

## Kashmir will become Gaza without India-Pakistan talks

Says Farooq Abdullah

THE HINDU, Srinagar



Former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister and senior National Conference (NC) leader and MP Farooq Abdullah yesterday warned of a situation akin to Gaza in Palestine if India did not have a dialogue with Pakistan over Kashmir.

"Dialogue is the only way forward to resolve lingering issues. If a conducive atmosphere for a dialogue is not worked out between India and Pakistan, the day is not far when J&K will become like Gaza, and people will suffer like in Palestine," Abdullah said in Srinagar.

He claimed that Pakistani leader Nawaz Sharif was likely to become the Prime Minister of Pakistan in the upcoming elections in the neighbouring country. "Mr. Sharif has repeatedly said he was ready to talk to India. What is the reason [that] we are not ready to talk? If we do not find a solution through dialogue, we will meet the same fate as Gaza and Palestine," Abdullah said.

Reiterating the statement made by the late former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee that friends can be changed but not neighbours, Dr Abdullah urged India and Pakistan to come forward and resolve issues.

"If we maintain good relations with our neighbours, only then we can move forward. Even PM [Narendra] Modi had said that war is not an option. So today, if voices of dialogue come from Pakistan, why are we not responding to them?" he asked.

Abdullah said "those making tall claims on the end of militancy" did not know that it would not end "till a conducive environment for talks is made". "Militancy is not going to end till that time," he said.



## MY DHAKA

PHOTO: FRUITSICLES

## FRUITSICLES a twist to the winter chill

RBR

Who said we cannot enjoy a cold treat during winter? Even if we are experiencing a cold spell, fruity popsicles are always a thing of joy. A spicy jolpai popsicle is such bliss now that olives are in season; a pineapple-flavoured pina colada is equally delicious.

With freshly squeezed fruit juices, no additives, preservatives, or colours, Fruitsicles -- an icicle venture of a mother wanting to give her son a healthy lolly took shape in 2022. Its products are offered on food delivery apps and in Chef's Table and Clay Station.

"I bought an ice lolly for my son one day during Covid and found his mouth was all coloured throughout the day. That got me thinking about the bad additives and colours these ice treats have in them. I started making my own popsicles from fresh fruits for my son. Then my friends, family, and neighbours became fond of the treat and slowly it gave me the boost to open Fruitsicles. The business went public in February 2023," explained Syeda

Sharmin Ahmed, the co-owner of Clay Station in Dhaka.

Lollies or lolly pops in orange and green is what we get from our commercial ice cream factories. Sometimes, besides playgrounds and local fairs, we find ice gola or multi-coloured crushed ice balls soaked in flavoured syrups and optionally lemon and masala sprinkled over it. We also have low priced, homemade ice pops in milk flavours sold in various neighbourhoods.

These are loaded with sugar and additives that can negatively impact your health, especially if you are eating them frequently. Even though the market demand for popsicles is quite high, Dhaka did not offer such treats until recently when Fruitsicles saw this gap in the market and grabbed the opportunity.

Antioxidant-rich, seasonal, and locally sourced fruits like green mango, ripe mango, jolpai, pineapple, and others are ingredients Sharmin work with.

"I want to educate my clients about seasonal bounties that are full of vitamins and minerals and do not last

throughout the year. I do not preserve the pulp for future use, rather I use them until the season lasts. Our summer favourite green mango and chilli is now replaced with spicy jolpai pops. We want to be environmentally conscious and focus on all things home-grown," she says.

Popsicles can be soothing while offering more fluid and nutrients; they do add sugar but only the unprocessed variants extracted from sugarcanes. The shelf life of their products is three months and they have seasonal unique flavours just for the winter season.

Currently, they have eight flavours and the range includes dairy-based items like coffee, Milo, and tea popsicles such as lemonade tea, black tea, iced tea, and espresso. Fruits are abundant in summer thus the options are more diverse at that time.

The ice-cold feel of a tasty ice pop in winter can be counterintuitive but by eating something icy in winter your body reacts to the coldness by regulating your body temperature, especially if you are dressed for cold weather. So, grab an ice pop and enjoy the Dhaka chill.

