

## GRAFT PROBE ACC grills Zahangir for over 3 hours

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) yesterday quizzed Zahangir Alam, the suspended Gazipur City Corporation (GCC) mayor, regarding the multiple allegations of corruption filed against him.



Zahangir appeared before the ACC headquarters at around 10:30am.

"He was quizzed for about three and a half hours until 2:00pm," said ACC Assistant Director Ashiqur Rahman, who is part of the investigation team that is probing Zahangir.

Ashiqur however declined to go into further detail about yesterday's interrogation or the investigation in general.

There are allegations of misappropriating huge amounts of money against Zahangir while he was the GCC mayor.

He was asked to appear before the ACC on May 21 and May 22.

Upon his request, the ACC deferred the quizzing to June 6 and June 7.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Zahangir's lawyer Nakib Saiful Islam said the ACC was requested to defer today's quizzing.

An appeal has been made on behalf of Zahangir seeking an exemption from the allegations, he added.

The ACC has not yet taken any decision on this matter, sources said.

After the quizzing, Zahangir told reporters that the allegations against him were "cent per cent false".

"I answered their questions properly... I seek punishment for those who brought the allegations against me," he said.

Talking to reporters, ACC Secretary Mahbub Hossain said there was no pressure on the ACC to investigate the allegations against Zahangir.

"It is just part of the ACC's routine task," he added.

A day after the ruling party expelled him on May 15, the ACC summoned Zahangir to quiz him over the corruption allegations.

After the Awami League nominated Azmat Ulla Khan as mayor for GCC polls, a disgruntled Zahangir attempted to run for mayor as an independent, but his candidacy was cancelled by the Election Commission.

His mother, Zaida Khatun, however, competed against Azmat Ulla and was elected GCC mayor on May 25.

