

Chinese vice minister flies in on 4-day visit

To call on PM, the Speaker

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Chinese Vice Minister of the International Department of the Chinese Communist Party Sun Haiyan arrived in Dhaka on a four-day visit last night.

This is the first visit by a Chinese official after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina assumed office following the January 7 national election.

Awami League International Affairs Secretary Shammi Ahmed received Haiyan at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport around 8:30pm.

A diplomatic source said Haiyan is expected to meet Hasina and Jatiya Sangsad Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury.

"The Chinese Vice Minister will be conveying greetings from the Chinese leadership to Hasina on her re-election," the source said.

China has been criticising the US for what it says was interfering in Bangladesh's national polls when the US and its Western allies had been calling for free and fair polls in Bangladesh.

After the polls, Chinese President Xi Jinping in a congratulatory message said that China will strengthen mutual trust and promote traditional friendly relations with Bangladesh.

A day before coming to Dhaka, Haiyan paid a courtesy call on the Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu and focused on exploring ways to promptly implement agreements signed during the president's recent state visit to China.

Forest officials attacked by land grabbers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Two officials of the forest department were injured in an attack allegedly led by land grabbers as they were returning from an eviction drive conducted in Banskhali Ecopark area of Chattogram yesterday.

The injured are Bisu Kumar Das, junior wildlife officer, Md Ashik, office assistant of the Ecopark, said Rafiqul Islam Chowdhury, divisional forest officer of the Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation Division, Chattogram.

Of them, Bisu Kumar was rescued in critical condition and admitted to Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH).

Rafiqul also said a team of the forest department, led by park in charge Ismail Hoque, conducted a drive in the Nayapara area inside the park around noon and evicted some illegal structures built by encroachers.

A group of the land grabbers attacked the forest officials with blunt weapons as they were returning to their office after the drive ended, he said.

"We informed local police verbally in this matter and are preparing to file a case against attackers," the DFO added.

