



## Next national polls vital for democracy

### Says president

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, *Pabna*

President Mohammed Shahabuddin has said the next general election is vital for democracy.

Speaking at a civic reception accorded to him at the Government Edward College in Pabna yesterday, the president said election is the only way to bring change in power.

He said people have to assess the candidates before electing their representatives.

"Violence and envy in the name of politics cannot bring any good for the country, the society, and the economy," he observed.

The president said all should reach a consensus through talks to strengthen democracy.

Shahabuddin, also a former commissioner of the Anti-Corruption Commission, said Bangladesh has become a role model of development in the world because of the continuation of Awami League rule over the last 14 years.

He said Bangladesh takes loans and repay those on time. "It never defaults on loans... Bangladesh rather financially supported Sri Lanka when they were in a crisis."

Referring to the corruption allegation brought by the World Bank in the Padma bridge project, the president said it was a conspiracy.

The World Bank brought a false and baseless allegation, he said, adding that his investigation proved that the allegation was not true.

Deputy Speaker Shamsul Haque Tuku, local lawmakers Golam Faruk Khandakar Prince, Mokbul Hossain, Ahmed Firoz Kabir, Nuruzzaman Bishwas, and Nadira Yeasmin Joly, and Managing Director of Maasranga Television and also the convener of Nagorik Somaj Anjan Chowdhury, among others, addressed the reception, chaired by valiant freedom fighter and social worker Baby Islam.

Earlier in the day, Shahabuddin joined a views-exchange meeting with local journalists at the Pabna Press Club.

He also inaugurated Square Science and Life Plant in the town's BSCIC area.

The president reached Pabna town on Monday on a four-day visit. This is his first official visit to his home district after becoming president.

## An alluring case of DHAKA'S COFFEE CULTURE



PUJA SARKAR

During my university days, I started visiting a coffee shop between classes because I did not exactly have any friends. Let's call this coffee shop "South Start". I went there because the coffee was within my daily budget and the cafe itself was a good place to study. I went there almost every day and fast forward four years and a year after my graduation, I still go there almost every day! The baristas there know my name, know my drink and are well aware that I will be sitting there for hours.

Just like that, I subscribed to this culture without even knowing it was one to begin with.

Now, all the friends I have are from South Start -- they either work there or are loyal, and passionately dedicated to South Start just like myself. We frown at the name of other coffee shops and our conversations and daily outings all centre this place. We start our day here, and we end it here.

It is true that you do not often see people walking around with go-to coffee cups or a coffee station in workplaces. As Bangladeshis, tea is our go-to comfort, caffeine drink; a drink which can never be replaced by any substitute and holds a special place in everyone's heart. What makes it more special is that everyone has a unique way of preparing it. You will see people enjoying a cup of tea commonly with their breakfast and later in the afternoon to re-energise.

The coffee shops we do have in Dhaka rarely have long lines during the mornings when people are rushing to work. Instead, we see roadside shops packed with people demanding their

tea during this time. These scenarios only tell us that coffee is not the most desired caffeine beverage. So, there technically should not be a coffee culture to begin with.

Yet, Dhaka's niche coffee community will have you believing otherwise. It is coffee or nothing! Nothing hits you with an energising bolt of energy at the start of your day or after work like coffee does. Some of us cannot even go to sleep without our bedtime coffee. This drink can also be customised a l t h o u g h you would need fancy equipment for it. The lack of long lines only makes the caffeine boost enter our bloodstream faster. Oh, we also frown at the name of instant coffee.

So, what makes South Start and other coffee places a hub for people to keep coming back year after year? It is not just the coffee but also the environment, and the sense of comfort it brings in, something not everyone can find in a roadside shop.

Moreover, it's the random conversations you get to have with strangers who make it into a community unknowingly. After all, you see the same people every day, you witness them stressed out while working on their laptops, you go through their explosive break-ups with them. We are a community at its truest



essence, through thick and thin.

While there is a division between coffee shops and who is loyal to which one, there is also stratification within the community itself -- the classic Americano drinkers who think they have superior taste buds, the iced coffee fanatics despite what the weather may hold (like myself), and lastly, perhaps the most judged group, the ones who opt for sugary drink and flavourings to mask the bitter taste of coffee, or even worse, decaf!

Dhaka's coffee community is not something you consciously subscribe to. It happens over time as you develop a taste for coffee from a specific place. This is not entirely a bad thing but it certainly does have an impact on your social life. Whether that impact is good or bad, is for you to decide. Bear in mind, we tend to gatekeep our coffee shop so you will have to find your own way in!