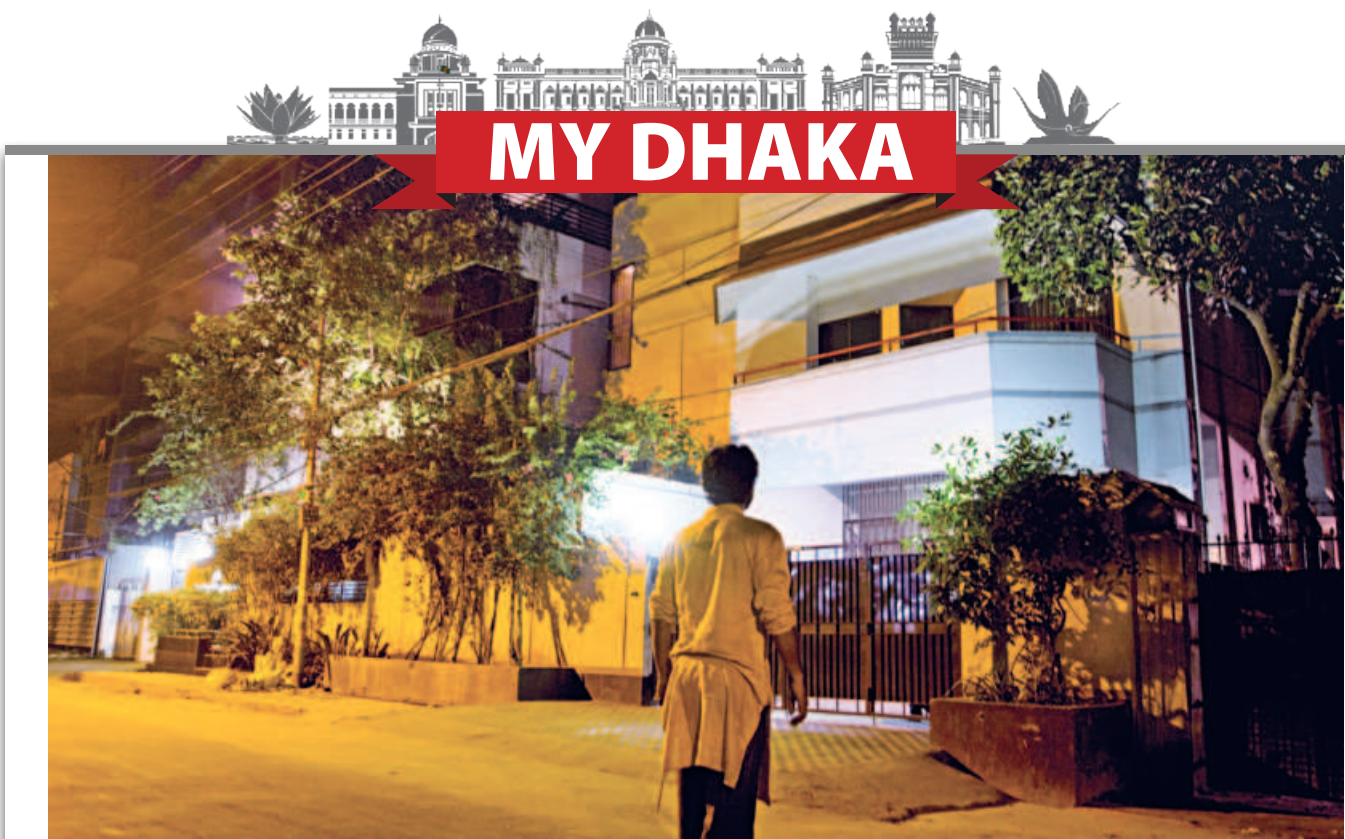


PHOTO: SAZZAD IBNE SAYED

# A CITY IN FICTION

ASHIF AHMED RUDRO

The capital of Bangladesh has been given many names. Writers, poets, artists, and musicians all have had their go at Dhaka and each painted a picture of the city in light of how they perceived it. Yet, Dhaka remains Dhaka. Perhaps not the "same old Dhaka", but still interesting all the same.

## THE LONELY METROPOLIS

Humayun Ahmed painted different views of Dhaka that were quite convincing. In "Kothao Keu Nei" for instance, the reader is introduced to a city that makes the dwellers feel the solitude of a bustling metropolis. The city seems busy where nobody has time for anyone else, and underneath this cruel reality, the very people that we know are in a constant bond with each other. Yet, when the time comes, one stands alone. It's a depiction that is perhaps not the most detailed but stitched in reality and albeit a bit tragic, even for fiction.

## DREAMY CITY

Perhaps, Himu brings a dreamier version of Dhaka as he aimlessly roams the streets. Himu's choice of attire is

a yellow panjabi, which should look dreamier under iridescent traffic lights. Sodium lights have that going on for them, they make everything seem surreal.

A stroll down Elephant Road or Fuller Road under sodium lights does sound ethereal. Unfortunately, the halogen lights have been replaced. While the new street lamps offer a better view of the roads, it's just not as enticing.

## THE UNIVERSITY

Ahmed Sofa's works heavily focused on Dhaka, and most of his stories were set either in or around the Dhaka University campus. It is difficult to determine which bit of Sofa's work is real and which is fiction. Regardless, his idea of Dhaka was not far off.

In one book, there's a line that goes -- "There are more poets in Dhaka than there are crows". If there's one avian creature that is constant in Dhaka, it's the crow. So, make of that line what you will.

## AN UNYIELDING DHAKA

In "Rifle, Roti, Aurat", Anwar Pasha also describes Dhaka but that's a very

different and somewhat scary view of Dhaka. It's a Dhaka in the aftermath of "Operation Searchlight" and it's a blood-soaked depiction. Yet, coherently the locations in Dhaka city build an image in the reader's mind of a metropolis as a whole. The damage that Dhaka suffers yet still stands; it feels like the city itself is a character.