## CRIMEAN PORT OF FEODOSIA Ukraine strikes Russian naval landing warship Moscow admits damage; one person killed

REUTERS, Moscow

Ukraine struck a large Russian landing warship in Crimea with cruise missiles in an overnight attack that killed at least one person and could hinder any Russian attempt to seize more Ukrainian territory along the Black Sea coast.

The Russian defence ministry, cited by the Interfax news agency, said Ukraine had used air-launched missiles to attack the Crimean port of Feodosia and that the Novochoerkassk large landing ship had been damaged.

Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu had briefed President Vladimir Putin in detail about the attack, the Kremlin said. Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014 in a move Kyiv and the West condemned as an illegal seizure.

## Israel strikes

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The Israeli army yesterday published footage showing its troops moving through the muddy zone of shattered buildings.

"... all the owners of the place have been displaced to the south," says one Palestinian man.

Video footage from inside the city's Al-Quds Hospital showed an empty ward with a hole blasted into a wall, broken window glass strewn across the floor and medical equipment covered in a layer of dust, reports AFP.

Some residents of Al-Maghazi refugee camp returned to the ruins of their homes after strikes that Gaza's health ministry said killed at least 70 people.

One of those coming back, Zeyad Awad, said there had been no evacuation warning before the strikes.

WHO staff visited a hospital treating victims of the strikes and "heard harrowing accounts" from health workers and victims, said the agency's chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

Sean Casey, a WHO emergency medical teams coordinator, described the fate of a nine-year-old being treated who was expected to die. "He was crossing the street in front of the shelter where his family is staying and the building beside him blew up," he said.

## Record rise in candidates' wealth

FROM PAGE 1

Over the past five years, Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi had the highest bump in income among ministers and state ministers. His annual income increased by 2,131.12 percent.

Among lawmakers, Anwar Hossain from Pirojpur-2 had the highest bump in income over the past 15 years, with his annual earnings rising by 7,116.3 percent.

Candidates possessing between Tk 200 crore and Tk 300 crore in liquid assets include Yusuf Abdullah Harun from Cumilla-3 (Tk 277.61 crore), Dilip Kumar Agarwala from Chuadanga-1 (Tk 276.19 crore), Abdul Momin Mondol from Sirajganj-5 (Tk 253.24 crore) and Gazi Golam Mertoza from Narayanganj-1 (Tk 233 crore).

Sirajul Islam Mollah from Narsingdi-3, Sayeed Khokon from Dhaka-6, Abdul Kader Azad from Faridpur-3, Afruz Bari from Gaibandha-1, Selima Ahmed from Cumilla-2, Mahmuda Begum and Muhammad Abdullah from Lakshmipur-4, Nur Mohammed from Jamalpur-1, Dewan Zahid Ahmed from Manikganj-2, and Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal from Cumilla-1 have between Tk 100 crore and Tk 200 crore in movable wealth.

Over 57.3 percent of the aspirants running for parliament are business

HIGHEST WEALTH INCREASE (Ministers/state ministers over last 15 years)	
Shadhan Chandra Majumdar, minister for food	6,350.18%
Md Zakir Hossain, state minister for primary and mass education	2,858.06%
Golam Dastagir Gazi, minister for jute	2,703.97%
Imran Ahmed, minister for expatriates' welfare and overseas employment	2,179.99%

people, and only 2.86 percent are politicians, TIB adds.

The share of businessmen among candidates has gone up with every consecutive election. In 2008, it was 47.4 percent.

"If more businessmen get into the parliament, they can take over institutions, like we have seen with the banking sector," said Dr Ittekkharuzzaman, executive director of TIB.

Women candidates make up only 5.1 percent of the contestants.

A total of 170 candidates, or 9.27 percent, have pending cases against them.

Eminent rights activist Sultana Kamal said, "The affidavits give us a

picture of the widening inequality in the country. And this is not a good message. Only a handful are witnessing development, and they will be sitting in the parliament. This will lead to a situation of tyranny of the minority over the majority."

