

Zia's birth anniversary today

UNB, Dhaka

The BNP today celebrates the 88th birth anniversary of its founder Ziaur Rahman.



Born in Bogura's Bagbari on January 19, 1936, Zia founded the BNP in 1978 and became the country's seventh president.

He was assassinated by a group of army officers at Chattogram Circuit House on May 30, 1981.

The BNP on Wednesday announced a two-day programme to mark the birth anniversary of its founder.

As part of the programmes, the party flags will be hoisted atop its offices, including Nayapaltan headquarters, this morning.

The party leaders and activists, led by the standing committee members, will place wreaths at Zia's grave at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar at 11:00am.

Meanwhile, the BNP yesterday arranged a discussion at the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh, in memory of Zia.

BNP's associate bodies will hold different programmes, including discussions and distribution of warm clothes, to mark the day.

The party's city, district and upazila units will also observe the day through organising different programmes.

HOUTHİ TARGETS IN YEMEN

US launches 4th round of strikes

AFP, Washington

American forces targeted 14 missiles that were ready to launch in Yemen, the US military said later on Wednesday, after Washington re-designated the Iran-backed Houthi rebels as a "terrorist" entity for their attacks on merchant vessels.

The Houthis — who have already faced multiple rounds of air strikes in response to their targeting of international shipping — struck a US-owned bulk cargo carrier in the wake of the designation announcement, and vowed to continue attacks they say are in support of Palestinians in Gaza.

US forces "conducted strikes on 14 Iran-backed Houthi missiles that were loaded to be fired in Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen," Central Command (CENTCOM) said in a statement.

"These missiles on launch rails presented an imminent threat to merchant vessels and US Navy ships in the region and could have been fired at any time, prompting US forces to exercise their inherent right and obligation to defend themselves," CENTCOM said.



FILE PHOTO

IS DHAKAIYA FOOD worth the hype?

FARIHA AMBER

The city of Dhaka has a rich history of delectable food that often dates back centuries. An array of succulent food that the Mughals introduced during their rule and recipes that have been passed down from generation to generation (some of which have been tightly held on to as family secrets) are widely available to the masses.

Among the numerous buzzing food hubs in the city, the ones in old town still have a distinct aura about them — and it is this preservation of heritage that makes the whole atmosphere unique to this day. Despite the frantic crowd and chaos that persists, people from all corners do not miss out on paying a visit to try the food of Old Dhaka.

Albeit the enthusiasm that is contained within Dhakaiya food, and being a Dhakaiya myself, dare I ask, is Dhakaiya food worth the hype? Now before misinterpreting the rest of the article, let me assure you that it is an analysis of the food scenario, where the intention is not to ridicule our food heritage.

Some areas of Old Dhaka have earned their name and fame in their

own right due to the popularity and demand for food, take Chawk Bazar's iftar bazar for example. Over the years, this has become the hotspot for people to buy iftar, so much so that in recent years, the roads are closed to vehicle entry during peak hours.

Add to that the insane traffic that persists throughout the month of Ramadan and yet so many people choose to make that trip. But is it worth it? The experience of rummaging the bazaar is exciting where you can explore new items, but even two of the most coveted dishes, Boro Baper Polay Khay and the gigantic Shahi jilapi make the hassle questionable given their taste.

Hailing from a Dhakaiya household, I can assure you that even we do not understand this hype.

Another way to catch a glimpse of our royal food heritage is by attending a Dhakaiya wedding. I am genuinely surprised by the number of people who want to attend my wedding just for the food spread! With the chicken biriyani, Nargis kofta, jali kabab, malai kofta, chicken roast, shahi jorda, borhani, and mishit paan on the menu — this is one experience to look forward to.

But do not blame the Dhakaiyas for

that overwhelming feeling afterwards or for wondering about the fate of that whole mutton roast. You have to appreciate the Dhakaiyas for their hospitality and exuberance, especially when it comes to splurging on food!

Another area in Old Dhaka famous for food — Nazira Bazar — especially so for late-night food shenanigans is abuzz with various delicacies from polao to lassi. As delightful as it may sound, the area is inaccessible via vehicles at night, and while you may enjoy some of the delicacies, you better take an expert's opinion on the right eateries to avoid a stomach upset.