## REALITIES OF OUR URBAN EXISTENCE

Of course, there are many more admirable depictions of Dhaka, but none of them are comparable to the one found in "Chilekothar Sepai" by Akhtaruzzaman Elias. The book paints a picture of the city in light of the 1969's revolution, particularly Old Dhaka -- a place that is often mentioned in stories but not explored enough.

Elias, who is well known for his ability to use details with mastery in his writing, uses that skill to show us a picture of Old Dhaka that is probably true to this day.

The troubles of living as a single man in Dhaka, the troubles of living in a "Chilekotha", or the reality of slums -- you can find them all in this depiction.

Dhaka as the centre point of the country, plays host to people from every corner of the world -- making it a unique place where different characters can collide and yet exist in equilibrium. Elias paints that picture of people from different classes in Dhaka and the physical place in Dhaka. The result? A literary masterpiece.

## Only one-third plants

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The energy sector should get the same priority as the food and agricultural sectors, said M Shamsul Alam, dean of Daffodil International University's faculty of engineering.

"To ensure food security, the government gives so many incentives. But here, the situation is the opposite. The government uses this sector to generate revenue only. This attitude is the main reason behind the ongoing crisis," he added.

## BNP won't take part

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He said he went to the envoy's residence following an invitation from Haas and stayed there for around an hour. They discussed the current political situation, next election, and the US visa policy.

Fakhru added that the party's position over the next election is very clear and it was conveyed to the US ambassador.

He told Haas that US visa restriction is shameful for Bangladesh, but it was announced because of the "misdeeds and misuse" by the government and the state machinery.

He, however, said people of the country welcomed the move.

Law Minister Anisul Huq told The Daily Star, "We had a meeting with US Ambassador Peter Haas in the office of Salman F Rahman. We have discussed a proposal given by the US about the labour rights.

## AL ready to sit with BNP

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Fernandez-Taranco in 2013 and his meetings with the AL and the BNP. Amu said, "You hatched a conspiracy the last time and are also doing it now. Then, the United Nations sent Taranco. He met with us and the BNP separately. Later, he held a meeting with the two parties together. Then it was proved how illogical the BNP's demands were; we were logical."

He said the BNP would be resisted if it tried to create chaos and invite any unconstitutional forces. The BNP is seeking help from foreign forces. It did

There is no fuel crisis in the international market, according to M Tamim, a professor of petroleum and mineral resources engineering at BUET.

"The main crisis is the dollar shortage," he said.

As of May 31, gross foreign reserves, as per the central bank's methodology, stood at \$29.9 billion, which is enough to cover import bills for about four months.

"I can say with a guarantee that we have not discussed any political issue."

The minister did not go into details about the proposal from the US, which imports more than \$10 billion worth of products from Bangladesh. The country has been critical of Bangladesh's labour rights issues.

Salman F Rahman told this newspaper that they discussed labour law reforms the US has been talking about for quite some time.

The US envoy spoke of a uniform labour law for the Export Processing Zone and outside the EPZ, he said, adding, "We are discussing it and will decide later."

Washington suspended GSP facility in 2013 following Rana Plaza collapse and has been seeking labour law reforms in Bangladesh.

Particularly, it has been pushing Bangladesh for removing barriers for trade unions and ensuring living wage.

it in 2014, but failed.

"Now the BNP is coming up with different types of excuses. [It is] seeking help from foreign forces and misleading people about the new US visa policy ... You get to know the results [of the visa policy] when it finally arrives," he said.

Alliance leaders and Jatiya Party (JP-Manju) chairman Anwar Hossain Manju, Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon, the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal President Hasanul Haq Inu, Bangladesher Samyabadi Dal General Secretary Dilip Barua, among others, spoke at the event.

## Roads now worse than a year ago

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The Highway Development and Maintenance Circle of the RHD carries out the survey every year to project the total maintenance costs for its road network.

It also conducts the survey to prioritise the roads needing maintenance because it does not get enough budgetary allocation to repair all roads at once.

