility of doing so. This not only ensures their food security to an extent, but also ensures organic nutrition. Similarly, urban homes have solar panels that have been made mandatory by the government. Unfortunately, the use of such solar panels is yet to become widespread. Using these panels can help people become energy-efficient, promote renewable energy, and help the environment in the process.

Millions of litres of water are wasted every day in Bangladesh. If every farmer, be it rural or urban, becomes a little more conscious about wasting water, it is possible to revert the wastage and save water for irrigation purposes.

Recycling glass, plastic, paper, and fabric can save additional dollars, and promoting the production and use of such products can help the country in the long run in the face of fewer

clogged landfills and harmful gas releases. Using products that can be reused over time, such as steel straws instead of plastic straws, jute or cloth bags instead of polythene bags, can make a big difference.

In countries like Bangladesh, where adaptation requirements are foremost on people’s minds, much has been done to help the common people until meaningful mitigation takes place. Some of these adaptation measures have, over time, turned into maladaptation practices, such as shrimp cultivation. Natural salinity of agricultural land saw shrimp cultivation as a way to adapt, whereby farmers could use *gher* (fish farm) culture to grow certain crops as well as cultivate shrimp in saline soils. However, it soon became evident that the shrimp export sector was a good way to make money in export markets, and thus, malpractices such as manually increasing salinisation in certain soils increased. While this made land conducive to cultivating shrimp, it also made it less fertile to grow any other crops on.

As millions of dollars have already been invested into such practices, new programmes must be incorporated for green transition. And funds must be allocated in national budgets to facilitate this transition as well as to pay for the investors’ interests and encourage them for more green investments.



# Is there a Bangalee way to celebrate Pahela Baishakh?



OF MAGIC  
& MADNESS

Badiuzzaman Bay  
is assistant editor at  
The Daily Star.

BADIUZZAMAN BAY

Culture, which is a complex, nuanced and multi-layered concept, is intrinsically related to one's religion, ethnicity, land, and language. But, much as we desire it, in a diverse society like ours, cultural homogeneity is not possible as not everyone has the same set of beliefs or follows the same customs. Ours is "a culture of many cultures." Over the centuries, it has been sliced up in so many ways that what's popular with one segment of the population may be quite unpopular with another segment. But certain ideas and occasions have the ability to transcend these differences, like Pahela Baishakh. It gives us a sense of unity amid our differences. At a time when divisions along religious, ethnic, political, and linguistic lines are ripping apart the very fabric of our society, it gives us hope about our future.

The history of Pahela Baishakh

quarters that say that Islam, the religion of the majority, doesn't support a celebration that they think is inspired by Hindu myths and traditions – or doubt if latter-day inclusions like *panta-ilish* feasts and Mangal Shobhajatra really represent our centuries-old culture and heritage.

These questions are usually ignored by the cultural elite, and binned as products of a "fundamentalist" mindset. Doing so, however, only risks widening the existing schisms within our already deeply polarised society. I think critical thoughts, however biased or intellectually unsound, should be welcomed for the simple reason that they exist as a "reaction," which should give us an opportunity to evaluate our own action. Also, such thoughts stem from long-held concerns and deserve appropriate response, the absence of which may very well mean the absence of a solid

linguistic, national and religious identities/differences lies at the heart of any pluralistic society, although cultural hegemony trying to impose their vision of a unidimensional identity will make you think otherwise. They will cry hoarse about the illusive "Bangaliyana," dig out age-old customs, and disparage anyone who doesn't gravitate to them. But they conveniently forget that such rigidity is an affront to those non-Bangalee ethnic groups that also respect the traditional calendar and celebrate harvesting of new paddy in their own ways.

The search for the Bangalee way is, therefore, a misguided one. We need to seek unity through diversity. That being said, modern-day practices are a far cry from how Pahela Baishakh used to be celebrated – through simple feasts, opening of *haal khata* (new ledger), village fairs, etc. And the fact that it has been turned into an urban affair by people far removed from the reality of peasant folks is an irony of the highest order.

The point I am trying to make is, Pahela Baishakh, while an integral part of the local culture and tradition, shouldn't be a cause for rifts simply because of some people's lofty idea of how to celebrate it. This, in part, also answers the questions about Pahela



ILLUSTRATION: BIPLOB CHAKROBORTY

## Leaders, beware of sycophants



NO STRINGS  
ATTACHED

Aasha Mehreen Amin  
is joint editor at The Daily Star.

AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

Being surrounded by sycophants is an occupational hazard for anyone who has some form of power. Celebrities, CEOs, any kind of leader – they are all vulnerable to the malaise of becoming blinded in the smog created by these yes men and yes women. These are not the people who genuinely care about the leader or act in the leader's best interest. No, these are the individuals who will never fail to flatter the leader at the drop of a hat and will always agree with whatever the leader says – just so they stay in favour and accrue some benefit.

The sycophant will never offer constructive criticism, and in more extreme cases will offer advice that will most likely cause harm to the leader by making them less acceptable to those they are supposed to be leading. Or the sycophant will reinforce the leader's prejudice or wrong assessment of a situation, which may have undesirable consequences – such as firing a competent, talented person just because the sycophant conveniently slipped in a piece of negative information about the person.

Unfortunately for leaders, it is very difficult to differentiate between those who are genuine well-wishers and those who are insincere bootlickers – because both may sound almost the same. Only extremely intuitive leaders, who are not drowned in their own glory, will be able to decipher the real McCoy.

Some of these flatterers are pure opportunists. They will gravitate towards anyone they think has some sort of superior status in society – either through wealth or position or just because of public perception. The idea is to be seen with the powerful person; having a repertoire of selfies with famous or influential people is a must-do. Because when you are with fame, some of it rubs off on you. The opportunistic sycophant is very efficient in orchestrating chance meetings with the target – at events

or places they may visit, making sure a photographer is handy. On special occasions, they will post their pictures with the celebrity on social media. This has a multiplier effect with people believing that the person who is with the celebrity must also be someone worth considering.

Soon, the sycophant will acquire their own coterie of flatterers, thus perpetuating the disease that erodes a person's integrity, honesty, and real worth.

Those who are not recipients of the sycophant's attention are the lucky ones, because they are the onlookers who can see right through the fake smiles that fade far too quickly when the target is not looking. After a whole session of flattering the leader, the sycophant may have a pale, fatigued look and often displays irritation, disinterest, and superciliousness when around those they perceive as inconsequential. Sadly, these sycophants have emotional intelligence close to zero, and hence cannot really form honest relationships as they have forgotten how to be empathetic and sincere.

