

131 global observers willing to watch polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 131 international observers and 46 foreign journalists have expressed interest in monitoring and covering the January 7 national election until yesterday, said Election Commission Secretary Jahangir Alam.

Yesterday was the last date for international observers and foreign journalists to apply to monitor the election.

EC sources said they invited 114 members and chiefs of election commissions from 34 countries and heads of four associations -- Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Forum of the Election Management Bodies of South Asia (FEMBoSA), and the Association of World Election Bodies (A-WEB).

In 2018, 38 observers from the Commonwealth, OIC, and Philippines-based Association of Asian Election Authorities (AAEA), among others, monitored the election at the EC's invitation.

Besides, 62 foreigners and 69 Bangladeshis from various foreign missions worked as observers in the 2018 election.

According to EC sources, 169 international observers monitored the 2018 election, compared to 593 in 2008, and 225 in 2001.

EC sources said that the European Union, Commonwealth, and US-based National Democratic Institute (NDI), as well as the African Electoral Alliance, have so far expressed their desire to monitor the 2024 polls.

The Commonwealth's pre-election assessment mission visited Bangladesh in November last week. It said it would decide on sending a full observer mission only after evaluating the team's findings.

The EU exploratory mission visited Bangladesh from July 6-22 while the US joint mission of the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) visited Bangladesh from October 8-11.

Based on the report of the exploratory mission, the EU decided not to send a full observer mission. The EU later said it would send a four-member observer team to monitor the polls.

