

## 2 US Congressmen to fly in tomorrow

### Likely to sit with AL, BNP, JP, visit Rohingya camps



**Ed Case**  
**McCormick**  
DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Two US Congressmen -- Richard McCormick and Ed Case -- will be visiting Bangladesh from August 12 to 15.

The diplomatic visit is being seen as significant ahead of the country's general elections, with Washington keeping a close eye on the matter.

During their visit, they are scheduled to meet with representatives from major political parties, including the ruling Awami League, the opposition BNP, and the Jatiya Party, as well as the foreign minister and members of civil society.

The Congressmen, Republican Richard McCormick and Democrat Ed Case, will also visit the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar as part of their trip.

"We welcome the visit by the US Congressmen to Bangladesh. We realise that we need more dialogue to improve our bilateral relationship and collaborate on issues of mutual interest," Nahim Razza, Awami League lawmaker and member of the parliamentary standing committee on foreign affairs, told The Daily Star last night.

He added, "The Congressmen will have a better understanding of Bangladesh and its people as they will be meeting different stakeholders here."

The visit comes ahead of the national polls in late December or early January next year.

As things stand, there is a stalemate over polls-time government, with the AL wanting polls under the current regime and the opposition calling for an interim government.

Against the backdrop of anomalies in the 2014 and 2018 national polls, the Biden Administration has repeatedly said that it wants the polls to be free and fair and will be keeping a close watch on it.

As part of putting pressure on Bangladesh, the Biden Administration imposed sanctions on Rab and its seven officials in 2021 and the new visa policy on Bangladesh was announced in May this year.

State Department's Coordinator for Global Anti-Corruption Richard Nephew, during his visit to Dhaka from August 6-8, communicated to the government that they use sanctions as a tool to fight corruption.



PHOTO: SAZZAD IBNE SAYED

## Serene 'Shapla Beel' at the backwaters of Zinda Park

RBR

I was on a dinghy. Sitting at the edge of the boat with my eyes closed, my face was being washed by drizzle. The young boy paddling the boat plucked a white lotus and offered me his appreciation for that particular moment in time that we shared.

It was not a dream but a dream-like reality I experienced when I went to the Shapla/Poddo Beel (the water lily and lotus pond) at the backwaters of Zinda Park. I heard about the ethereal beauty of this beel and saw many enticing videos and reels but nothing compared to the beauty of the pond dotted with pink, white and red lotuses and lilies.

There are many such waterbodies throughout the country but the one I visited was in the suburbs of Dhaka, crossing the expressway that connects Purbachal to Dhaka and takes you to the back of Zinda Park.

It takes around an hour to reach

the destination provided you stop in the farmer's market lined by the road, otherwise, it is a short ride from the 300 feet expressway.

The winding roads of this small, urban village have an old Kali temple sheltered under the big aerial roots of a banyan tree. The goddess, with a burning red tikka or dot on her forehead, seems indomitable, ruling over her surroundings.

The village road leads you to a small tea stall placed on a Y-junction just as you cross the temple. The curve of the road leads you to a crooked old bridge but the beautiful blooms in almost all village ponds make for a surreal scene.

Crossing the bridge by foot, because that is where the cars need to stop, you come across a lush carpet of green grass.

The park benches and canopies are there for you to rest but I suggest you walk a little further until you come to a broken pier where all the small boats



are roped in. The boatmen, young boys hardly passed their teens, take you as far as you want to go for Tk 300 per hour.

The serenity, the colours of shapla and poddo, and rain-drenched nature give you a feeling like no other. It soothes your body and calms your mind, takes you beyond the chaotic reality of everyday life.

This beautiful scene is at its best during monsoon. Although early mornings are the best time to enjoy the scenes, few hours before dusk is also a romantic setting. The golden light of the setting sun peeking through the rain-washed sky makes for the best Instagrammable shot.



## 31 die from dengue

FROM PAGE 1

According to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), at least 12 dengue patients died in the last 24 hours till yesterday morning, raising the total number of dengue fatalities to 364.

Of those, 31 patients, or 9 percent of all fatalities, were children aged 0 to 10 years old.

Meanwhile, 2,959 new patients were recorded yesterday, bringing the total number of dengue cases to 78,028.

HM Nazmul Ahsan, associate professor at Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College and Hospital, said dengue symptoms are slightly different in children.

"While for older people, the symptoms begin with a sudden fever with pain in the body and eye, children first experience nausea and/or coughing."

A child (newborn to 12) may cry excessively, have a fever with nausea and cough, and younger ones may show disinterest in being breastfed -- if such symptoms show up, they may be suspected of having dengue, he said.

Dengue, he added, also reaches the critical stage faster in children.

"It takes 48 hours for the situation to become critical for adults, while children only have 24 hours, which is why we suggest hospitalisation as quickly as possible."

"Children are also more prone to developing shock syndrome, which is risky for any dengue patient."

Urging guardians to be careful while sending children to the coaching centres and schools, Nazmul said the chances of being infected in educational institutes are high, and both the authorities concerned and guardians will have to be careful.

"Most of the schools don't have full-sleeved uniforms, which is very essential during the dengue season. Their legs should also be protected with long socks and shoes."