The latest survey was conducted from November 2022 to March 2023.

According to the report, 20,523km of roads were surveyed this year. This doesn't include the ones being rehabilitated or reconstructed.

The survey found over 1,263 km of road (6.16 percent) in poor condition, 511.59km (2.49 percent) in bad condition and 377.15km (1.84 percent) in very bad condition.

The remaining 89.52 percent were

found in "good" or "fair" conditions.

However, last year's report found 2,078km or 10.48 percent of the total 20,272km of surveyed roads in "poor, bad or very bad" conditions.

The length of road in "poor, bad or very bad" conditions was 4,731km (26.32 percent) in 2018; 4,247km (24.34 percent) in 2019; 3,590km (18.61 percent) in 2020; and 3,006km (16.27 percent) in 2021.

The department classified the roads in five categories on the basis of roughness, said an RHD engineer.

A road classified as "very bad" needs immediate attention. A "bad" road left without attention turns into a very bad one in a year, he said.

This year's report made eight recommendations including controlling overloading and increasing budgetary allocation for both routine and periodic maintenance.

## PM asks ministries

FROM PAGE 1

dollar because of the dollar crisis. "That's why our actual buying price is more than whatever the price is in the international market."

The prime minister ordered quick implementation of government-to-government foreign loans in order to reduce the dependency on foreign currency reserves, he said.

Besides, the government is considering whether to increase the incentive on remittance sent through the formal channels. Discussions are

## Labour court

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The court had not passed any order on a petition Yunus filed yesterday, seeking exemption from making appearances at the court during hearings.

On May 8, the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court upheld a High Court verdict that cleared the way for the labour court to hold the trial.

On September 9, 2021, Labour Inspector (general) SM Arifuzzaman of the Inspection for Factories and Establishments Department filed the case with a labour court of Dhaka.

According to the case documents, officials of the Inspection for Factories

and Establishments Department on August 16, 2021, inspected the office of Grameen Telecom in the capital's Mirpur and found several violations of labour laws.

On August 19 that year, the department sent a letter to the authorities of Grameen Telecom, mentioning that 67 of its employees were supposed to be made permanent employees. But it was not done, the case statement said.

Besides, the employee's participation and welfare funds were yet to be formed, and 5 percent of the company's dividends supposed to be paid to the workers, were not paid, it added.

## 2 Bangladeshi farmers shot by BSF

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

Two Bangladeshi farmers were shot allegedly by the members of Indian Border Security Force in the bordering area of Brahmanbaria's Kasba upazila.

Confirming the incident, BGB Battalion 60 Commander Lt Col Ashiq Hasan Ullah said the incident happened at Dhwanjagar village yesterday morning.

The injured are Azam Ali Bhuiyan, 55, and Iqbal Bhuiyan, 45, of Dhwanjagar village.

Lt Col Ashiq said Azam and Iqbal were grazing cattle near the border when BSF members opened fire on them, leaving them injured.

Locals rescued and took them to Kasba Upazila Health Complex for treatment.

The border guards protested the incident, the BGB official said, adding that they would hold a flag meeting with BSF in this regard.

## Municipality mayor sent to jail over murder

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj

A court yesterday sent Chapainawabganj Municipality Mayor Mokhlesur Rahman to jail after he surrendered before it in connection with a case filed over the murder of Khairul Alam Zem, a Swachhasebak League leader and former councillor of ward-9 of Shibganj municipality.

Mokhlesur appeared before the court and appealed for bail. After a hearing, Judge Nirmolendu Das of Additional District and Session Judge Court sent him to jail rejecting his bail prayer.

On April 19, Zem was killed at Udayan More in the town.

## HC grants Evaly CEO conditional bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday granted conditional bail to Mohammad Rassel, founder and CEO of e-commerce platform Evaly, in a case filed under the Digital Security Act.