But let's leave aside the sycophant's inner demons and focus on their targets – the leaders.

What happens to them? Usually, a core circle of sycophants will surround the leader like overzealous bodyguards and make sure that the leader does not get any opportunity to think for themselves, or try to get an objective view from others. The leader will be first bombarded with adulation about all their achievements, the power they have over people, and how brilliant their every move is. They will glibly make up stories of how other powerful people have been impressed by the leader. The leader, giddy with self-love, will be left delusional and blinded. It will leech out the leader's ability to assess things in a rational, logical way.

Once the blindness sets in, the leader can be manipulated to do almost anything. The brilliance of

sycophants lies in the way they will make the leader believe that the conclusion that has been arrived at, the decision that has been made, is completely of their own accord. The fact that the leader has been influenced with slow poisoning, that the outcome serves the sycophant's agenda, will never be detected. It will leave the leader more and more clueless about what is really going on while pushing them further away from the people they are leading. It will give them a false sense of invincibility and grandeur. The leader will become more and more vulnerable to the lies of the sycophants. Eventually, they will stand helpless in front of a wall that has cracked in too many places.

So, can leaders survive this inevitable onslaught? For some, it may be too late. But for those who still feel that twinge of conscience every now and then, there may be an antidote.

One of the traits most advocated by leadership gurus is the ability to listen to people. This means listening to everyone's view – especially from those who seldom get a chance to voice their opinions. In a CEO's case, it would be the junior-most staff; in a nation's leader's case, it would be the people, the silent majority.

For the CEO of a company, it is perhaps easier to talk to their own staff. For a political leader, it is harder because of the layers of leadership under them that may block them from the realities on the ground as it may disrupt the status quo, expose the sycophants' inefficiencies and occasional deception.

The leader must therefore seek out the voices of the unheard, the voices of reason and expertise, thus helping to identify corrosive trends like the corruption of public officials, deficiencies in administration, and excesses of the sycophants. If the leader is smart, they will use this information to mend the cracks and come out stronger than ever.

Listening, of course, requires restraint, calmness, and humility – the last trait fast becoming extinct in today's world of obsessive self-promotion. Humility will give the leader 20-20 vision and give them the patience to hear the point of view of others. Hubris, on the other hand, will cause blindness, forcing the leader to succumb to the trap laid out by the sycophants.



Pahela Baishakh is a celebration of life, a renewed awareness of what we are, what we used to be, and what we can achieve if we start together.

FILE PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

is tied with the history of the formulation of the Bangla calendar, the origin of which is unclear. Some historians traced it to the rule of Mughal Emperor Akbar, who wanted to create a "harvest calendar" for local residents in line with his taxation policy; others traced it to a much earlier time. Regardless of who adopted the calendar, the start of the traditional new year has been historically observed as an auspicious day for both farmers celebrating new harvest and traders looking for a fresh start in their businesses. But it was a simple affair without the flashy trappings of modern-day celebrations that we see in cities and urban centres.

In 1967, Chhayanaut initiated the urban tradition of paying musical homage to the Bangla New Year. As the occasion grew in popularity, celebrations began to take new forms, and new elements were introduced. Today, Pahela Baishakh is celebrated in numerous ways. You see village-style fairs, dance and musical events, readings, open-air concerts, kite festivals, special television programmes, DJ parties, corporate-sponsored gigs, and so on. After the Unesco recognition of Mangal Shobhajatra, a sense of pride was added to the celebrations.

Pahela Baishakh has clearly come a long way since its humble, rural beginnings, and has spawned a regionwide multi-billion-taka bonanza. This, in turn, has also ignited some unpleasant questions about whether the way it is being celebrated is indeed the "Bangalee way."

To put it differently, if Pahela Baishakh is part of Bangalee culture, does the way we celebrate it truly reflect that culture? You can hear murmurs of disapproval in some

basis for said action.

Is there really a Bangalee way to celebrate Pahela Baishakh? Frankly, there isn't. We're too different to be alike. The "Bangalee way" in the sense of a single, linear way is a myth at best, and nationalist propaganda at worst. It is difficult to define because there is no single definition. The vast majority of our population belongs to the Bangalee ethno-linguistic group, but it is hardly ethnically homogeneous because of the different subgroups and deep divisions that exist within that group. And even then, religion plays a big part in how a certain cultural practice will be viewed, meaning that even if it is accepted, its level of acceptance will vary depending on one's interpretation of it.

That brings up the question of the identity of the Bangalee Muslim. As Prof Anisuzzaman once said, "When we identify a group of people as Bangalee Muslim, we highlight only one aspect of their self-identity. But if we observe closely, we'll see that they contain multitudes." He drew on historical documents and literary sources to present a compelling picture of the diversity of Bangalee Muslims of different ages in terms of their preference for language, attire, occupation, customs, and religious and political beliefs, which made them different not only from their Hindu counterparts, but also from each other. Identifying the Bangalee Hindu presents a similar challenge. So, when we single out a certain way and try to pass it off as the Bangalee way, to be followed by everyone, it serves as a denial of people's diversity and, in so doing, attains an autocratic quality.

Culture is a fluid concept. The freedom to navigate the complex situation that arises from one's

Baishakh from an Islamic perspective. Some Islamic scholars do no support celebrating it because of *Mangal Pradip*, *panta-ilish* feasts, Mangal Shobhajatra, and other apparent Hindu influences. They mistakenly equate the spirit of Pahela Baishakh with its modern-day trappings. But Pahela Baishakh is more than that. Pahela Baishakh is an idea – it will not change, although how we celebrate it will. Pahela Baishakh is a celebration of life, a renewed awareness of what we are, what we used to be, and what we can achieve if we start together. Unlike Eids or Pujas, which come with a religious tag, Pahela Baishakh is a celebration for all. Anyone can celebrate it in their own unique way. Even a simple, unceremonious prayer for the well-being of the country would mean as much as organising big public galas.

What I find interesting is the story behind the first Mangal Shobhajatra organised in Dhaka in 1989. It was meant to be a creative expression of protest by the writers-artists who organised it, as part of their movement against the autocratic regime that used religion to stay in power. So the organisers wanted to do something that would highlight Bangalee culture, which is for the people of all religions. Hence, the idea of using symbols of different traditions. It was a deliberate attempt to underscore the importance of unity through diversity. That first walk was called "Ananda Shobhajatra." I wonder if those who object to the naming of "Mangal" Shobhajatra today would have objected to "Ananda" Shobhajatra too.

