

NEXT GENERAL ELECTIONS

Feeling no pressure or fear

Shahriar tells DCAB meet

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam has said the 2014 and 2018 elections cannot be a model and that the Awami League was also disappointed by them.

“You know it clearly. The prime minister also said this more than once that we worked so much that we want to see peoples’ mandate,” he said at a talk organised by Diplomatic Correspondents Association, Bangladesh, at the Foreign Service Academy yesterday.

He said the BNP did not take part in the 2014 polls as Jamaat would not, while in the 2018 elections, BNP lacked proper leadership.

“For those, who don’t want continuation of the democratic process, those who do not want to be involved in democracy, it is natural to disturb the democratic process, instead of advancing it ...,” Shahriar said.

He said the Hasina government is 100 percent committed to a free, fair and acceptable election either late this year or early next year.

“We will do it inshallah. The parties that are disturbing and trying to hamper the elections will not have any international acceptability,” the state minister said.

The government is not feeling any pressure or fear, he said replying to query about the new US policy that would deny visas to those who are involved in vote rigging or intimidation.

He said that after the January 5 election in 2014, there was an apprehension if the parliament would sustain. At a diplomatic briefing, a diplomat even said they would like to see a fresh participatory election by monsoon, a few months after the polls.

“But I said it sounds quite ambitious. That government continued for five years and most laws were enacted in that parliament. There was then a dynamic government. So, we could run the government smoothly.

“So, as we did not feel pressure then, we are also not feeling pressure now for anything. We, as per the constitution and mandate, will continue our work and decide anything that needed until the last day of the tenure without hesitation.”

Shahriar said the Election Commission will then announce the polls schedule and conduct the election.

Asked about the stance of different countries on Bangladesh’s polls, he said the government would

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The fairground was blushing with red roses and pink bougainvilleas and complementing them were the yellow roses, peachy tecomas, and colourful allamandas. They were all spread out in a picture-perfect pose on the lush canopy of green at the Jatiya Brikkho Mela 2023.