## Stakeholders have to give opinions by August 22

FROM PAGE 1

cancelled in the proposed law.

"When the issues of Digital Security Act came up, it was said that offences under many sections of the act were non-bailable. Now we have made most of the offences under the sections of the Cyber Security Act bailable. You [stakeholders] can give your opinion on some sections [17, 19, 21, 30, 33] under which offences are still non-bailable," said Anisul.

The press conference on the draft of Cyber Security Act-2023 was organised at ICT Tower in the capital's Agargaon. Zunaïd Ahmed Palak, state minister for ICT, also spoke.

The draft of the law was uploaded on a government website on Wednesday. The stakeholders can submit their opinion within 14 days from that day.

The government has decided to revoke the controversial DSA amid widespread criticism from different quarters. It has drafted the CSA making several changes to the DSA. The cabinet approved the draft law on August 7.

Centre for Governance Studies' DSA Tracker logged a total of 381 journalists being accused until mid-July under the law since it came into force in 2018.

The law minister said, "All I can say is that all the sections that have now been made bailable will remain bailable [in the law]. Some other clauses [non-bailable] can be added to the law."

Offences under sections 17, 19, 33 have been made non-bailable and these are all related to cybercrime, Anisul said, adding that the government's main objective here is to stop cybercrime.

"I think the misuse of Digital Security Act will stop after the enforcement of the proposed law."

The minister said if the draft law is compared with the DSA, one must

notice the changes in the draft law and it is not an "old wine in a new bottle".

He said the problems (sections of DSA) which worried the journalist community will be gone and so harassment of journalists will also stop.

The mental pressure and fear which was created in independent reporting for journalists through the use of DSA will be removed by the CSA, he added.

About the changes in the CSA, Anisul said there is a jail term for defamation in section 29 of DSA, which has been replaced with only fine. There is 10-year jail sentence under article 21 of DSA, but now the jail term has been cut to seven years.

"Ninety-five percent of the people, starting from the United Nations high commissioner for human rights to my journalist friends, who spoke to me opined that there should be such a law. The government's main aim is to amend parts of the Digital Security Act so that independence of the media is not disrupted.... We strongly believe we have removed that fear with this act."

International Federation of Journalists in a statement on Wednesday said it should be ensured that any future legislation respects and defends press freedom, instead of criminalising it.

"While the government's intentions to reform the problematic Digital Security Act are welcomed, we remain concerned at the CSA's potential to recreate the repression seen under its predecessor. If Bangladeshi authorities wish to reduce the harm of frivolous and dangerous legal action against the media, then this legislation must centre press freedom concerns," said the platform.

## 5 Shariah banks fined Tk 281.3cr

FROM PAGE 1

"Those five banks have been failing to meet CRR and SLR since December last year -- it is not just the odd day here and there," said a top official of the central bank on the condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter.

For instance, on June 30, Islami Bank had a CRR shortfall of Tk 3,900 crore but it met its SLR requirement.

First Security Islami Bank (FSIBL), whose chairman is S Alam Group Chairman Mohammed Saiful Alam, had a CRR shortfall of Tk 1,400 crore and SLR shortfall of Tk 900 crore, according to data from BB.

That day, Social Islami Bank (SIBL) had Tk 700 crore in CRR shortfall and Tk 1,100 crore in SLR shortfall, Union Bank Tk 600 crore as CRR shortfall and Tk 460 crore as SLR shortfall, and Global Islami Bank (GIB) Tk 360 crore as CRR shortfall and Tk 460 crore as SLR shortfall.

Subsequently, the five banks were fined Tk 5.9 crore for their CRR and SLR shortfall.

Islami Bank's penalty was Tk 2.9 crore, FSIBL's Tk 1.3 crore, SIBL's Tk 79 lakh, Union's Tk 54 lakh and GIB's Tk 37 lakh, shows a central bank document.

The banks have been unable to clear their penalty for the first half of the year and have been given until September to do so, The Daily Star has learnt from BB officials involved with the proceedings. They spoke on the condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter.

Earlier in June, when unveiling the monetary policy for the second half of the year, BB Governor Abdur Rouf Talukder named the five banks and said the banks needed to improve their financial health by September.

"We continuously met with those banks about the issue. We imposed fines for their CRR and SLR shortfall but that is not a priority for us. We want those banks to improve their financial health by September," Talukder said.

Islami Bank, it appears, has already started taking measures to that end.

At the bank's 324th board meeting held on June 19 -- in which the 28-year-old Ahsanul Alam, the elder son of

S Alam Group chairman Alam, was unanimously elected as the chairman -- a decision was taken to tighten the lending activities.

"We have already met our SLR shortfall -- we are now facing CRR shortfall but that would go away soon as well," said a top executive of Islami Bank on the condition of anonymity as he is not authorised to speak with media.

The current liquidity crisis will end within the deadline imposed by the regulator because the deposit flow is "good now", he said, adding that the bank's remittance flow also increased in recent months.

SIBL MD Zafar Alam said acknowledged there are some gaps in the regulatory requirement.