**This is an abridged version of an article first published in The Daily Star in 2018.**

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

#### ACROSS

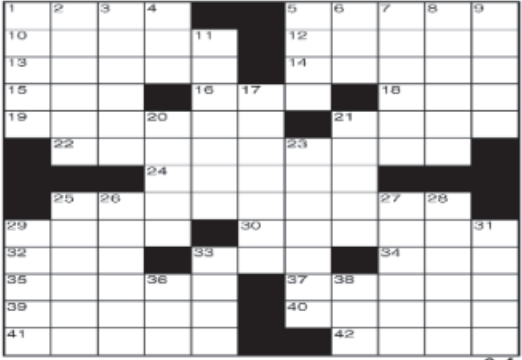
- 1 Historian's concern
- 5 Secures, as a boat
- 10 Writer Nin
- 12 Tax cheat's worry
- 13 Two-dot character
- 14 Corduroy feature
- 15 Important time
- 16 Purpose
- 18 Coffee, in slang
- 19 Impair
- 21 Parachute pull
- 22 Cold-sea crustaceans
- 24 Darkness
- 25 Workers work for them

#### DOWN

- 1 Showed nervousness
- 2 Hooded jacket
- 3 Seasoned sausage
- 4 Uncle, in Acapulco
- 5 Foal's mother

- 6 Arles assent
- 7 Goldfinger's henchman
- 8 Hardships
- 9 Mount
- 11 Get cozy
- 17 Plate refill
- 20 Brat's opposite
- 21 Caravan creature
- 23 Stiffly awkward
- 25 High-protein grain
- 26 Persuasion
- 27 Corrida critter
- 28 Went to sea
- 29 Angry
- 31 Takes a break
- 33 Chest muscles, for short
- 36 Spy org.
- 38 Dapper fellow

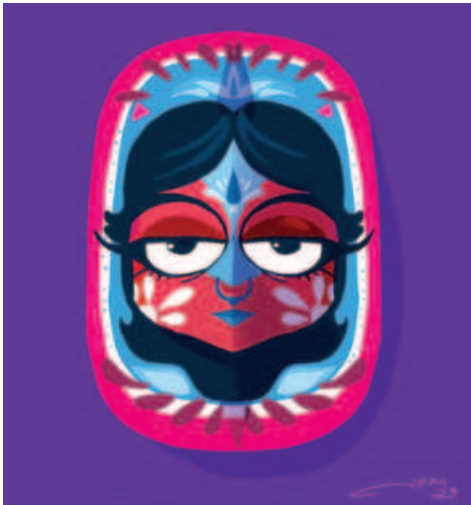
WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO  
dsopinion@gmail.com.



### MONDAY'S ANSWERS

M	A	C	A	W	P	A	C	T	S
A	D	O	R	E	A	L	O	H	A
S	H	A	K	E	M	O	U	R	N
H	E	R	P	A	P	E	R	E	D
E	R	S	H	E	R	S	A	Y	
D	E	E	R	A	R	M	E	D	
		T	A	R	S	E	C		
	R	E	G	A	N	L	A	S	S
H	E	X	P	O	T	T	A	P	
A	S	T	A	I	R	E	A	T	A
R	O	U	T	E	R	E	L	I	C
E	R	R	O	R	S	N	O	R	E
S	T	E	P	S	E	D	G	E	S





Mohamaya Kandoo



Salman Sakib Shahryar



Mehedi Haque



Rakeeb Toonzz



Oishik's kartoon and stuff

# A ‘Baishakh’ rebellion AGAINST NEGATIVITY

“**Pahela Baishakh doesn’t belong to any religion. It’s part of our Bengali culture and people from all classes and religions can take part in Mangal Shobhajatra. Anybody is free to participate in the ‘Mongol Shobhajatra’.**”

CHANCHAL CHOWDHURY  
ACTOR

AAQIB HASIB & MALIHA MASHIAT

*Esho He Baishakh, Esho Esho*

*Shubho Noboborsho.* The new Bengali year has finally arrived and with it, a breeze of colours that take hold of the celebrations surrounding it. At its heart, Pahela Baishakh is a celebration of our identity as Bengalis.

Each year, on April 14, we all wake up, eat our *panta bhat*, put on our Punjabis and head out into a celebration unlike any other. There are no prejudices in place, nor any form of discrimination when it comes to celebrating this occasion.

In the context of Bangladesh, the festival of Pahela Baishakh is doubly important, as we fought for our right to be Bengali and to speak in Bangla. Therefore, when a legal notice was sent opposing the celebrations of *Mangal Shobhajatra*, came together to protest that notice.

*Mangal Shobhajatra* is the largest secular festival that is celebrated by Bangladeshis. In 2016, it was inscribed on UNESCO’s Representative List of ‘Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity’. Despite this, certain individuals came forth to suppress this festival, citing that “showcasing various sculptures of birds, fish and other creatures is offensive to the religious sentiments of the Muslim community.”

Speaking about this issue, Ramendu Majumdar had told The Daily Star, “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. I believe that this notice will have no, rather, more people will gather on this day than ever before. These attacks on Bengali culture will not go very far.”

Similarly, Chanchal Chowdhury had stated, “Pahela Baishakh doesn’t belong to any religion. It’s part of our Bengali culture and people from all classes and religions can take part in *Mangal Shobhajatra*. Anybody is free to participate in the ‘Mangal Shobhajatra’. However, opposition to this festival is highly deplorable.”

It wasn’t only reel artists who had spoken up or expressed their thoughts on the matter. Recently, art groups on Bangladesh social media have been swept away by a creative art phenomenon. Lovingly dubbed as ‘Into the Pecha-verse’, the art endeavor has seen different artists of different mediums showcase the traditional masks

of *Mangal Shobhajatra*, drawn in their own style. This surge comes after Mehedi Haque, popular artist and publisher of Dhaka Comics posted his own interpretation of the ever-famous and colourful Pecha mask.

His art was posted around the same time the legal notice regarding *Mangal Shobhajatra* was sent, inciting outrage among both regular and artist communities. Speaking to The Daily star, Mehedi remarked, “I wouldn’t call it politically inspired per se, but it is (art) indeed reflected in the timing. I used my art to showcase that I stand with the belief that *Mangal Shobhajatra* is an essential part of our culture.”

When asked about how he feels about his art creating a movement, political or not, he said, “Pecha-verse was entirely organic, people saw my art and liked it and they wanted to emulate their own. I absolutely loved seeing people come together, solely for the sake of it.”