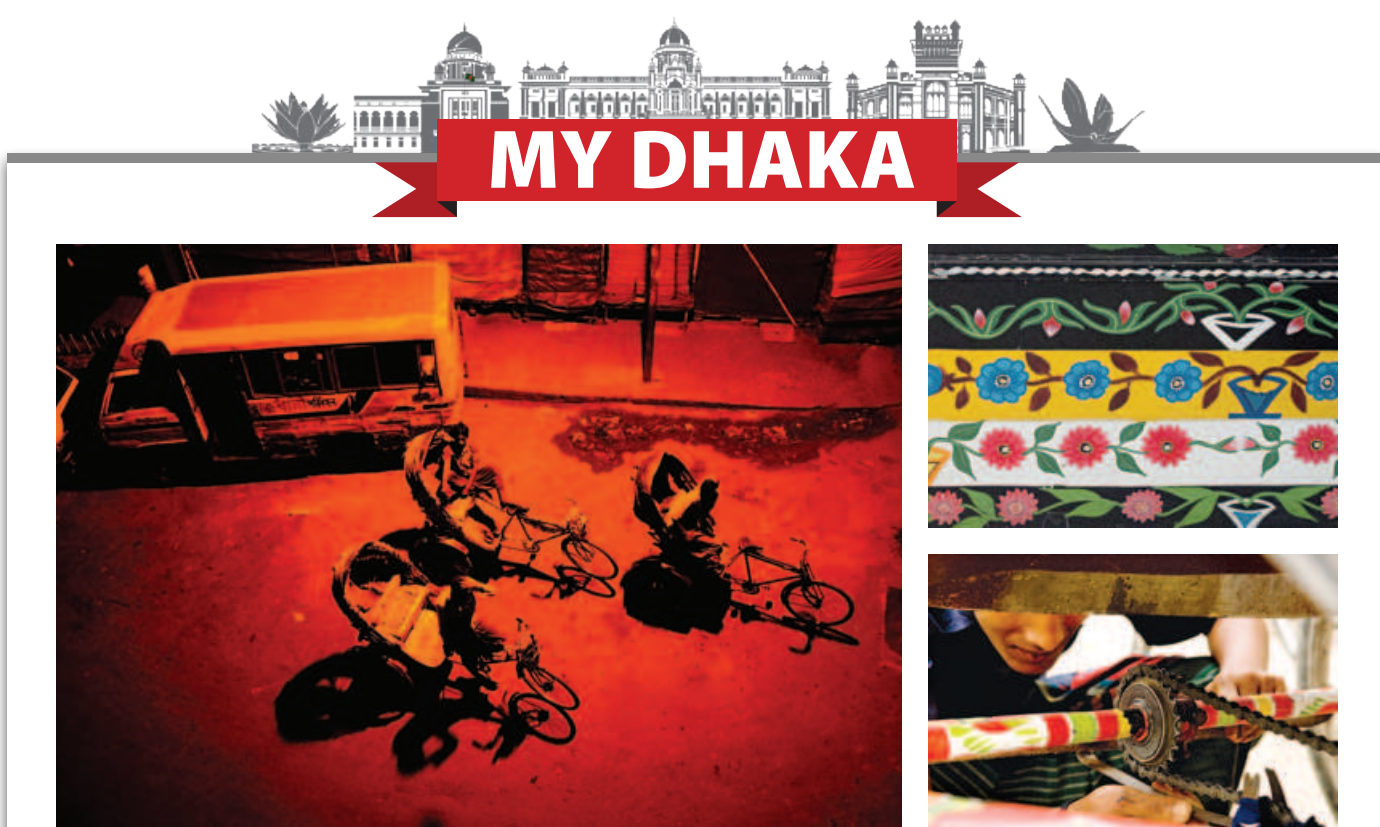


PHOTO: SAZZAD IBNE SAYED

The magic of RICKSHAW AND RICKSHAW PAINTING

RBR

In the early nineties, while setting up my first home. It became a challenge to decorate my small apartment with limited funds and starting from almost zero.

Soon, I learned the magic of upcycling and recycling flea market finds and hand-me-down furniture.

I needed a big storage piece but I could not afford to build a wooden option for it. Thus, I bought the traditional big, black trunk from Karran Bazar for a meagre amount but its imposing black presence was an eyesore.

So, I decided to upcycle it by painting it in traditional rickshaw motifs.

I roamed the narrow lanes of Chankharpul and found an artist who turned it into a beautiful art piece, with shapla, butterflies, and other rickshaw motifs. He took something like Tk 800 for it. I am still grateful to him for I used the trunk as my centre table and stored my quilts and winter wear inside it.

When I read the news that Unesco inscribed Bangladesh's rickshaws and rickshaw paintings to its list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of

Humanity my heart fluttered. I remembered my art piece that brought so many compliments and sowed the seed of upcycling and bohemian décor as a hobby in me.

Rickshaw paintings and their colourful composition of rustic and kitsch motifs have grabbed everyone's attention ever since the '70s, when decorating the pedicab with tassels, tinsel, and colourful plastic started. It was said that the painters expressed their heart's desires, the longings of the common man, or the rickshaw pullers. Thus, movie stars, pastoral Bangladesh, and religious motifs were all depicted through this art form.

Today, rickshaw art and artists are in a struggle for existence but Unesco's including it in the list of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity will help raise awareness of its importance and allow people to appreciate its loud glaring neon colours.

What is fascinating is how recognised artists are bringing it to the fore by incorporating it in products

that make for souvenirs of Dhaka.

Jatra, a handicrafts store of the colourful arts and crafts of Bangladesh, has popularised this pop art as their mainstream attraction.

Artists and designers like Kuhu Plamondon and Chandana R Dewan made a T-shirt collection called Dhaka



Kitsch with rickshaw art-inspired designs. The tees are appreciated because of their glaring example of "kitsch" in the local context.

Biskut Factory is a statement label that specialises in splashing rickshaw art and can pretty much jazz up any everyday object and turn them into an object of art -- teapots, miscellaneous boxes and trunks, guitar/ukulele, or scooters and helmets. Biskut Factory has made rickshaw art-themed sunglasses and cell phone covers popular among the Dhakaites.

Rickshaws and rickshaw paintings are Bangladesh's fifth entry to the list, the other entries are Jamdani and Shital Pati weaving industries, Baul songs, and Mangal Shobhajatra.

BORDER KILLING

BSF returns body of Bangladeshi man

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) yesterday returned the body of a Bangladeshi man who they shot dead three days ago along the Kathaldangi border in Haripur upazila of Thakurgaon.