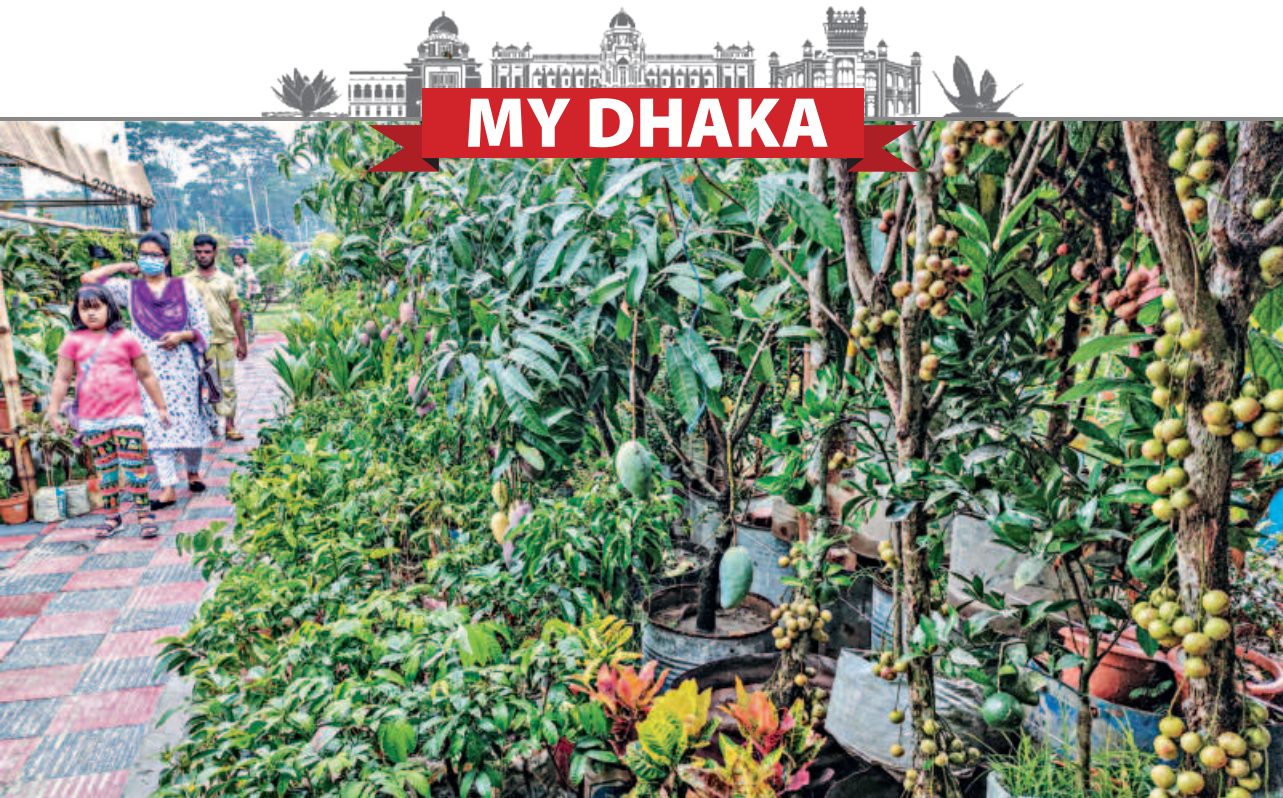


PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

BRIKKHO MELA brings a touch of green to the city

RBR

This yearly assembly of the nurseries brings plant lovers and enthusiasts a variety of exotic options – medicinal plants, wood trees, local fruit trees, and of course various kinds of ornamental and flowering plants.

Dhakaites flock to the premises and buy to their heart’s content and there is so much to see and experience. In fact, it takes an hour to just check out one-third of the fair. Each stall is beautifully decorated and there is an unseen competition as to who has the best collection.

“Every year I eagerly wait for the Brikkho Mela to start, and I drop by a couple of times within the month it runs. I hire pickups to carry my purchase; my Uttara plot is full of trees and plants I collected from the mela grounds,” said Monsoor, an ardent gardener. He has a fair bit of land even in this concrete jungle we call Dhaka and was seen busy making purchases at the fair.

“Arjun, which has many herbal

benefits and is considered a minor timber in the wood trade, is one of my prized collections. Besides, I stumbled upon gorjon, famous for the wood and also considered an investment for people in rural Bangladesh. I collected a rare hijol or Indian oak tree, which is native to riverine Bangladesh,” he adds.



Rashid, another gardening enthusiast, said, “I buy flowering and leafy plants for my rooftop and balcony garden. I just love green and cherish coming to the mela to see new additions and add to my collection.”

The fair also sells many kinds of fertilisers, coco and bone dust, moss plant poles, gardening tools, etc. They have cells or booths to give you information and help you understand the nuances of gardening and plants.

The government stall from Bangladesh Forest Research Institute, who is the main organiser, brings their technical and research knowledge to support and help all the nursery owners to implement the know-how at the field level. To give the ground a true fair-like feel there are interesting stalls selling various pickles, chutneys, and also rare local fruits like deuwa (monkey jack), bethfol (cane fruit), and lotkon (Burmese grapes).

The Jatiya Brikkho Mela 2023 is going on at the old trade fair ground in Agargaon and will continue till mid-July.

Tofazzel to stay as PM’s principal secy under contract

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister Tofazzel Hossain Miah, who was to go into retirement on July 4, will stay in his post for one year more under contract.

Public Administration Ministry yesterday issued a circular in this regard.

On December 7 last year, the government appointed Tofazzel as the principal secretary to the prime minister.

Before this appointment, Tofazzel served at the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) for more than six years in different positions, including secretary, director general, and private secretary to the prime minister.

Road crashes kill cop, two others

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Munshiganj

Three people were killed and four others injured in two separate road accidents on the Dhaka-Mawa Expressway in Munshiganj yesterday.

A microbus hit a woman and a policeman on duty near the Padma Bridge North Police Station at around 10:00am.

The unidentified woman died on the spot, while the traffic police constable, Md Motaleb, 37, was declared dead after being taken to a local upazila health complex.

Two other individuals also sustained injuries, said Bazlur Rahman, district traffic police inspector.

“We seized the microbus but the driver fled,” he added.

In a separate incident, a man died and two others were injured after a pickup rear-ended a covered van in the Dogachi area of Sreenagar upazila around 6:00am.

The deceased was identified as pickup driver Md Mehedi, 26, said Srinagar Fire Service Station Officer Mahfuz Riben.

Bangladeshi shot dead in South Africa

STAR REPORT

A Bangladeshi national was shot dead and another suffered gunshot wounds in two incidents of robberies in South Africa, locals said.

The deceased identified as Makdudur Rahman Mohsin was from Cumilla’s Daudkandi upazila.

The injured was Sajib Barua of Chattogram’s Fatikchhari upazila.

The incidents occurred Saturday evening (local time) in Johannesburg and the capital Bloemfontein.