He also added, “Recently our process of creating



Roodles

## NEWS

### No reason for journos

FROM PAGE 12

in nature, and demanded a new policy. The previous EChad also announced a ban on the use of motorcycles during the last national election. But the decision was withdrawn amid protests by journalists.

Habibul yesterday said they learned from the media that there are some confusions regarding the new guideline.

“We had discussed it among ourselves,” he said, adding that no document was “sacrosanct”.

“If needed, a document can be changed over time. We will have

further discussions in this regard.”

The CEC also said they prepared the new guideline keeping in mind that a free and fair election must not be hampered.

“However, since you [journalists] will do the work of monitoring the election, we will sit down and discuss your views further. We will take a decision and inform you in due course.”

Meanwhile, Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh, in a statement issued yesterday, said the new guideline—banning reporters from

using motorcycles, being at a polling room over 10 minutes and broadcasting live from there—is basically an attempt to compel the media workers into “obedient journalism”, and demanded its withdrawal.

He added that it will create obstacles for reporters in playing a role in the holding of a free, fair and acceptable election.

In a separate statement, the Dhaka Reporters’ Unity also demanded withdrawal of the guidelines, saying it was against the freedom of press, and is tantamount to “controlling journalism”.

### RMG sector saw progress

FROM PAGE 12

However, the US envoy praised labour leaders for their tireless efforts that resulted in positive changes, particularly in the RMG sector.

“Today, garment factories are safer due to agreements among unions, global brands, and employers who worked together under the former Accord and Alliance,” he added.

He emphasised the need for protecting workers’ health and safety standards, strengthening the workers’ rights to form and join independent trade unions, and collectively bargain for better working conditions.

The diplomat called upon governments, international brands, and buyers to do more to demand that labour rights are respected throughout their supply chains.

“I believe that through our collective work and commitment, we can continue to make progress in creating sustainable manufacturing that will support workers, the industry, and the economy,” he added.

A one-minute silence was observed at the programme in memory of the Rana Plaza tragedy victims. The

collapse of the building on April 24, 2013, left at least 1,136 people dead and many others injured.

Delivering the welcome speech, Kutubuddin Ahmed, general secretary of IndustriAll Bangladesh Council, said Rana Plaza owner Sohel Rana was found responsible in an investigation, but he has not been “punished enough”.

Kutubuddin demanded that those responsible for the disaster be handed highest punishment. He also said forming trade unions for garment workers is essential for their emancipation.

Monika Hartsel, deputy country director of Solidarity Center Bangladesh, said, “We mourn for the injustice in the system that allows this preventable tragedy to occur. Today in their memories, let us reconnect ourselves to the collective struggle for a safe, healthy, and just workplace.”

Nazma Akhter, executive director of the Awaj Foundation, a labour rights platform, called upon American buyers to mandatorily hold the factories accountable for violation of labour rights.

The participants voiced their

concerns over the lack of trade unions in garment factories.

Rajequzzaman Ratan, president of Samajtantrik Sramik Front, said only a few garment factories have trade unions, and most of those are “pocket unions” subservient to the factory owners.

According to him, trade union leaders are always in fear of losing jobs when they join unions. The factory inspectors are not held accountable for disasters, he added.

Rajequzzaman demanded hospitals be set up near industrial areas to provide urgent treatment to RMG workers.

AKM Nasim, country program director at Solidarity Center Bangladesh, stressed the need for amending labour laws to accommodate the demands of RMG workers.

Rashadul Alam Raju, general secretary of Bangladesh Independent Garment Workers’ Union Federation, delivered the keynote address at the event. He underscored the need for more effective efforts to protect workers’ rights in laws in accordance with internationally recognised labour standards.

### Zeenat bookstore shuts

FROM PAGE 12

copies. While the pressure of taxes continues to inflate the prices of these books in Bangladesh, readers want to pay lower prices. Though taxes should not apply to some of these imports, the time and financial costs of navigating court cases far outweigh the revenues they would have earned from the books. The books themselves get damaged in stock during this time-consuming process.

In the meantime, most of these books end up getting pirated and sold at lower prices. Few, if any, customers want to buy the original prices from stores like Zeenat which do not have the financial backing of larger bookstores or the technical expertise of a younger staff to compete with digital promotions and online orders.

“Our staff have been here for over 31 years, they’re comfortable selling books face to face. I cannot let them go to make our operations more digitally savvy. Even if I did, I could run the store

for six or seven more years at most,” Faisal said.

“I have incurred losses of Tk 29 lakh in the last nine years. Every month brings in losses of Tk 50,000 to 70,000. These are huge amounts for a small operation such as ours—selling books is our main business,” he explains.

In his experience, it is readers aged 60 and above who continue to be loyal to reading. The bookseller has noticed a significant dip in reading among the youth.

Readers, however, have expressed immense grief over the news of Zeenat bookstore closing down.

“Zeenat Bookstore was a part of our lives for so long,” activist Khushi Kabir has posted on social media.

Bookworm Bangladesh echoes, “One of the first original bookstores of Dhaka located in the heart of New Market... We will never forget the magic of entering New Market and finding our way to Zeenat soon. When a bookstore closes, something dies for all of us.”

Iffat Sumaiya, another regular visitor, posted, “Zeenat is where I got my taste for Steinbeck, Tennessee Williams, Bell Hooks, and so many more. It is a place to stop on a summer’s day for a chat and a warm smile. It’s now slowly fading before my eyes, before I’m ready to let go.”

Before closing down on May 1, Zeenat Book Supply are holding one last sale, with books being sold at a conversion rate of 60 taka per 100 Indian rupees.

### CAAB suspends

FROM PAGE 2

Sources in CAAB said Sadia won’t be able to fly any commercial flights at home or abroad from now on.

A top official of CAAB yesterday told The Daily Star that after completion of the investigation, they will decide on revoking her CPL.

Biman has also launched an investigation into Sadia following The Daily Star report that said Sadia forged the certificate to claim that she was a student of the science group when she was actually a student of arts.

Meanwhile, Biman has suspended four other contractual pilots as they have failed to complete their training within the one year stipulated time.

The five pilots are: Irfanul Haq, Shah Nasimul Awal, Sadia Ahmed, Sayed Muhi Rezwan and Mohammad Atiqur Rahman.

The five pilots failed to complete initial route check (IRC), according to a source in Biman.

In February last year, Biman recruited a batch of contractual pilots to fly its Boeing 777-300ER aircraft, claiming that it needed pilots immediately due to a shortage.