The BSF handed over the body of Jaharul Islam, 27, of the upazila's Geruadanga village, to the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) during a flag meeting in the afternoon at Kathaldangi border near pillar 370/6-S, said Haripur Police Station Sub-Inspector Manik Mia.

Later, the BGB handed Jaharul's body over to the police, and in turn, the police handed it over to the victim's family members, he added.

Gedura Union Parishad Chairman Tariqul Islam said, "BSF personnel of Uttar Dinaipur in India's West Bengal opened fire on a group of people when they were trying to trespass into the Indian territory through the Kathaldangi border early Monday, leaving Jaharul and Mokhles wounded."

"The BSF took the injured Jaharul to an Indian hospital, where he later succumbed to his injuries. Although Mokhles had escaped before BSF men arrived, his body was found in the Nagor River," he added.

Road crashes kill 5 in Jhalakathi, Cox's Bazar

OUR CORRESPONDENTS, Pirojpur, Cox's Bazar

At least five people were killed in road accidents in Jhalakathi and Cox's Bazar yesterday.

In Jhalakathi, three people were killed in a head-on collision between a human haulier and a bus in Nalchity upazila.

The deceased were identified as human haulier driver Jasim Hawlader, 45, of Barisal Sadar upazila, Razib Khan and Surovi Khanam, 35, of Jhalakathi's Nalchity upazila.

Witnesses said a Patuakhali's Kuakata-bound bus of Bepary Paribahan from Dhaka collided with the human haulier at Zero Point on Barishal-Kuakata road around 4:40pm.

In Cox's Bazar, two siblings were run over by a bus in Chakaria upazila.

The deceased are Abdur Rahman, 8, and his sister Saba, 6, from the upazila's Malumghat area.

The accident took place in the Malumghat area on Cox's Bazar-Chattoagram highway around 8:00am.

Abdur died on the spot, while critically injured Saba was taken to a local hospital, where she succumbed to her injuries, said Sheikh Mohammad Ali, officer-in-charge (OC) of Chakaria Police Station.

Three killed in Las Vegas university shooting

AFF, Las Vegas

Three people were killed and another seriously injured by a gunman who was shot dead by police at a US university on Wednesday.

The incident at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, a short distance from the gambling hub's tourist-packed Strip, was the latest in the United States, where gun violence is a part of the fabric of daily life.

Profits eaten

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eroded Bangladesh's competitiveness and created other problems.

The fight against inflation remained virtually unattended after fixing the interest rate. After that, the central bank had no other monetary policy instrument to influence inflation outcomes.

At the same time, in addition to liquidity support provided at the time of the pandemic, Bangladesh Bank printed quite a large amount of bills to finance budget spending.

"In my view, there was a complete disregard for inflation from a central bank perspective, relying on the hope that an improved domestic supply situation will help contain inflation. God bless us."

The low tax collection coupled with other structural problems has diminished the government's capacity to cope with the macroeconomic challenges and meet the political aspirations of the government.

"Generally, it is expected that the tax-GDP ratio increases in line with the increase in per capita income. Bangladesh, despite being close to India in per capita income, has a much lower tax/GDP ratio. Despite having much higher per capita income, Bangladesh's tax-GDP ratio is lower than that of Pakistan."

Woman dies

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The hospital director said Nurtaj was admitted to the hospital with abdominal pain.

"In the morning, she started having pain again and died all of a sudden. We suspect it was a heart attack," he said, adding that her body bore no injury marks.

Narsingdi Superintendent of Police Mohammad Mostafizur Rahman said the inquest report prepared in front of an executive magistrate show no injury marks on her body.

"We formed a three-member probe committee, which has been asked to submit a report in three working days," he said.



People affiliated with Doctors Without Borders/Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) hold signs during a vigil to honour colleagues and others who have been killed during the war in Gaza outside the United Nations Headquarters in New York City, US on Wednesday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Momen writes to UN secretary general's office

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The letter comes in the face of repeated calls from the West for a free, fair and participatory election -- scheduled for January 7 next year -- after the two controversial polls in 2014 and 2018.