According to the conditions, Rassel cannot leave the country, he has to surrender his passport to the authorities concerned, he cannot tamper evidence, he must assist the officers during the investigation into the case, and he cannot circulate any advertisement for his company, Deputy Attorney General Sarwar Hossain Bappi said.

The HC bench of Justice Mustafa Zaman Islam and Justice Md Aminul Islam passed the order following an appeal filed by Rassel seeking bail.

Rassel's lawyer Ahsanul Karim told this correspondent that his client cannot get released from jail following the HC order as he is arrested in other cases.

## 6 cops hurt in attack by 'drug dealers'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinaipur

Six policemen were injured after suspected drug dealers launched an attack on them during a raid in Dinaipur's Phulbari on Monday night.

Police arrested five people, including two women, in this connection, said police.

Ashraful Islam, officer-in-charge of Phulbari Police Station, said a team went to Moheshpur village and detained suspected drug dealer Labu Islam, 28, with drugs.

## Rejoinder, our reply

FROM PAGE 1

quoted as saying, "Big poultry farms control prices and they often lower the market price to increase profit and force marginal farmers to fall in line with their business strategies." Terming this claim "ridiculous", the rejoinder says, "How can lower prices increase profits? If this were true, the world's food problems would be solved. Farmers would be lowering prices to make higher profits, and low-income families would be able to buy their food at low prices." Claiming that large poultry companies make up 20 percent of Bangladesh's broiler eggs and chickens, the rejoinder states, "the vast majority of broilers is produced and sold by tens of thousands of small farmers. No one can fix prices in such a competitive environment with so many sellers. It is unavoidable that prices will fluctuate due to daily variations in supply and demand in a live poultry market like ours, with very few slaughterhouses or frozen warehouses to store meat to level out prices over time ... The assertion of price fixing is totally false. There is no 'syndicate' in the poultry industry manipulating prices."

Defending contract farming, the rejoinder goes on to say, "Farmers buying chicks and feed with their own money risk making huge losses when chicken prices are low. Contract farming removes risks from the small farmers, as they don't risk their own money. Instead, farmers are assured a steady income based on their labour contribution. If the chicken price falls, the poultry company takes the loss, not the contract farmer."

## Our Reply

After conducting research and interviews with stakeholders, The Daily Star came to learn that marginal farmers face an unfair competition in a market where prices are unstable.

Large poultry farms are the biggest producers of one-day-old chicks (DOCs) and feed. As producers, they can control the prices of these products which are sold at different prices to different groups of farmers. To marginal farmers these products

are sold at a comparatively high price. When the DOCs reach a saleable weight, marginal farmers find their production costs to be higher than the market prices.

To those who come within the fold of contract farming, however, these products are provided by the large farms for free. After the chickens reach a saleable weight, they are collected from the farmers and sold in the market through the mediation of middlemen. In return, the contract farmers are given a profit of Tk 10 to 12 for per kg chicken. That's why market prices do not affect large companies or contract farmers when prices are low. And that's how big companies, as producers of DOCs and feed, can not only keep their production cost very low but also set the price for these products at a high rate for marginal farmers.

The findings were corroborated by interviews with farmers, middlemen, experts, government officials and members of Bangladesh Poultry Association, the body that represents marginal farmers. These were also supported by a 2020 study on Bangladesh's poultry sector which was commissioned by the Embassy of the Netherlands in Bangladesh. Although the study mentions a big farm which, it says, sets the prices of DOCs, our report does not mention any farm. Even then, we reached out to representatives of big farms and published the comments of Kazi Farms Managing Director Kazi Zahedul Hasan and Paragon Group Managing Director Moshirur Rahman who responded to our queries. We gave their versions accurately.

The Daily Star also obtained documents that demonstrate that different companies practise contract farming differently, and that there are many instances in which farmers working under contracts have to sign blank cheques which some companies use against them afterwards to recover their losses through legal harassment.

In preparing this report, The Daily Star has fulfilled all journalistic conditions.

We stand by our report.