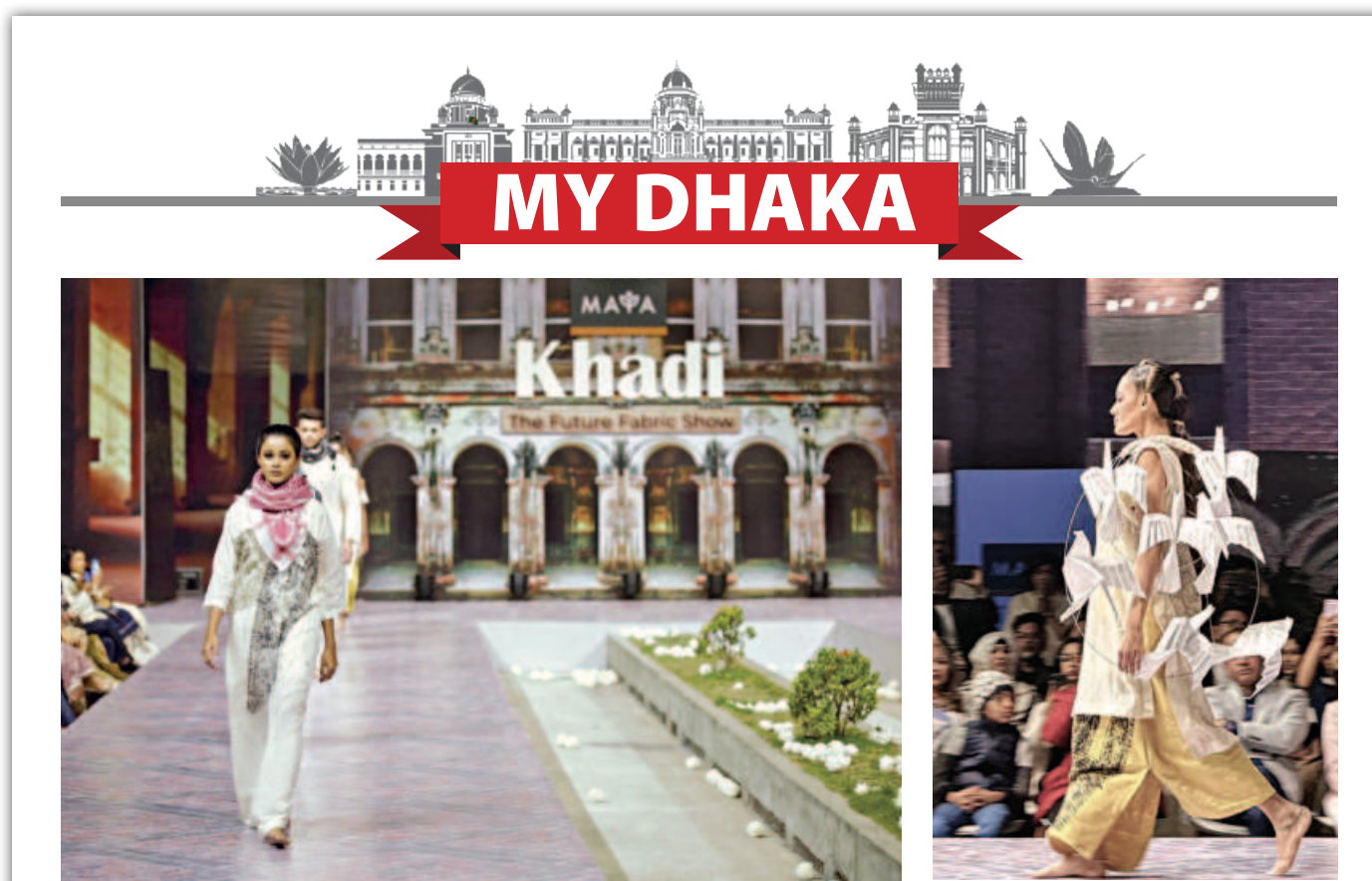


PHOTO: FAIZA AHMED

PROTEST THROUGH ART A Dhaka fashion designer for Palestine

RBR

Art as a form of activism can at times stand against oppression and discrimination. It has always been a medium of expression for struggles that personally or socially affect the artist. In recent times, fashion activism has come to the fore in Dhaka.

Fashion need not always be about glitz and glamour; rather it can convey strong messages against discrimination. Designers are now turning garments into canvases to express their grief, sadness, or happiness; fashion activism is finding its way into clothing. This kind of artwear makes a powerful statement, conveying the designer's message or perspective. It's a form of self-expression that goes beyond typical fashion.

Faiza Ahmed is an artist who turned into a fashion activist and she express her voice through fashion. She talks about things that touch her heart through her work. She is the owner of the sustainable fashion venture, Manas, and a vegan restaurant, Shanchayita.

Manas is a canvas for activism where Faiza makes a limited collection of select pieces that resonate with her inner turmoil, about social responsibilities and global disputes. Her collection is not always for sale, but if they are, then the proceeds go to charities dear to her.

"Social negativity hurts me and there are times I need therapy to heal. I decided to make my weakness my strength and speak my mind through fashion activism. Even though I make clothes to sell and fashion is my bread-earner, not all collections need to be about glamour and praise.

"There is a responsibility inside me and I want to desensitise stigmas like divorce, menstruation, domestic violence and such. I want to incorporate my responsible soul in my work. It heals me, like my therapy," she says.

Her latest collection, Palestine in My Mind, is a visual representation of bruises and scars that linger on the bodies and hearts of those affected by war. Using her artistry, Faiza has tried to print the sorrowful and woeful looks

of Palestinian children on each of her wearable pieces. It is not a commercial venture; instead, it is a deep-rooted protest against violence, war, and the tragic deaths of thousands of civilians in Palestine.

"The decision to keep this collection unavailable for purchase underscores my commitment to using my art as a form of activism, channelling my creativity to raise awareness and provoke thought on urgent global issues," she adds.

"Crimson Pride", brought menstruation to the spotlight, it spoke about the celebration of womanhood and showed that fashion can have a voice to speak of issues far beyond aesthetics and make bold statements.