## PM may visit Qatar next week

### Likely to attend Qatar Economic Forum from May 23 to 25

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is likely to attend the Qatar Economic Forum, the Middle East's leading voice dedicated to global business and investment, to be held in Doha on May 23-25.

However, there is no official announcement yet regarding the visit.

Strategically located in Doha, the Forum draws on Qatar's ability to link Asia with Africa and beyond, as well as its position as a key global diplomatic hub and a leader in LNG energy technologies.

The forum features a curated group of global leaders and innovators exploring solutions for some of today's more pertinent challenges as they draw up a blueprint for our shared future, said the organisers.

The organisers of the event put Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's name as one of the guests among the heads of state and government.

## Minor madrasa student found dead

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A minor madrasa student was found dead in Rangpur Sadar yesterday.

Victim Sahinur Islam, 12, of the upazila's Haridepur village, was a student of grade-VI at Nurul Quraan Hafizia Madrasa in the district.

Shahinur Alam, inspector (investigation) of Rangpur Sadar Police Station, said the victim went missing on Monday.

Locals found his body at a sugarcane field yesterday, he further said, adding that the boy was strangled to death.

Police recovered the body and sent it to Rangpur Medical College Hospital for autopsy.

Police detained seven people in connection with the murder for quizzing. A case would be filed soon, the inspector added.

## Man sent to jail for acid attack on teenage girl

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A Moulvibazar court yesterday sent a man to jail for throwing acid at a teenage girl in the district's Rajnagar upazila.

Police arrested accused Lal Chan Bauri, 26, of Uttarbhag union, on Monday afternoon and produced before the court yesterday.

The victim's brother filed a complaint with Rajnagar Police Station in this connection.

According to him, Lal had been harassing his sister for long. Recently, he proposed his sister for marriage. Refused, he hurled acid at her around 9:30pm on Sunday.

Her right eye and cheek were burnt, he added.

Binay Bhushan Roy, officer-in-charge of the police station, said the victim was undergoing treatment at Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College and Hospital.

## VIOLENCE IN PAKISTAN

# Imran Khan's party blames intelligence agencies

AFP, Islamabad

Former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party yesterday accused intelligence agencies of being responsible for shootings and arson during violent protests that followed his arrest last week.

The former cricket superstar has waged a campaign of defiance against Pakistan's powerful military, which controls the country's intelligence services, since being ousted from power last year.

Khan, 70, is Pakistan's most popular politician and his arrest on corruption charges last week, following months of political crisis, prompted his supporters to pour onto the streets of several cities.

Violent clashes erupted with police, government buildings were set on fire

and military installations damaged, with at least nine people killed in the unrest.

Open criticism of the military, which has staged three coups and heavily influences domestic politics and foreign policy, is rare in Pakistan's political mainstream.

"We have ample amount of evidence to present to any inquiry that the arson and in some places, shootings were done by (intelligence) agencies men who wanted to cause mayhem and blame it on PTI so the current crackdown would be justified," the party said in a statement.

"PTI believes that identification of elements involved in this unusual incident of violence and chaos through a credible investigation is inevitable," the statement said. It did not offer any evidence for the claim.

More than 7,000 people have been

detained or arrested since the unrest broke out.

At least 19 senior PTI officials have been arrested, some in overnight raids on their homes, after being accused of instigating the violence.

The PTI statement came a day after top commanders vowed to try those involved in damaging military installations in military courts.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, whose government has vowed to re-arrest Khan, said he would open more anti-terrorism courts to try people accused of anti-state behaviour during the protests.

The independent Human Rights Commission Pakistan said it was "deeply concerned by reports of random arrests and cases filed arbitrarily against PTI workers across Pakistan".

## Opens this Sept but bottlenecks to stay till 2028

FROM PAGE 1

"All out efforts are on to complete the work [of Chattogram-Cox's Bazar line] within August to inaugurate it [Dhaka-Cox's Bazar line] in September," he told reporters while inspecting the under-construction iconic station in Cox's Bazar.

At least 84 percent of the civil works have been completed, he added.

**THE IMPEDIMENTS**

Built in 1931 as a rail bridge and then converted into a rail/road bridge in 1962, the Kalurghat bridge over the Karnaphuli has become rather unsafe and the authorities have to repair it occasionally to keep it usable.

Heavy locomotives, which were added to the railway fleet over the last few years, cannot use the bridge.

In 2014, the government decided to build a new bridge and decommission the British-era bridge.

In 2018, a Detailed Project Proposal (DPP) was prepared for a single rail line and double-lane road bridge that would cost Tk 1,163.27 crore.