### Embracing Baishakh, embracing harmony

FROM PAGE 1

Batamul at 6:00am.

Then around 9:00am, the Mangal Shobhajatra, a mass procession seeking the wellbeing of all, organised by Dhaka University’s Fine Arts faculty, kicks off.

Pahela Baishakh, one of the most colourful festivals held in the country, is when the Bangladeshis welcome the new year and bid farewell to the old.

It is also a festival that upholds the rich cultural values and rituals of the nation.

Separate Mangal Shobhajatras are now brought out at divisional, district and upazila headquarters, especially after it was recognised as an intangible heritage by UNESCO in 2016.

Meanwhile, business communities, especially in the rural areas, are ready to open their traditional “Haalkhata”, accounts books for the new year. Traders usually offer sweets to their customers as part of the occasion.

For the last six decades, Chhayanaut has taken the lead in welcoming the Bangla new year through cultural programmes.

It could not hold the event in 1971 during the Liberation War. In 2020 and 2021, Pahela Baishakh was celebrated on a small scale and online due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

In 1967, Chhayanaut organised its Pahela Baishakh programmes in protest at the then Pakistan government’s blatant suppression of Bangalee culture.

After independence, the festival became a symbol of the country’s nationalist movement as well as an integral part of people’s cultural heritage and identity.

Mangal Shobhajatra is a key element in Pahela Baishakh celebrations.

Some historians attribute the Bangla calendar to the 7th century king Shashanka, which was later modified by Mughal emperor Akbar

for the purpose of tax collection.

During the Mughal rule, land taxes were collected from the Bangladeshis according to the Islamic Hijri calendar, which was a lunar one. Its new year did not coincide with the solar agricultural cycles.

Akbar asked the royal astronomer Fathullah Shirazi to create a new calendar by combining the lunar Islamic calendar and solar Hindu calendar already in use, and this was known as Fasholi shan (harvest calendar).

President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday issued separate messages greeting the people on Pahela Baishakh.

Hamid, in his message, wished all Bangladeshis in the country and abroad a happy Bangla New Year.

In her message, the PM called upon all, irrespective of religion and caste, to wake up with a renewed sense of joy, forgetting the sorrows and failures of the past year.

### Hefajat leaders recommended

FROM PAGE 12

the country’s population are Muslim and Hefajat are helping spread Islam. “So we welcome them.”

Asked if his visit was related to the upcoming elections, the minister said, “I am travelling all over Bangladesh.”

He said he went there to offer fateha at the grave of Shah Ahmad Shafi, the previous ameer of Hefajat-e-Islam.

Kamal said the government has not closed any Noorani madrasa and will not do so.

The government is working to modernise madrasa education, he said, adding that Qawmi madrasas are being managed under a board and

the government does not interfere there.

The home minister’s visit came two days after present Ameer of Hefajat-e-Islam Muhibullah Babunagari made a statement demanding immediate release of its leaders.

The minister said, “After the rise of militancy, everyone said that militants come from Qawmi madrasas. But we said religious education is imparted in Qawmi madrasas, militants never emerge from there.”

He said that religious leaders including clerics and imams of mosques have cooperated with the government to tackle militancy.



## Pioli happy to enjoy lead

REUTERS, Milan

AC Milan took a big step towards their first Champions League semi-final appearance for 16 years as Ismael Bennacer's goal secured a 1-0 home win over Napoli in the quarter-final first leg on Wednesday.

On a rainy night, Serie A leaders Napoli's first European clash with seven-times European champions Milan was also their first appearance in the quarter-finals of Europe's most prestigious club competition.

"I am above all happy to enjoy evenings like this with our fans," AC Milan manager Stefano Pioli told Sky Sport Italia after his side kept a fifth consecutive clean sheet in the Champions League for the first time since 2004-05.

"The history of Milan speaks to many Champions League victories, but the recent years saw us dream of getting here, so we wanted to enjoy it. "We didn't build out well from the back at the start, giving Napoli the chance to hurt us, but we got the first home win over Napoli in three years."



It was yet again the deadly duo of Vinicius Junior and Karim Benzema that turned up for Real Madrid on Wednesday night at the Santiago Bernabeu. After Vinicius' initial attempt deflected off the keeper, Benzema tapped it in past Chelsea stopper Kepa Arrizabalaga to open the scoring for Los Blancos in their 2-0 win in the Champions League quarterfinal first leg.

PHOTO: REAL MADRID

## Champions ‘returning home with smiles’

SPORTS REPORTER

The SAFF-winning women's team received cash awards from different corporate houses ahead of Bengali New Year and Eid-ul-Adha and it may have somewhat soothed the collective wound from being barred from taking part in the qualifiers of the 2024 Paris Olympics due to the financial limitation of the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF).

Envoy Group, one of leading export-oriented garment factories, was the last corporate house to hand over their promised Tk 50 lakh and they also promised to stay with the country's women's football by floating a club or franchise team in future.

Abdus Salam Murshedy, Envoy Group managing director and also the BFF senior vice-president, and Ismam Salam, son of Murshedy and Envoy Group director, together handed over the cheque to the players and officials. "We are really sorry for being late in handing over the promised awards that our Envoy Group chairman Sharmin Salam gave right after the SAFF Women's Championship triumph. I think the girls brought laurels for the nation and took the country's football ahead as well," said Murshedy at the BFF House yesterday.

"It is a matter of great happiness for us to get the money before going home for Eid vacation. Thank you, sir, the girls are really happy ... that we are returning home with smiles," Bangladesh captain Sabina said. It has been learned that, since the historic triumph in Nepal in September last year, every player of the SAFF Championship-winning squad received approximately Tk 17 lakh based on the cash-awards given by the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh Army, the Bangladesh Cricket Board, BFF vice president Ataur Rahman Bhuiyan, Rupayan Group, Amber, Prothom Alo, Sammilito Sangskritik Jote and Sonali Bank.

## ‘It’s time for us to win a tournament’

SPORTS REPORTER

Former Bangladesh skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza threw his weight behind Shakib Al Hasan, backing up the current Test and T20I captain's sentiment that 2023 could potentially be a good year for Bangladesh.

So far, the year has seen series wins against England and Ireland and Bangladesh reach fourth position in the ODI Super League. A 3-0 clean sweep in an away series against Ireland could even see them climb to second.

After featuring for Legends of Rupganj in an exciting one-run win in the Dhaka Premier League, Mashrafe said it would be more prudent to continue to focus on building the team now rather than think about ODI Super League standings.