"Atma Bala: Where the Soul Finds its Strength", is a fashion line that pays tribute to the strength within each of us. Atma Bala represents the essence of womanhood in its ability to break free from societal stigmas and a reminder that these experiences are not shackles, but mere stepping stones in our individual and collective journey.

Fashion is essentially wearable art and evokes its maker's artistic expression and aesthetic taste. Thereby, fashion activism is a declaration to make a bold statement on relevant issues, and more specifically issues related to women.

Mercury to fall

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Kazi Jebunnesa, a BMD meteorologist. Rain or drizzle is likely at a few places in Barishal, Khulna, and Chattogram divisions and at one or two places in Dhaka division today, she added.

Weather may remain mainly dry with partly cloudy sky elsewhere in the country, according to the BMD forecast.

The Met office said that 10 to 8 degrees Celsius is called mild cold wave, 7.9 to 6 degrees Celsius moderate cold wave, 5.9 to 4 degrees Celsius severe cold wave and less than 4 degrees Celsius is called very severe cold wave.

Meanwhile, flight operations at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport were disrupted for around one-and-a-half hours yesterday due to fog.

An international flight that failed to land at the airport was diverted to Sylhet Osmani International Airport, said Group Captain Mohammad Kamrul Islam, executive director of HISA.

Flights could not be operated from 8:30am to 10:00am yesterday due to the fog, he said.

The diverted flights started returning to HISA after 10:00am when visibility improved, Kamrul added.

In Dhaka, city dwellers yesterday experienced a chilly weather.

Schoolchildren suffered in the morning cold. Schools are supposed to close if the temperature drops below 10.00 degree Celsius.

"It is really very tough for the primary students as when primary schools start, temperature seems quite low," said Jyostna Yesmin, a resident of Indira Road.

The government should close all educational institutions for a week considering the cold spell, she said.

"I don't send my son to college every day due to the chilly weather as he already has a cold," said Mohammad Shaheen, father of Shabakat Sabri Samir, an eleventh grader.

Vulnerable groups such as labourers, low-income people, children, and elderly people were the worst sufferers of this weather.

"I failed to get hired yesterday as I reached Mirpur Section-II at 8:00am, an hour late that the usual time due to cold morning," said Majeda Begum, a construction worker.

People hire labourers from Mirpur Section-II near Islami Bank Hospital where the workers gather.

When cops turn part-time robbers

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continues. They confessed to the crime before a Dhaka court.

This is not an isolated incident, however. Over the last six months, Banani, Airport and Uttara Paschim police stations investigated six robbery cases involving police members, immigration officials and petty criminals who operate as partners in crime.

This syndicate often targets Bangladeshi expatriates, snatch gold and smuggles the precious metal to India, investigators say.

The police forwarding reports submitted to different Dhaka courts over the last six months reveal the names of seven policemen – one sub-inspector, two assistant sub-inspectors, and four constables.

Police also arrested Airport Fire Operator Dinesh Chandra Biswas and Traffic Assistant Bappi Sheikh in the case for acting as informers.

"We are investigating the case with priority. Anyone involved will face stern action, whoever they may be," Md Shahjahan, deputy commissioner of Uttara division police, told The Daily Star.

The number of police personnel turning into part-time criminals seems to be rising. Sources in the police say a section of junior and mid-ranking officers are committing various crimes including robbery, drug smuggling, mugging and rape, tainting the image of the 2 lakh-strong police force.

In the first nine months of 2023, at least 318 cases were filed against 304 police personnel, and 79 were arrested across the country, according to the Police Headquarters data. The last three months' data for 2023 are not available.

In 2022, around 1,731 police personnel faced departmental actions, with majority of the offenders getting away with suspension or transfer.

"Recruitment should be transparent if we want to prevent crimes by police personnel. This is the first step. Then there has to be strong monitoring in place to identify police members having criminal tendencies," said Nurul Huda, former inspector

general of police.

"Finally, stern departmental and legal actions should be taken if any police member is found involved in crimes," he told The Daily Star.

THE BAND OF ROBBERS

All seven arrestees in Abdullah Munshi's case have robbed migrants on at least two other occasions, investigators say.