Now, the bridge would have double-line dual-gauge rail lines and a double-lane road on the same deck. It is expected to be built at a cost of around Tk 14,000 crore with South Korean financing.

BR is expected to submit the new DPP within this month and the project is likely to take up to 2028 to be completed.

Railways Minister Sujan said a group of experts were tasked with repairing the bridge and once that is done, the railway operations will face no hindrance.

A BR official, requesting anonymity, said the repaired bridge will be able to support heavy locomotives, but the speed limit will remain the same. "It can be upgraded to maybe 20kmph but no more than that."

BR has already floated tender to repair the bridge before September 15, sources said.

Meanwhile, only two passenger trains and an oil tanker train, both pulled by small locomotives, run on

the Chattogram-Dohazari metre-gauge section, BR sources said.

To increase the speed on the section to 80kmph from 48kmph, BR has submitted a project proposal to the Planning Commission. The proposal asked to turn the section into dual-gauge one at a cost of Tk 7,073.54 crore by June 2027 with funding from Asian Development Bank.

Contacted, BR's Director General Quamrul Ahsan, however, claimed that railway operations between Dhaka and Cox's Bazar will be smooth from the beginning of its opening.

He said they would carry out some maintenance work on the Chattogram-Dohazari section to increase train speed to 60kmph, claiming that after repairs, the speed limit on Kalurghat Bridge would also be increased. He, however, could not say by how much.

About the delay in starting the two projects, he told 'The Daily Star' last night, "It is not possible for us to do all the work at the same time. We have to implement the projects in phases."

## Coming years 'critical' to slash plastic pollution: UN

AFP, Paris

The world must halve single-use plastics and slash throwaway consumption to stem the tide of environmental pollution, according to a UN report yesterday that warns the next few years are critical.

Concern is growing about the impacts of microplastics -- produced when plastic products break down in the environment -- which have been found from the deepest oceans trenches to top of Mount Everest.

In humans, they have been detected in blood, breast milk and placenta.

The report by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

comes two weeks before negotiators from nearly 200 countries meet in Paris for a new round of negotiations aimed at reaching a legal agreement next year to end plastic pollution.

It lays out a three-pronged plan based on reuse, recycling and diversifying the materials used -- to help slash plastic pollution 80 percent by 2040 overall and cut single-use plastic production by half.

The report cited research estimating plastic could emit 19 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions by 2040.

That would essentially prevent the world from meeting its Paris Agreement commitment to limit the rise in the planet's average

temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial level.

"The way we produce, use and dispose of plastics is polluting ecosystems, creating risks for human health and destabilising the climate," said Inger Andersen, UNEP executive director.

She said the roadmap laid out in the report "dramatically reduces these risks, through adopting a circular approach that keeps plastics out of ecosystems, out of our bodies and in the economy".

In 2020, approximately 238 million metric tonnes (mmt) of waste from short-lived plastics -- like packaging that ends up in municipal waste -- was generated worldwide.

## Head of Libya's rival govt suspended by parliament

AFP, Tripoli

Libya's parliament, in the east of the divided country, yesterday suspended Fathi Bashagha as head of an administration challenging the authority of the country's western-based prime minister.

Parliament also announced an investigation into Bashagha.

The chamber, backed by military strongman Khalifa Haftar, had picked Bashagha in February last year to lead a government to replace that of Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah, who sits in Tripoli.

In July, Bashagha had told AFP that he planned to take office in Tripoli "in the coming days."

## Japan, China ministers make first call on defence hotline

AFP, Tokyo

Japan and China used a new military hotline for the first time yesterday, their defence ministries said, following years of negotiations to set up the communication channel.

Japanese Defence Minister Yasukazu Hamada held a 20-minute call with his Chinese counterpart Li Shangfu, Tokyo's ministry said in a statement.

"Hamada mentioned the existence of security concerns between Japan and China, such as the situation in the East China Sea," it said.

He "stated that it is necessary to have candid communication especially when there are concerns about Japan-China relations".

Beijing confirmed the call, saying the air and maritime hotline would "contribute to further maintaining regional peace and stability".

The hotline, launched on March 31, had been mooted by both sides for over a decade as a way to avert unexpected clashes in the East China Sea.

A territorial dispute over islets in the area known as the Senkaku by Tokyo and the Diaoyu by Beijing has long fuelled tensions between the countries.

Japan, wary of its neighbour's growing military power, has publicly protested the presence of Chinese vessels around the disputed islets, and in other regions including near Okinawa.