“Mohsin had been working at a shop in Bloemfontein. In the evening, a group of robbers entered the shop and shot him in the head. He was rushed to the hospital, where doctors declared him dead,” said Mir Hossain Meeru, a neighbour and the organising secretary of the Comilla Community of Africa.

Regarding the other incident, Sheibal Barua, president of the Buddhist Community of South Africa, said, “Sajib worked as a driver in Johannesburg. He was dropping off some goods at a shop on Saturday evening when a group of robbers entered the shop and shot him in the head.”

“Sajib was taken to Johannesburg Central Hospital in critical condition. The doctors are closely monitoring his condition,” he added.

Widower seeks

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Sangjukta previously posted many videos on her Facebook page about painless normal deliveries she had supervised at Central Hospital. She presents herself as an advocate for normal deliveries at a time when the number of C-sections are growing at an alarming rate.

Yakub’s complaint says his late wife decided to give birth under Sangjukta’s supervision after “watching her videos on painless normal deliveries”. Akhi also consulted the gynaecologist several times.

When she went into labour on June 10, she was admitted to Central Hospital and was told that Sangjukta would oversee the childbirth, says the complaint.

“But without my permission, Dr Muna Saha and Dr Shahazadi Mustarshida Sultana from Dr Sangjukta’s team made my wife do some exercises for 45 minutes. They then cut through her urinary tract, rectum and other organs as they tried an incision leading to severe bleeding, which they failed to stop.

“Later, they completed the delivery through a C-section by taking her to an operating theatre without my permission. I also saw Dr Maksuda Akter Mili and Dr Ehsan in the operating theatre.”

When Yakub started looking for Sangjukta, the attending physicians informed him that Sangjukta was not present.

“Dr Shahazadi said she did everything in line with Dr Sangjukta’s instructions and asked me to take the patient to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

“My wife and the newborn have been killed. I demand a compensation of Tk 2 crore.”

On June 13, Yakub filed a case with Dhanmondi Police Station. Dr Shahzadi and Dr Muna were arrested the next day and sent to jail on June 15.

Sangjukta and the authorities of Central Hospital have blamed each other for the deaths.

The health directorate recently formed a seven-member committee to investigate the incident.

CID presses charges against 37 more

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The charge sheet mentions that the new suspects are on the run. The officer investigating the case appealed to the court for arrest warrants for them.

The new suspects include former president of Faridpur district Chhatra League Nishan Mahmud Shamim, former labour affairs secretary of Faridpur municipality AL Billal Hossain, leading contractor and former president of Faridpur Chamber of Commerce and Industries Siddique Rahman, former Faridpur Chhatra League general secretary Saiful Islam Jibon, law affairs secretary of

Faridpur district AL Animesh Roy, and former Faridpur district AL vice-president and former Faridpur Sadar Upazila chairman Shamsul Alam Chowdhury.

A hearing on the charge sheet will be held on July 5.

The complaint of the case filed with Kafrul Police Station said Sajjad and Imtiaz laundered Tk 2,000 crore amassed through tender manipulation, drug smuggling, land grabbing and extortion.

Twelve people, including ex-minister’s brother Babar, and brothers Barkat and Rubel, were arrested in the case.

Assistant Superintendent of Police Uttam Kumar Biswas, who was investigating the case, submitted a charge sheet against 10 people before a Dhaka court in March 2021.

They are Barkat, Rubel, Babar, Khandaker Mosharraf’s former APS AHM Fuad, Levi, Farhan, General Secretary of Faridpur District Swchasebak League Fahad bin Wazed, former joint convener of Faridpur Jubo League Kamrul Hasan David, district Jubo League Joint Convener Mohammad Ali Minar, and Faridpur Jubo League Joint Convener Tariqul Islam alias Nasim.

Ensure the safety of UN peacekeepers

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the member states about the security situations in some missions, said Masud Bin Momen, the foreign secretary, at the inaugural session of the preparatory meeting. He, however, did not name the missions.

Currently, Bangladesh is a leading troop contributor with about 7,000 peacekeepers, including more than 400 women, deployed in eight countries.

More than 2,500 Bangladeshi UN peacekeepers are among those deployed in Mali and Congo, which are calling for the withdrawal of peacekeepers.

Mali’s Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop, who is part of Mali’s interim military authorities, told a UN Security Council meeting on June 16 that the peacekeeping force MINUSMA should withdraw its troops from the West African nation.

Al Jazeera reported that the Malian foreign minister had expressed concern that the UN had been in the country for 10 years and the violence and insecurity it was sent there to stop had only gotten worse.

The two under-secretary generals briefed Shahriar Alam, the state minister for foreign affairs, on the ongoing situation of the peacekeeping

mission in Mali, according to the foreign ministry statement.