Nazira Bazar is a haven for foodies and explorers, only if you eliminate the nonchalance of the restaurateurs towards customers and the push of the crowd deciding for you where to eat. From famous biriyani houses to drinks and coolers, you can wrap up an entire meal.

Albeit the diversity in opinion for the question at hand, and the imperfections that exist in the Dhakaiya food scenario, these are also gems that make the wealth of food in traditional Dhaka and act as a reminder of our rich history.

Iconic items like the ones mentioned above may seem far-fetched in today's modern food scenario, but these are the founding bricks of our love towards food. In terms of experience, is Dhakaiya food worth the hype? Most would disagree, but to get the true taste of our food culture — definitely!



Govt planning concerted action

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commerce ministries yesterday held separate meetings and issued a host of directives to administration officials and businesspeople.

During a virtual meeting with eight divisional commissioners, DCs, and SPs of all districts, the food ministry asked the deputy commissioners and police superintendents to carry out joint raids against rice and paddy hoarders in every upazila.

Food Minister Sadhan Chandra Majumder and Food Secretary Md Ismial Hossain, however, told the DCs and SPs not to raid any farmer's home.

"The food secretary instructed the attendees to ensure that the news of the raids reaches nearby areas so that the hoarders become too afraid to stockpile," said an official.

At the meeting, Sadhan suggested that the DCs and SPs sit with the millers so they do not increase the prices of rice and paddy.

The DCs and SPs were also asked to take action against unlicensed traders, meeting sources said.

The minister asked the DCs to collect data on each rice or paddy trader's purchases and sales. "The administration needs to find out whether the amount of paddy purchased and the amount of rice sold are consistent," an official who attended the meeting quoted the food minister as saying.

Talking to The Daily Star after the meeting, Sadhan said, "Before the election, we promised the people that we would control the prices of food products. There is no reason to have instability in the rice market.

"Those who hoard essentials or manipulate their prices will be punished. But there is no reason for the honest businesspeople to worry," he added.

State Minister for Commerce Ahsanul Islam Titu held a meeting

with edible oil and sugar importers, traders, and refinery owners at his ministry to know about the stock and supply situation.

Before the meeting, he told reporters that the government would go after traders who hoard to create an artificial crisis.

The state minister assured that the word "syndicate" in commodity trading may not be heard from July onwards as the government was working to fix the problem.

"The message is loud and clear: we will ensure transparency and accountability through establishing a smart market," Titu said.

During the meeting, sugar and edible oil importers said the US dollars have to be made available in the market so they can easily open Letters of Credit (LCs) ahead of Ramadan.

The fluctuating exchange rate for the dollar is a major problem in commodity trade, Md Amin

Helaly, senior vice-president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), told The Daily Star after the meeting.

The demand for around 98 percent sugar and 90 percent edible oil is met by imports.

The sugar and edible oil refiners also demanded the government ensure adequate gas supply to their factories.

A commerce ministry official said they were trying to import 61 lakh tonnes of rice, wheat, onion, and edible oil from India. Of the amount, over 10 lakh tonnes would be imported under government arrangements.

The government has been trying to import essentials from India for months but did not get any positive response from the neighbour yet. Now, the commerce ministry will make a fresh effort in this regard, the sources said.

Can it contain inflation?

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has been mired in inflation for more than two years now, and more so, when it has a clear mandate from the newly-formed government on what to prioritise: inflation over growth.

Even then, BB's modus operandi for reining in price spirals would have passed muster were the cause of inflation demand-pull.

But it is cost-push inflation thanks to Bangladesh's overwhelming reliance on imports to sustain itself.

Almost every item consumed by the average citizen in Bangladesh in their everyday life is imported or produced with imported raw materials.

With the exchange rate scaling new heights every day, automatically the price of everything is rising. Unless the exchange rate is reined in, inflation cannot be reined in.

On Wednesday, BB Governor Abdur Rouf Talukder said the central bank was considering adopting a crawling peg system, a precursor to having a fully market-based exchange rate, on the advice of the International Monetary Fund.

But he did not specify when that system would be rolled out, meaning the exchange rate will continue to appreciate and with it, inflation.

With no action taken to fix the exchange rate, how much impact would steps to suppress demand have on inflation when demand is already low thanks to no corresponding growth in wages and drastically shrunken purchasing power? Not much.