"But we are trying to mend those issues. We are keeping the focus on mobilising deposits," he said, adding that the banks introduced new deposit products.

The bank, whose chairman Belal Ahmed is the son-in-law of S Alam Group chairman Alam, is not issuing large loans for now, concentrating more on SME and agriculture loans.

"We were always in a good position when it came to deposits, but due to some reports, our deposit base has been adversely affected -- that is why we are in trouble," said Syed Habib Hasnat, the MD of GIB, which was previously called NRB Global Bank. PK Halder, who is now in a Kolkata jail while he awaits trial on charges of money laundering and embezzlement, was its former MD.

After some media reports, GIB -- whose vice chairperson Maimuna Khanam is S Alam Group chairman Alam's daughter -- saw its customers withdraw Tk 1,700 crore in a short span, according to Hasnat.

"We suspended all the lending activities and are requesting those who withdrew their money to come back," he added.

Union Bank -- whose directors include S Alam Group chairman Alam's two brothers Osman Goni and Md. Rashedul Alam -- has already met its shortfall and its financial health is improving by the day, according

## Rohingya man stabbed to death by 'Arsa members'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

A Rohingya man was stabbed to death allegedly by members of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (Arsa) at a refugee camp in Ukhiya upazila of Cox's Bazar last morning.

The deceased Mufti Jamal, 55, used to teach at Sahih al Bukhari at Monkhal Madrasa and Nakfura Madrasa in Rakhine, Myanmar, before his escape to Bangladesh, said his family members.

Some five to six men ambushed him when he went out for groceries to a local market at E-12 block of Balukhali Camp II in Palongkhali union around 9:30am.

The criminals stabbed him multiple times and fled the scene immediately, said Additional Deputy Inspector General Amir Zafar, commanding officer of the Armed Police Battalion (APBn)-8.

Jamal, a camp resident, was taken to a nearby hospital, where doctors declared him dead, he said.

Mufti Jamal was once an active member of Arsa but left the group seven to eight months ago, the APBn official said, quoting locals.

"We heard that Arsa members killed him for leaving the group," he said.

## Bodies of three children recovered

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

The bodies of three children were recovered from a water body in Pekua upazila of Cox's Bazar last morning, a day after they went missing.

Villagers found floating bodies of the children, who were holding each other's hands even after death, at Ferasingapara under Uzantia union around 6:30am, said Toffazzal Karim, chairman of the union.

The deceased were Tauhida Begum, 10, daughter of Nurul Alam of Ferasingapara, her brother Amir Hossain, 5, and their cousin Humaïara Begum, 8, daughter of Saber Ahmed.

They went missing Wednesday evening when they went to catch fish in the floodwater, said Mohammad Omar Haidar, officer-in-charge of Pekua Police Station.

The bodies were handed over to the families, he added.

## 2 brothers suffocate to death inside septic tank

UNB, Cox's Bazar

Two brothers died from suffocation inside a septic tank while they were cleaning it without wearing any protective gear in the South Bohaddarkata area under Chakaria upazila in Cox's Bazar Wednesday night.

The deceased were identified as Shahadat Hossain, 50, and Shahidul Islam, 22, sons of Anwar Hossain and residents of the South Bohaddarkata area.

"First, the younger brother got into the tank. When he did not come up, his elder brother followed him into the tank to get him," Chakaria Police Station Officer-in-Charge (OC) Mohammad Javed said yesterday.

Informed, fire service personnel got them out of the tank and took them to Chakaria Upazila Health Complex, where the on-duty doctor declared them dead.

"The autopsy reports have been prepared. A case over unnatural death will be filed in this regard," he added.

to its MD ABM Mokammel Hoque Chowdhury.

FSIBL MD Syed Waseque Md Ali could not be reached for comment at the time of going to print.

The five banks faced huge cash withdrawal pressure when loan irregularities of Islami Bank came to light after media reports last year. The bank had approved Tk 7,246 crore in loans to nine companies that exist only on paper, as per the reports.

## Businessman

FROM PAGE 1

The accused then went on to control the tenders of different offices in Faridpur and other districts using Mosharrar's former APS Fuad, Barkat, and Rubel's infamous "helmet bahini" and "haturi bahini".

The statement further said Siddiqui ran a sand and stone business on grabbed government land near the rail station in Faridpur town. He would also control the district Chambers of Commerce, C&B terminal and Tepakhola Bazar and the cattle market.

The complainant also mentioned a long list of land and other properties that Siddiqui acquired using money earned through laundering and other criminal activities.

Those included over 3,287 decimals of land worth Tk 14.2 crore; a three-storey market in Faridpur worth around Tk 3 crore; a brick kiln and auto bricks worth Tk 20 crore; shops and rooms on 500 decimals of land at the C&B terminal worth Tk 15 crore; and a community centre and flat worth Tk 12 crore.

He also has houses, apartments, lands and office space in his, his wife's and other relatives' names, the case statement read.

Except for Siddiqui, all the accused are in jail in various other cases.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Siddiqui said, "My father has been in business for 36 years, and I've been in it for 27 years. We have tax files. The assets in our tax file are shown as illegally acquired in the case. However, they were gained through honest business and have nothing to do with corruption."