These cops used to interact with different criminal groups for professional purposes, but were likely influenced by the criminals and joined forces with them, said Abdul Hannan, a detective who is investigating the case.

Three months after Abdullah filed the case against unnamed robbers, police caught the four constables red-handed during another robbery attempt in front of the airport on April 1. The victim was again a migrant worker. Police filed a case against the four the next day.

The very next day, on April 3, another case was filed against the same four with the Airport police for looting four gold bars weighing around 464 grams from Jakir Hossain and Din Islam, both Dubai expatriates. This robbery took place in front of the airport on February 11, 2023.

Some staff members of the airport play a vital role in this syndicate, tipping off the police members about the passengers who carry legally declared gold, one investigator said.

"Thus informed, the constables along with other criminals used to rob migrants," he said.

'SMUGGLING TO INDIA'
Gourango Datta, who has a jewelry shop in Tongi, on December 23 filed a case with Uttara Paschim Police Station after he was robbed of 200 tolas of gold near Uttara Gausul Azam Market.

Four people identifying themselves as detectives stopped Gourango's vehicle on way to his shop from the Uttara residence, and looted the gold and his phones, according to the case statement.

Subsequent police investigation found ASI Gias Uddin and ASI Md Obaidur and SIMd Abdul Alim robbed

Gourango that day, reads the police forwarding report submitted before the court on January 4.

According to the police report, these cops, who are not part of the gang that robs migrants around the airport, have links with gold smugglers in India. They smuggle looted gold to the neighbouring country through Chuadanga border point of Bangladesh.

ASI Gias has since been arrested while Obaidur and Alim are on the run. All three have been suspended.

"We identified some people involved in the crime. We hope we will be able to arrest them soon," said Uttara Paschim Police Station Sub-inspector Safin Ishtiaq Rubel, who is investigating the case.

Asked about gold smuggling by these cops, he said he will be able to share some details after arresting the other gang members.

Covid infection

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In this situation, the DGHS advised those at high risk to receive the fourth (booster) dose of the vaccine. It also asked people to get tested if they exhibit Covid symptoms before rushing to take any treatment.

Contacted, Mushtaq Hussain, a former advisor to the Institute of Epidemiology Disease Control and Research, said it was yet to be determined as to why the infection rate was increasing.

"A one-day spike in infection rates does not appear to indicate whether there is a community-level transmission. Besides, the number of Covid tests that are being done now is low. In case the rise in infections continues, the cause behind it can be identified with the information that'll be available in the coming days."

He warned that Covid is deadly, especially for healthcare workers, individuals over the age of 60, and those with pre-existing medical conditions.

"So, it's important for all to wear masks. Also, those who have not yet received the booster dose should get it as soon as possible."

Road crashes claim 7 lives in 3 dists

STAR REPORT

At least seven people died and five others were hurt in separate road accidents in Mymensingh, Jhenaidah, and Pabna yesterday.

In Mymensingh, three people were killed in a head-on collision between a lorry and a truck in Tarakanda upazila in the morning.

The victims are lorry driver Kamrul Islam, 22, and his passengers Abdul Kadir, 45, and Mizanur Rahman, 48, from Hataughat upazila.

Tarakanda Police OC Wazed Ali said a Dhaka-bound lorry from Sherpur collided head-on with a truck on Mymensingh-Sherpur road in Taalidighi area around 7:30am.

In Jhenaidah, three more people died and four others were injured when a CNG-run autorickshaw collided head-on with a truck in the Bhalaipur area of Maheshpur-Khalishpur road in Maheshpur upazila around 7:30am.

The deceased are Kashed Mia, 55, of Ghugri village, and Alamgir Hossain, 36, and Kamal Hossain, 60, of Pantapara village in the upazila, said Maheshpur Police OC Mahbubur Rahman.

In Pabna, a man was killed while another was injured as a CNG-run autorickshaw and tractor collided in the Dhopadaha area of Pabna-Shanthia road in Shanthia upazila in the afternoon.

The deceased Islam Hossain, 60, of Dabarjani village, was a passenger on the autorickshaw.