"It would be good for us to end in second position. But even if they finished in eighth place, they would still play the World Cup. How we play from the beginning of the World cup is what's going to matter," Mash said.

Bangladesh's only triumph in a multi-nation series came ahead of the 2019 ODI World Cup, when they won a tri-nation series in Ireland also featuring the hosts and the West Indies.

The 2023 World Cup is the last hurrah for the most of the team's stalwarts and, like many others, Mashrafe too was banking on the side's experience.

"If the team's best player [Shakib] believes, then so do we. If you ask why Shakib said such a thing, I believe there

“



It is very good that one of us [Liton Das] is playing in the IPL. They flew out our Mustafizur [Rahman] on a chartered plane and didn't play him. There is a lot to it; There is a social media aspect to it and we become excited as well. Bangladesh cricket has a fanbase which they [IPL] can use

Former Bangladesh skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza on how the IPL is probably using Bangladesh cricketers' social media impact.

isn't another team in world cricket as experienced as ours. Even Australia aren't as experienced. It's time for us to win a tournament, maybe the Asia Cup or could be the World Cup. Even youngsters like [Nazmul Hossain] Shanto have four-five years' experience.

"So with that in mind, Shakib can say such a thing and I back him absolutely. This year can be very big for us if everyone is healthy, in form and has a clear mind."

Veterans such as Mushfiqur Rahim

appear to be finding new gears in their ODI mentality, with the wicketkeeper-batsman recently batting at number six and producing brilliant knocks.

Mashrafe believed that players needed to fulfil the roles they are given by the team management while also opining it may not be over for Mahmudullah Riyad at the World Cup, even if he is not taken onboard as a starter.

"Where Mushy is batting and that he is enjoying himself, is good for the team.

Most importantly he has accepted himself and the challenge that coach has given him.

"I can't talk about selection but I won't say that Mahmudullah has no chance. We all know what he can do. If they want to see a player in a particular position, then even when Riyad is being taken, there could be a back-up option who has already been observed.

"Only winning with the team is important. If you are talking particularly about Riyad, he has to accept that. If I don't perform, after two or three matches I will be dropped. It's also important to fulfil what the team management is asking of you."

Mashrafe's Legend of Rupganj picked up their eighth win as Chirag Jani defended two runs off the last delivery as Umar Amin's 133-ball 128 for Dhaka Leopards went in vain at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium.

Abahani returned to winning ways with a nine-run win against Agrani Bank. Mohammad Naim continued his excellent DPL form, hitting 79 as Abahani posted 267 all out. Needing 16 off the last over, Agrani fell short despite Marshall Ayub's unbeaten fifty at the Khan Saheb Osman Ali Stadium in Fatullah.

Towhid Hridoy struck an unbeaten 98 after Saif Hassan's 70 at the top to chase down Prime Bank's 244 and lead Sheikh Jamal to a seven-wicket win at the BKSP in another match.

“



As I am involved with the board [Bangladesh Cricket Board], saying anything about this does not look good. But this is a part of Bangladesh cricket's history as things [Bangladesh cricket's journey] started from here. Look, it has been 26 years since the ICC Trophy triumph [ in 1997 in Kuala Lumpur]. A get-together must have been arranged -- be it by the BCB or CWAB [Cricket Welfare Association of Bangladesh]. Here, we are being deprived.

Akram Khan, captain of the Bangladesh team that beat Kenya in the final 26 years ago in the ICC Trophy in Kuala Lumpur, said on how their achievement has not been recognised properly.



## Mbappe hopes to be at 2024 Olympics

AFP, Paris

Kylian Mbappe has said he will still be a Paris Saint-Germain player next season despite regular speculation over his future, as the France superstar also admitted he hopes to play for his country at the 2024 Paris Olympics.

Asked where he saw himself playing next season in an interview with television channel France 3 on Wednesday evening, Mbappe responded: "At Paris Saint-Germain. I am Parisian, I have a contract and so it's Paris Saint-Germain."

Mbappe signed a new contract with PSG at the end of last season to keep him at the Qatar-owned club until 2025, although French media reports have indicated that the last year of that deal is optional and down to the player. "I hope to be there. Everyone knows I have always dreamed of playing at the Olympic Games but it doesn't depend on me," Mbappe also said.



At the Stade de France in Saint-Denis, Mbappe took part in a football match with children from the “Premiers de Cordee”, an association he has been a patron of for six years. “It's not hard to play for Paris-Saint-Germain or captain the French team; it's much harder to fight against illness every day, not knowing what the future will hold, if indeed there is a future,” Mbappe said.

PHOTO: TWITTER

## Marauding City turning up heat on Arsenal

REUTERS, London

In track and field parlance Arsenal would have hoped their relentless pace over the last few laps of the Premier League race might have taken the sting out of sprint finish specialists Manchester City as the bell approaches.

Arsenal's seven-match winning run in the league allowed them to maintain their lead over their pursuers but they have simply not been able to crack Pep Guardiola's side.

And this weekend they might well start to feel City's hot breath on their backs with the gap most likely to be cut to three points by the time they kick off at relegation-threatened West Ham United on Sunday.

Reigning champions City have countered every Arsenal move in recent weeks and appear to be reaching top gear at the perfect time, just as they usually do.

Arsenal's squandering of a 2-0 lead to just about escape with a 2-2 draw at Liverpool last weekend means City will

host a demoralised Leicester City side on Saturday with the chance to really ratchet up the pressure on the Londoners.