Ittekkharuzzaman said the wealth statements should be analysed.

"The Election Commission, Anti-Corruption Commission and National Board of Revenue can analyse these even after the elections. Lawmakers can be brought to book even after an election if irregularities are found."

"The Anti-Corruption Commission says that it only investigates when there is a specific complaint. But it can take up suo moto investigations," he said.

## How National Bank went astray

FROM PAGE 1

At the same time, the bank logged a capital shortfall of Tk 2,024.4 crore and a provisioning shortfall of Tk 13,797.5 crore, according to data from the Bangladesh Bank.

The current situation is the legacy of the last 15 years, said a former independent director of the bank on the condition of anonymity.

The bank's financial health began to worsen when an influential party accumulated greater ownership of the bank.

In 2009, Sikder Group gained a bigger stake in the bank, according to bank officials.

The massive loan irregularities, lack of good governance, loan irregularities by directors, internal conflict among directors and the lack of quality human resources were the major reasons for the current ailing situation of the bank, according to the former director of the bank.

"The weak monitoring by the central bank on National Bank was a vital reason behind the fragile situation of the lender," he added.

Despite having a central bank-appointed observer on the NBL board since October 2014, the bank grabbed media headlines on several occasions for its brazen loan irregularities and directors' violation of banking rules.

Several managing directors were forced to resign from the bank.

The central bank started to exert its influence on the NBL only after the death of Zainul Haque Sikder in February 2021. Sikder was the chairman of NBL at the time of his death.

In April last year, the BB banned 10 members of the Sikder family and two officials of the Sikder Group from using international credit cards for two years as they took loans from the bank beyond their credit card limit, which grossly violates the banking rules.

The lender gave them \$10.58 million (about Tk 91 crore) breaching the credit card limit set by the central bank.

NBL has become sick in the front of the central bank and the banking regulator just watched it without taking any effective action, said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute.

"The central bank is also responsible for the weak health of the bank," he said, adding that the BB should have reconstituted the board much earlier.

Earlier on December 21, the central bank reconstituted the NBL board by ousting three of the four Sikder family members.

Moazzem Hossain, who is the chairman of Hossaf Group and one of the founders of NBL, was reinstated on the board. At the bank's 39th annual

general meeting, Hossain and his son Mabroor were ousted from the board through manipulating the digital voting system by certain directors.

Md Serajul Islam, a former BB spokesman, and M Kamal Hossain, a former managing director of Southeast Bank, have been added to the board.

Syed Ferhat Anwar, a former professor at the University of Dhaka's Institute of Business Administration, is the new chairman of National Bank, replacing Monowara Sikder, the widow of Zainul Haque Sikder.

"Restructuring the board will not fix everything. There is a need for a special audit in the bank," said Mansur, also the former chairman of BRAC Bank.

Commissioning the special audit should be the first responsibility of the new board.

"The management team also will have to be restructured as they are also responsible for the weak health of the bank," said Mansur, also a former economist of the International Monetary Fund.

The new board will hold its first meeting today, according to Md. Mehmood Husain, the MD and chief executive officer of NBL since December 2021.

"They will surely take some initiatives for the betterment of the bank," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

## Exercise your voting rights on January 7

FROM PAGE 1

These are to make the country free from homeless and landless people and eradicate poverty completely, she said.

The PM said the government is working to make sure everyone gets a beautiful life.

"We want to take the country forward. We have attained the status of a developing country. Keeping that in mind, we want to make Bangladesh a developed country. This country will be developed only if the party with 'boat' symbol remains in power."

Taraganj upazila AL President Atia Rahman presided over the rally.

BSS adds: The premier landed at Saidpur Airport by a commercial flight around 11:00am. From there, she started journey for Taraganj by road.

Addressing another campaign rally at Pirganj Government High School ground in the afternoon, Hasina sought vote for "boat".

"This 'boat' has brought independence and given economic emancipation. This symbol will give you a developed and prosperous country," she told the rally.

Pointing to her party candidate for Rangpur-6, she said: "I hand over

Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury to you. She is like my daughter. Voting for her means voting for me, voting for Joy..."