METRO RAIL

Service disrupted as TV cable falls on power lines

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The metro rail service suffered a brief disruption of 15 minutes around noon yesterday as a satellite TV cable was thrown across the power lines.

"Someone threw a cable on the power lines between Farmgate and Shahbagh stations. Police are looking for that person," MAN Siddique, managing director of Dhaka Mass Transit Company Ltd, told The Daily Star.

The incident resulted in approximately 15 minutes of disruption to metro rail services starting from 12:10pm, metro rail officials said.

The service resumed after staffers removed the satellite TV cable from the power lines, Siddique said.

UN calls for more funding for Rohingyas

UNB, Dhaka

The United Nations has called for solidarity and more funding for the Rohingyas and their host communities in Cox's Bazar.

"The refugees need our solidarity, and the host communities need our solidarity. We need increased funding for all of that," Spokesperson for the UN Secretary-General Stéphane Dujarric told reporters at a regular media briefing in New York on Monday.

He said no refugee should be repatriated against their will.

It needs to be done voluntarily and in a manner that preserves their dignity and their safety, said the spokesperson.

"It is clear to us that the situation in Myanmar currently does not meet the requirements. What we do need is increased global solidarity for those communities that are generously hosting Rohingya refugees, like the community in Cox's Bazar, which the secretary-general has visited," Dujarric said.

Yunus not being given docs

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Besides, the labour court is supposed to grant the sentenced bail for 60 days under section 426(2)(ka) of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPc), but it has granted them bail for only 30 days, he said, adding that the court has given the certified copy of the judgement 11 days after the pronouncement of the verdict.

Giving Prof Yunus and three others 30 days to file the appeal is a breach of the law, he said, adding that the Nobel laureate and the others have been deprived of their fundamental rights.

Abdullah Al-Mamun said everyone is equal in the eyes of the law and has a right to get the protection of the law under the constitution of the country.

Replying to a query, the lawyer said they would have to appeal by February 1 in compliance with the Third Labour Court's verdict, even though they were in a very difficult situation as they did not get the relevant papers from the trial court concerned.

Mamun said the whole world and human rights organisations are watching closely what is happening

Buses beginning to feel the pinch

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has now come down to Tk 1,200-Tk1,400."

He added that owners of Mirpur Super Link buses recently decided to operate 30 buses on the route instead of 50.

Jahid Hossain, head supervisor of Shadhin Express which operates between Mawa and Mirpur-12, said nearly half of his clients were people commuting from Pallabi to Gulistan. But now the percentage has come down to around 10 percent.

Employees of Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation and Bihanga Paribahan also gave similar accounts of their businesses.

According to metro authorities, around 2.5 lakh commuters have been using their service every day. At peak hours in the morning, 1,800-

with Prof Yunus.

Meanwhile, state counsel Khurshid Alam Khan told The Daily Star that there was no need for any papers other than the certified copy of the verdict for filing an appeal.

All the relevant papers have been given to the defence lawyer during the trial proceedings of the case, he added.

On January 1, the Third Labour Court sentenced Prof Yunus and three top officials of Grameen Telecom to six months in jail in a case filed by the government over labour law violations.

Prof Yunus is the chairman of Grameen Telecom, while the three are its directors Ashraf Hassan, Nurjahan Begum, and M Shahjahan.

The four were also fined Tk 30,000 each, in default of which they would have to serve 25 more days in prison.

Soon after the verdict, the same court granted bail to all four for a month.

Meanwhile, 12 US Senators wrote to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday urging her to end what they said the persistent harassment of Prof Yunus.

2,000 people travel from Uttara to Motijheel on each train. This has impacted the business of buses.

Mohammad Alam, a 42-year-old businessman, who used to commute between Pallabi and Motijheel, said the metro service had saved him from the agony of spending hours in traffic.

"Somedays, it took me almost three hours to travel just 14 kilometres. Now it takes only 30 minutes," he said yesterday.

According to a 2017 World Bank analysis, traffic congestion eats up 3.2 million working hours per day in Dhaka, one of the world's most densely populated cities.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurated the Uttara North-Agargaon section of the country's first metro rail in December 2022.