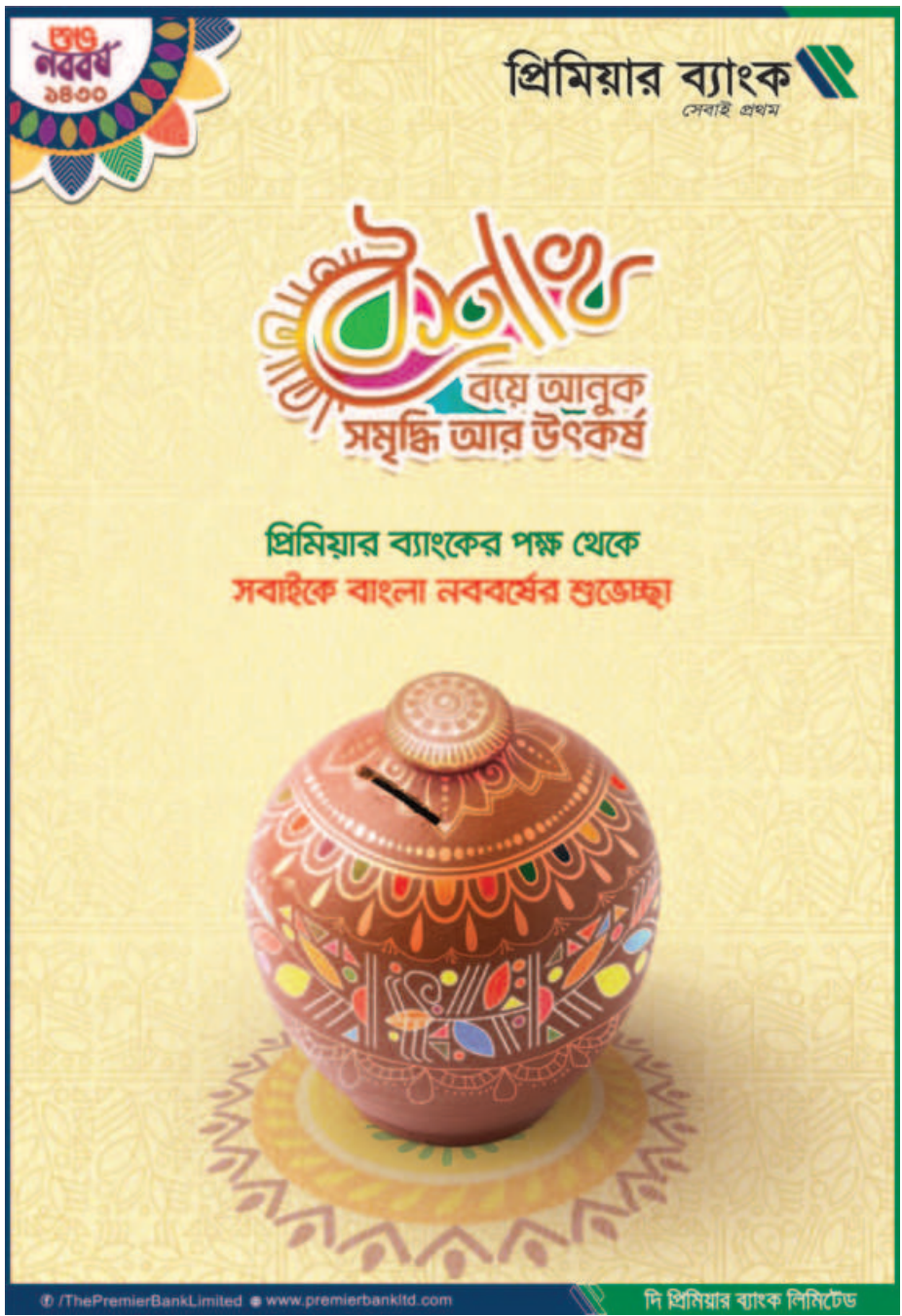
For 19th-placed Leicester's newly-appointed interim manager Dean Smith it could hardly be a worse scenario as he attempts to pull the club out of a death spiral of seven defeats in their last eight league games.

Smith must find a way to halt a City side who have won nine successive games in all competitions, scoring 34 goals and conceding three in the process.

The way City demolished Bayern Munich on Tuesday to all but secure their place in the Champions League semifinals would have sent a shudder down the spines of Arsenal fans.

Guardiola said he aged 10 years during the 3-0 win over Bayern in which Erling Haaland set a new record for goals in a single season by a Premier League player.

But it is Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta who might well be feeling the strain this weekend as he tries to deliver the club's first English title since 2004.







## SIDDIQUE BAZAR BLAST

# Faulty Titas gas line might have caused it

### Says CTTC's bomb disposal unit

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN and HELEMUL ALAM

A faulty Titas Gas line might have caused the explosion at the seven-storey Café Queen building in the capital's Siddique Bazar last month, say investigators.

They say the Titas contractor concerned should have stopped the commercial gas supply to the building before installing a new domestic line.

Visiting the blast site yesterday, the bomb disposal unit (BDU) of the DMP's Counter Terrorism and Transitional Crime unit found a "commercial gas line" at the building.

The gas connection pipe from the riser to the outer wall of the building was 1.5 inch wide. The building's sewage line was also there.

A "reducer" was installed there by the contractor to convert the commercial line into a domestic one with a pipe 0.25 inch wide which is not supposed to contain the pressure of gas supplied from a 1.5 inch wide pipe, said investigators.

An explosion at the building on March 7 killed 25 people and injured more than 100 people.

The BDU team disclosed their findings to The Daily Star after inspecting the blast site.

"Titas Gas was supposed to install the domestic gas line from the riser after severing the commercial line. But the contractor provided the connection with a thinner pipe installing a reducer," said Raisul Islam, inspector of the BDU and also the investigation officer of the case filed after the explosion.

There was mismanagement by Titas, said the officer.

Md Haronur Rashid Mullah, managing director of Titas, said that it was not supposed to happen.

"There is no scope to change the gas line or install pipe underground after the riser. We may be able to say clearly about it after inspection of the site by our team," he told The Daily Star.

On April 3, Titas Gas official Moshir Rahman said there was once a commercial gas line at the building, but it was disconnected and a domestic gas line was installed.

Rahmat Ullah Chowdhury, chief of the BDU team, told this newspaper yesterday that there was an empty space where the pipe width was reduced.

"Gas might have accumulated in the space and then flowed to the basement from there, which ultimately led to the explosion," he added.

The BDU investigation team also found two other reasons for the explosion.

Inspector Raisul said there is no scope for installing an AC in the basement.

"But building owner Wahidur Rahman built a store fitted with AC in the basement and rented it out for Tk 40,000," he said.

Wahidur had permission from Rajuk to construct a five-storey building, but he extended it to seven-storey, said Raisul.

Wahidur was arrested a day after the explosion. He is now behind bars.

According to investigators, the building owner complained about the low gas pressure just about a month before the explosion. A new riser was installed later to increase the pressure, they said.

Raisul said that they contacted Titas Gas to know about the installation of the new riser, but Titas said they were not aware of it.

"We are checking if there is any negligence on the part of Titas Gas," he added.



A massive fire broke out in 20 warehouses under a structure in Suritola of the capital's Nawabpur around 10:00pm yesterday. At least 14 fire engines with the help of an army team brought the blaze under control after around one and a half hours. No casualties were reported.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## METRO RAIL

# Agargaon-Motijheel part to open by Nov

### Says Quader; 100 bridges to open to traffic on a single day in June

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Agargaon-Motijheel section of the metro rail will be opened by November this year, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader said yesterday.