In the letter, which was seen by The Daily Star, Momen said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is "a crusader of democracy and she went through lots of pain to guarantee right to vote, right to food and right to decent life".

"She is determined to hold a free and fair election but will not tolerate burning of public and private properties, burning of human lives alive in the name of demonstration that the opposition party frequently perpetrates."

During her 15-year tenure, she conducted thousands of elections, by-elections, national elections, regional elections and mayoral elections,

Momen said.

"Except a microscopic few, all were free and fair."

Bangladesh is a leader in upholding democracy, human rights, justice and human dignity, he said, adding that it is the only country in the world to have shed 3 million lives to establish these.

And yet, the country is facing "undue, unwarranted and vested political pressure from different corners ahead of the polls", Momen said.

"We hope that United Nations system, including its Secretariat, agencies and country office, would play a constructive and collaborative role to assist Bangladesh to remain persistent in its development trajectory. Bangladesh, a proactive and supportive member state, also has high expectation that the United Nations system would continue its cooperation and assistance in

our national journey towards the political progress and socioeconomic emancipation of our people."

The country also remains optimistic that the UN system would continue to act as a trusted partner in the efforts to ensure a peaceful, just, inclusive and prosperous future for all at national, regional and international levels.

"We also expect UN officials to maintain highest standard of non-partisanship, integrity and objectivity to uphold UN credibility and respect. If their reports are based on falsity and without objectivity and if not fact-based they may lose their credibility that would be a bad omen for the UN system."

Momen also called for engaging a few Bangladeshi experts and professionals as special representatives of the secretary-general and assistant secretary-general.

Another 29 BNP men jailed over political violence

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According to the case statement, a group of leaders and activists of BNP and its front organizations, including Tuku and Jewel, brought out a political procession in front of Khilgaon Railgate at around 11:30am on October 14, 2017.

They vandalized vehicles, assaulted policemen, and prevented them from discharging their duties.

Following the incident, police filed a case against Tuku, Jewel, and 25 others with the Shahjahanpur Police Station.

On January 25, 2018, police pressed Tuku, Jewel, and 62 others.

Also yesterday, Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Shafi Uddin sentenced nine leaders and activists of the BNP and its front organizations to two years imprisonment over political violence in Gulshan in September 2018.

Mehedi Hassan Bappy, general secretary of BNP in the city's ward 18, was among the convicts in the case.

One accused was acquitted after

the charges against him were not proven.

The magistrate announced the judgement in their absence in the courtroom.

The case statement said a group of leaders and activists of BNP and its front organisations, led by Bappy illegally gathered in front of Progati Sarani in the city's Gulshan area around 6:00pm on September 25, 2018.

They exploded crude bombs and vandalised vehicles.

Following the incident, police filed a case against Bappy and nine others with the Gulshan Police Station.

On April 22, last year, police submitted a charge sheet against Bappy and nine others.

In both cases, conviction warrants were issued against all absconding convicts yesterday.

According to the judgement, their punishment will be effective from the day of their arrest or surrender before the court.

HC denies Fakhrul bail

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problems," he told the court, adding that the other accused in the case, Shahjahan Omar, has already been granted bail, and therefore, Fakhrul is also entitled to the same.

Meanwhile, Deputy Attorney General BM Abdur Rafell opposed the bail petition, saying that BNP members vandalised and torched the chief justice's residence in a pre-planned manner, centring the party's October 28 rally in Dhaka.

"Since Fakhrul had convened the rally, he cannot avoid the responsibility of such subversive activities and, therefore, should

not be granted bail in the case," he argued.

Fakhrul, who landed in jail on October 29, in connection with the case filed with Ramna Police Station, filed the bail petition with the HC through his lawyers. His bail was first rejected on October 29 after he was produced before the court of Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Md Rashidul Alam.

Then on November 22, a lower court had refused his bail.

A group of pro-BNP lawyers, led by senior counsel Zainul Abedin, appeared for Fakhrul during yesterday's hearing.