Mentioning that the AL work for the welfare of the people, Hasina said she is working tirelessly to change the fate of the people.

The premier urged all to resist arson attacks and destructive politics by BNP-Jamaat.

On her way to Pirganj, the AL chief spoke at a road-side rally in Mithapukur. She urged all to strengthen the AL to turn "Digital Bangladesh" into a "Smart Bangladesh".

"Our students and youths will be turned into smart and skilled manpower. We will groom them for the future. Bangladesh will be a developed, prosperous and Smart Sonar Bangla by 2041," she said.

The AL president introduced the party candidate for Rangpur-5, Rasheq Rahman, to the people and requested all to vote for him.

She asked all AL candidates to shun violence as the party has allowed many members to run as independents.

"You have to hold the election peacefully, and ensure the victory of the Awami League," the PM said.

## AL candidate to face tough test from two rivals

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on the AL's voters in the upazila, add locals.

"The Awami League always wins electoral races in Alfadanga. Even if an Awami League candidate lags behind his rivals in the two other upazilas, the party nominee later wins the seat with a massive victory in Alfadanga," said Siddique Ahmed, president of ward-5 AL in Boalmari's Gunboha union.

AL nominee Rahman, who hails from Madhukhali, is making efforts to increase voter turnout, which may impact the polls outcome.

Madhukhali remains a "stronghold" for him, and he is also eyeing the AL's vote bank in Alfadanga, say locals.

Four-time MP Abu Zafar, who represented the AL, BNP, and Jatiyo Party in parliament, is popular

among many voters, mainly because he has not harassed his opponents over the years.

"Abu Zafar quit three political parties, but his supporters remain loyal to him. They will again vote for him on January 7," Shariful Islam, a teacher of a local high school, told this newspaper.

However, the local BNP is aggrieved by his leaving the party.

"Abu Zafar has betrayed the BNP at a time when the party is waging a movement to restore people's voting rights. However, his departure will not cause any harm to the BNP," said Khandkar Nasirul Islam, vice-president of Krishak Dal and also a former MP from Faridpur-1.

Locals say Dolon may have an edge over his two rivals, as BNP supporters would not vote for the AL and BNM candidates.

## 43RD BCS RESULT

## 2,163 recommended for cadre posts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The final result of the 43rd Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) examinations under the Bangladesh Public Service Commission (BPSC) was published yesterday.

This year, the BPSC published the combined results - cadre and non-cadre posts - for the first time.

Some 2,163 candidates have been recommended for appointment to different cadres, according to a press release issued by the BPSC.

Besides, 642 have been recommended for non-cadre posts.

The BPSC published the written exam result of the 43rd BCS on August 20, and a total of 9,841 candidates passed the exam.

The viva voce exam of the candidates ended last month.

## 2 killed as truck crushes autorickshaw

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Two people, including a child, died and 11 others were injured after a truck collided with a bus and overturned on top of a CNG-run autorickshaw, crushing it completely in Kalihati upazila of Tangail yesterday.

The incident happened on the Tangail-Mymensingh road in Chatipara area of the upazila around 2:00pm.

The deceased were identified as Hiranman Begum, 80, of Shialkol village in Bhuapur upazila of Tangail and Abdullah, 13, of Tarabari area in Narandia union of Kalihati.

Of the injured, two were identified as autorickshaw driver Mohammad Rabiul, 35, of Soya Palima village in Kalihati upazila, and passenger Hasna Begum, 30, of Baroi village in Bhuapur upazila.

## 2 held with gold bars worth nearly Tk 5cr

UNB, Chuadanga

Members of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) yesterday arrested two individuals along with 23 gold bars, weighing 5.19kg from Uthali in Jibannagar upazila of Chuadanga district.

The arrestees were identified as Pintu Biswas and Sias Hossain of Damurhuda upazila.

Tipped off, a team of BGB-58 conducted a drive in the area and challenged a human haulier carrying the duo, said Commanding Officer of BGB 58 Masud Pervez Rana.

Later, gold bars worth Tk 4.90 crore were found in their possession.