Besides, the airport to Tejgaon section of Dhaka Elevated Expressway will be inaugurated within this fiscal year, he said, adding that 100 bridges will be opened on a single day in June and the country's first 100 electric buses are going to be added to the BRTC fleet by November this year.

He said these after a contract-signing ceremony at his ministry.

The Roads and Highways Department signed the contract with a consortium of consultants for Kewatkhali Bridge in Mymensingh.

LEA Associates South Asia Pvt Ltd of India, Yongma Engineering Company Ltd of South Korea, and Desh Upodesh Limited and Kranti Associates Ltd of Bangladesh will provide the consultancy services for four years at a cost of Tk 59.94 crore, according to sources.

Civil works of the country's largest steel arch bridge in Mymensingh are expected to start in August this year under a Tk 3,263.63 crore project, said Project Director Noor E-Alam.

Quader said preparation for opening the metro rail up to Motijheel is at the "final stage" and he is hopeful of inaugurating this part by November.

The Uttara-Agargaon section of the metro rail was opened to public in December last year. Earlier, the authorities announced that the second phase from Agargaon to Motijheel would be opened in December this year.

The government opened 100 bridges on November 7 last year.

**The Uttara-Agargaon section of the metro rail was opened to public in December last year. Earlier, the authorities announced that the second phase from Agargaon to Motijheel would be opened in December this year.**

Quader said 100 electric buses would be added to the fleet of Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation by November. Eighty of the double-decker AC buses will operate in Dhaka and 20 in Chattogram, he added.

Construction of Dhaka Elevated Expressway from airport to Kutubkhali on Dhaka Chattogram highway was going on under Public Private Partnership model.

## NAT'L ELECTION

# Momen welcomes IRI of US to observe it

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen has welcomed US International Republican Institute's interest in observing the next general election, said Seheri Sabrin, the ministry spokesperson, at the weekly media briefing yesterday.

Momen joined a meeting as the chief guest at the IRI, which promotes democracy worldwide, in Washington.

At the meeting on Wednesday, he talked about Bangladesh's political landscape, its electoral process and preparedness for a free, fair and participatory general election.

IRI officials expressed their interest to observe the general election that was cordially welcomed by the foreign minister.

President of the institute Daniel Twining moderated the event.

Seheri said the foreign ministry does not think that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her ICT Adviser Sajeeb Wazed Joy's criticism of the US will impact the relations between the two countries.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

## No reason for journos to worry

### Says CEC on polls guideline; TIB, DRU demand withdrawal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibur Awal yesterday said there is no need to worry about the new guideline for media personnel who would be covering the election.

"We will take into account opinions or criticisms that have come from different sources. We will review whether there is need for any further amendment, addition or subtraction in the policy," he told reporters at his office.

He made the comments in the wake of criticisms over the EC's new guideline that banned journalists from using motorcycles during elections.

In the guideline published on Wednesday, the EC also said only two journalists at a time would be allowed in a voting room, and they will only be able to stay there for 10 minutes.

At a discussion with the EC regarding the guideline on March 13, journalists said the use of motorcycles should not be banned.

The Reporters Forum for Election and Democracy, in a statement on Wednesday, rejected the guideline, saying it was anti-journalist

SEE PAGE 10 COL 1

## Zeenat bookstore shuts its doors after 60 years

### Piracy the main reason



SARAH ANJUM BARI

Zeenat Book Supply, a New Market staple for book lovers since 1963, will close shop on May 1, 2023.

"There were few other forms of entertainment when my father opened this shop in 1963. Radio and Bangladesh Television eventually arrived, but even that was limited. I still remember the days when we would arrive at the bookstore each morning to find huge lines waiting outside the shop," says Syeed Faisal, who took charge of the bookstore after Syed Abdul Malek, his father and the bookstore's founder, passed away in 1994.

Faisal, 67, has spent 47 years looking after the bookstore. Over these decades and in the last few years in particular, he has seen the bookstore sell in three months what it used to sell in a day. Of its 25 registered importers, Zeenat has had to maintain trade with just one — all caused by the fall in demand for textbooks and leisure reading.

"The coronavirus made it especially worse, once students became used to online classes and reading books digitally," he said.

Faisal explains that piracy is among the main reasons behind their decision to close Zeenat Book Supply.

All of the store's books are imported, original

SEE PAGE 10 COL 1

## Hefajat leaders recommended for release from jail

### Says home boss

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, City

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan yesterday said most of the jailed Hefajat leaders have been freed and the rest have been recommended for release.

"We received a list Hefajat-e-Islam leaders who are in jail. According to that list, we are recommending the release of them," he added.

The minister was talking to reporters after a programme at Al Jamiatul Ahlia Darul Uloom Moinul Islam Madrasa at Hathazari upazila in Chattogram, a stronghold of Hefajat-e-Islam.

Asked about the government's relations with Hefajat, he said, "We have no hostile relationship with anyone."

He said 90 percent of

SEE PAGE 10 COL 1



## WINGS OF PARADISE

**A male Indian Paradise Flycatcher feeding his chicks with utmost care in a nest resting between the twigs of a tree in Sherpur. Like most birds, both genders of this species share the responsibilities of the family. These passerine birds, native to most of Asia, are widely distributed and are in the "Least Concern" category in the IUCN's red list. The Indian Paradise Flycatcher, though very noisy, is considered one of the most beautiful birds in the world.**

PHOTO: TIMU HOSSAIN

## WORKPLACE SAFETY

# RMG sector saw progress but still not enough

### Says US ambassador

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Although progress has been made in the garment sector for the RMG workers' betterment following the Rana Plaza tragedy, it is nowhere enough, US Ambassador Peter Haas has said.

As Bangladesh moves to graduate from LDC status, more will be expected of it, especially in terms of workers' safety and labour rights becoming ingrained in the country's ethos, he said.

The envoy was addressing a stakeholders' roundtable yesterday, organised by Solidarity Center Bangladesh, on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Rana Plaza collapse.

The event titled "Workers' Health and Safety and Trade Union Rights: Where Are We Now?" was held at The Daily Star Centre.

Citing recent incidents, including the massive fire at the Bangabazar Shopping Complex in Dhaka, Haas highlighted the need for greater progress in industrial safety beyond the export-oriented RMG sector.

He expressed his frustration over the absence of the representatives from the BGMEA, BKMEA, and the government agencies concerned. He said their no-show suggests that they are indifferent towards the issue.

SEE PAGE 10 COL 4