If BB had to go down this route of managing inflation by policy rate cuts, it could have gone for its biggest rate hike yet as that could have addressed the situation in one fell swoop. What we have now is death by a thousand cuts.

And the biggest casualty of the latest monetary policy statement is the country's GDP.

Private sector credit growth, a barometer of industrial optimism, is already below the central bank's target for the next six months and given the higher cost of funds now, it will only

go down.

In the first six months of the fiscal year, the opening of letters of credit for industrial raw materials, petroleum and intermediate goods have declined year-on-year, in yet another indication of the impending slowdown.

Lower economic activities mean lower employment, and that is never good news for the inflation-fatigued poor and low-income people.

The sensations suggest economic activities are now more subdued than during the depths of the pandemic.

Back then, there was hope that the virus would be contained with the vaccine soon and the economy would roar back to life right away.

This time, the end is not even in sight — given the central bank's meek response, which has left the prospect of a sustained period of high inflation and economic stagnation not out of the question.

Election

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The CEC said they learnt from the media that this election was comparatively good.

"There are praise and criticism. We need to consider both. But in social media, there is continuous criticism — we don't bother with it."

Awal's comments come a day after Transparency International Bangladesh said, "The EC has acted as one of the catalysts in implementing the election agenda in the name of constitutional obligations and legal boundaries."

In response, Awal said: "How did the Election Commission implement the government agenda in the name of constitutional obligations? Were there no obligations? What could we do? Could we defer the election for three years or 10 years or 30 years saying that there is no political consensus?"

No one in the EC had any deal with the government over any secret agenda.

"Without any doubt, I could say I had no such deal."

AL mulls taking 'boat' off local body polls

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"Many leaders favour taking 'boat' off the local government elections. We put forward the proposal before the party general secretary and he will discuss the issue with the party president. She will make the final decision," AL Joint General Secretary Mahabubul Alam Hanif told The Daily Star yesterday.

Sources in police said additional police personnel have been deployed in some districts where tension prevails over AL's internal feuds.

"Necessary steps have been taken to keep the law and order under control. We are carrying out our duties without considering political affiliation of individuals. Stern action will be taken against those found involved in attacks, vandalism, and clashes," Md Anwar Hossain, deputy inspector general (operations) of police, told The Daily Star.

AL leaders said divisions among the party grassroots widened after

2015 when the party started fielding candidates for the local body polls with its electoral symbol "boat".

In November 2015, five laws related to union parishads, upazila parishads, municipalities and city corporations were amended, allowing party-backed candidates in local government bodies.

After the allocation of electoral symbols by the Election Commission, the AL took many initiatives, including serving show-cause notices, issuing warnings of punitive actions, expulsions from the party, and not giving party posts, to deter the party leaders from running against its nominees. All went in vain.

Before the January 7 polls, the AL chief allowed the party leaders to run as independents. This was against the party's charter which stipulates that if anyone contests against the party nominee, the person will be expelled from the organisation.

The AL took such a decision this time to make the election appear participatory and increase turnout.

A total 62 independents, including 58 leaders of the AL and its front organisations, won.

According to a report of the Human Rights Support Society, at least five people were killed, 60 got shot, and more than 450 people were injured in clashes in at least 39 districts between election day and January 17.

Even the AL candidates, who lost to AL independents, came up with allegations of rigging and irregularities in the polls and demanded fresh polling. They blamed the party grassroots for their defeats.

For instance, in Porabari union of Tangail Sadar, an AL leader washed the local party office floor with milk and put up a banner of Sanwar Hossain, who won the polls in Tangail-5 as an independent, after

removing the banner of AL nominee Mamun-or-Rashid.

Newly appointed Housing and Public Works Minister RAM Obaidul Muktadir Chowdhury has filed a Tk 100 crore defamation suit against Firozur Rahman Olio, who was his rival in Brahmanbaria-3.

The case was filed with a Brahmanbaria court on January 11, a day after Firozur, a local AL leader who resigned as Brahmanbaria Sadar upazila chairman to contest the national polls, congratulated the minister with a bouquet shortly after he took oath of office.

Independent candidate Noor-e-Alam Siddique Haque, also the Krishak League organising secretary, wrote to the EC demanding fresh polls to Rajbari 2 bringing allegations of voter intimidation, driving out polling agents from voting centres and casting fake votes by AL activists and supporters. AL nominee Zillul Hakim won there.