The authorities in Congo are also calling for the withdrawal of the UN peacekeepers within the next six months, according to a diplomatic source.

Many Congolese have called for the departure of the UN force due to its “ineffective role to protect civilians from violent armed groups in eastern DRC”, said Patrick Muyaya, Congo’s minister of communication, according to the Congolese news portal, DRC News Today on June 15.

During a courtesy call on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Gono Bhaban, UN officials lauded Bangladeshi peacekeepers for their contribution to maintaining peace, reported UNB.

Bangladesh has been contributing to the UN peacekeeping missions for three decades with dedication and professionalism, Hasina said.

Pollard thanked the premier for Bangladesh’s contribution to the trust fund to check sexual exploitation and abuse.

In reply, Hasina said Bangladesh is deeply committed to ensuring women’s security and increasing their participation in UN peacekeeping. She reiterated her

government’s zero-tolerance policy against sexual exploitation and abuse.

Bangladesh has taken serious punitive measures against those who were found guilty after investigations, she said.

Talking about climate change, the PM said Bangladesh is a vulnerable country and her government is implementing mitigation and adaptation programmes with its own funds.

Mohammad Ziauddin, ambassador-at-large; Momen; Lieutenant General Waker-Uz Zaman, the principal staff officer of the Armed Forces Division; Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun, Inspector General of Police; and Muhammad Abdul Muhith, Bangladesh’s permanent representative to the UN, were present at the meeting.

In a separate meeting, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen highlighted Bangladesh’s strong commitment to fulfilling the UN target to increase women peacekeepers as per the UN Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy.

He underscored the importance of recognising the personal sacrifices of women peacekeepers.

Keep AL in power

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Coming down heavily on the critics of the budget, Hasina said, “We are used to hearing such things.”

After the PM, Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal in his speech said that to protect the people from inflation, the government has taken various initiatives including increasing allowances under the social safety net programmes. About 4.5 crore people will benefit from the initiatives, he said.

The government is providing food to one crore families free of cost or at subsidised rates, he said.

At yesterday’s parliamentary session, the tax measures for the next fiscal year were approved. The

measures are expected to yield Tk 430,000 crore.

However, the proposal to collect Tk 2,000 as minimum tax from those who claim their income is below the taxable threshold was scrapped.

The government faced criticism from different quarters, which termed it discriminatory and contradictory.

The finance minister proposed legalising movable and immovable assets abroad acquired with undeclared income in Bangladesh in exchange for a certain amount in taxes in the next fiscal year.

Since this too received criticism, only the option to bring back cash through the banking channel by paying a 7 percent tax remains.

Heart stents

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DGDA, told The Daily Star after the meeting.

Of the stents produced by Abbott Laboratories, the base price of Xience Prime, one of the most used in Bangladesh, will be reduced to \$425 from \$561.

The maximum retail price would also be reduced from Tk 84,800 to Tk 64,754, before tax reduction.

The price of another stent of this company, Xpedition, will drop in phases to \$600 from the current \$830. The MRP would be Tk 1.81 lakh before tax reduction is factored in.

The base price of Promus Primer, a stent produced by Boston Scientific, will go down to \$470 from \$570. The MRP of this stent will likely be reduced to Tk 74,411 from Tk 86,500.

The DGDA asked Boston Scientific officials to reduce the base price for Synergy stents by \$300 from the current price of \$1,200, and their Promus Elite stents by \$300 from \$900.

“The company officials said they would inform us about this later,” said Maj Gen Yousuf.

“We have informed them that our people cannot afford the high prices ... So, we proposed maintaining the same price they charge in India,” he said.

They argued that the market size in Bangladesh is smaller than that of India for which they cannot reduce the price. “But we said otherwise we will have to explore other sources. They agreed at last,” he said.

In India, the price of stents starts from Rs 9,842 and goes up to Rs 35,835.

Hajj begins

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witness the largest hajj pilgrimage in history,” if things go according to plan, predicted an official with the Saudi ministry of hajj and umrah.

“The numbers will exceed 2.5 million pilgrims,” added the official, speaking on condition of anonymity because he is not authorised to speak with the press.

The hajj began early yesterday with the “tawaf” – the circumambulation of the Kaaba, the large cubic structure draped in black cloth with gold trimmings that Muslims around the world pray towards every day.

“I am living the most beautiful days of my life,” said Saeed Abdel Azim, a 65-year-old Egyptian performing the ritual. “The dream has come true,” added the retiree, who had saved for 20 years to pay the thousands of dollars needed to take part.