

MY DHAKA



PHOTO: SHADAB SHAHROKH HAI

## A walk from TSC to Boi Mela

AYMAN ANIKA

On any other day, a 10-minute walk from the TSC to Bangla Academy may seem mundane. Every February, however, this stroll can turn into a memorable one as you will experience a burst of colours, culture, and festivity, thanks to the Ekushey Grantha Mela.

Torsa Hasan Lamiha, a student of Fine Arts at Dhaka University, came with her friends to visit the Boi Mela. "The transformation of our university grounds is indeed admirable," she said, describing how the area goes into a festive mood during the Boi Mela.

"We see a diverse crowd walking the street, which we do not see often. It is refreshing to get so many people



flocking here in their colourful saris and panjabis."

During the vibrant book fair, the area around Bangla Academy and Dhaka University transforms into a

bustling marketplace, teeming with hawkers and vendors selling an array of souvenirs that capture the essence of our culture. Traditional jewellery made from wood or beads is a favourite among visitors.

Artisans are also seen calling to passers-by with handmade crafts – wooden toys, paper birds, and beautiful clay figurines. The younger visitors rejoice at the sight of candy floss and balloons, with parents succumbing to their children's demands.

A father of two, Hasibul Alam, was seen keeping his two sons close to him while purchasing balloons. He mentioned, "I have been attending the

Boi Mela since I was a student at Dhaka University and now, I came here with my sons. I do not mind their demand for toys and balloons because I know these memories will stay with them for a lifetime."

Truly, these souvenirs, ranging from handcrafted memorabilia to flags of our country, are not just items for sale but tokens of collective memory and identity.

Amidst the bustle, the melodic sounds of an ektara played by a lone artist became audible. With this traditional instrument, he produced music that seemed to weave through the crowd, connecting individuals in a

shared moment of cultural reflection as the onlookers continued to admire the ektara player and take photos or videos.

So, on any normal day would you find such an artisan with an ektara? The chances are highly unlikely. However, the spirit of the Boi Mela brings together diverse people across the country.

As one meanders towards Bangla Academy, the aroma of jhal muri (spicy puffed rice), pithas, and fuchka fills the air and makes one feel hungry. People of all sorts make a stop here, conversing and eating before continuing their walk to the Boi Mela.

The street leading from TSC to Bangla Academy, in essence, becomes a celebration of our life in all its facets during February. From the hawkers to the artists, from the food stalls to the laughter of children, each element contributes to a larger story of cultural pride, communal spirit, and intellectual curiosity. Nonetheless, it is the people, more than anything, who bring the street to life.

This 10-minute walk ends with reaching Bangla Academy, where the scene becomes even livelier, and books take centre stage. Intellectuals, students, and creatives mingle and engage in spirited discussions on fairgrounds, reminding us how our vibrant cultural landscape is fostered by the Ekushey Boi Mela.

## Bus staffer crushed to death between two vehicles

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A bus counter manager was crushed to death between two buses in the capital's Jatrahari area yesterday.

The victim, Rakibul Hasan Nasir, 50, was the manager of a Banaful bus counter. He was from Barishal's Ujirpur, said one of his relatives.

Victim's colleague Suman Khan said Rakibul was assisting a bus in leaving the counter at Jatrahari around 4:00pm. At that time, a bus of another paribahan was heading towards another counter. Rakibul got stuck between the two buses and was seriously injured.

Doctors declared him dead when he was taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, said Bachchu Mia, in-charge of DMCH police camp.

## Teen killed allegedly by father in Gazipur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

A man allegedly killed his teenage daughter in Kaliakoir upazila of Gazipur yesterday.

The deceased, Yasmin Akhter, 14, tried to stop her parents from quarrelling when the father, Mohammed Bulu Mandal, stabbed her with a knife out of anger, police said quoting locals.

The father then tried to commit suicide using the knife inflicting severe injuries on himself, reports our Gazipur correspondent quoting police sources.

The daughter and the father were taken to Kaliakoir Upazila Health Complex where doctors declared Yasmin Akhter dead, said Dr Md Lutfur Rahman Azad, health and family planning officer of the health complex.

Mohammed Bulu Mandal has been transferred to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), said Rahaduzzaman Akand, sub-inspector (SI) of Kaliakoir Police Station.

No one has yet been arrested in this connection, he added.

## BNP leader Alal released from jail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

BNP Joint Secretary General Syed Moazzem Hossain Alal has been released from Gazipur's Kashimpur jail.

He walked out of the prison around 4:00pm yesterday, our local correspondent reports quoting Kashimpur Central Jail-2 Senior Jail Superintendent Mohammad Amirul Islam.

Alal got released after securing bail from the High Court, a source in the BNP said.

On November 6 last year, the court of Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Md Rashidul Alam sent the BNP leader to jail on completion of his five-day remand in the case filed over vandalising Muktiyuddha Museum of Razarbagh Police Lines during a clash with policemen on October 28.

Alal was arrested from a Dhaka Bank branch in the Shahinbag area of the capital on October 31 last year.

Alal's release came after senior BNP leaders including BNP's Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, BNP Standing Committee member Mirza Abbas and Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury walked out of jail.

On October 28 last year, BNP activists and police clashed during the party's grand rally in the capital. A slew of cases were filed against hundreds of BNP leaders and activists after the clashes.

## Load shedding may spike in summer

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than 11,000MW, meaning people in many areas in Dhaka and elsewhere are experiencing daily power cuts before the demand hit anywhere near the peak.

In fact, the state-owned agency started load shedding in the last half of January when the temperatures were still low.

Meanwhile, the government is set to hike the electricity price from the billing month of March, according to multiple top officials of the ministry of power, energy and mineral resources. A gazette notification on this is expected soon.

In short, users will have to count a higher bill without any improvement in their electricity supply when the utility is needed the most.

"There is no logic behind the electricity price hike before synchronising the fuel price with the international market," said Khondaker Golam Moazzem, research director at the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

The move will impact the overall economic activities and fuel inflation further, he said.

Inflation averaged 9.7 percent in the first seven months of the fiscal year, much higher than the government's revised target of 7.5 percent.

The more the government tries to solve the fuel shortage issues through the traditional ways, the deeper the government gets caught in a vicious circle, Moazzem said.

"To meet imports amid the dollar shortfall, the government took a loan of \$2.1 billion with a high interest rate of 7.5 percent to pay the fuel bills. This short-term solution will plunge the country into a deeper crisis for a long time."

The government is trapped in this situation as it failed to take the right decision at the right time, said Moazzem, adding that it will be tough to manage the fuel supply issues in the last quarter of the fiscal year.

"If there were around 2,000MW solar-based plants, the government would have been able to cut short the fuel requirements for that much power generation. They couldn't increase the local gas supply for a long time either," Moazzem added.

To meet the upcoming demand during the summer months, the PDB would be banking on gas and coal-fired power plants.

According to the plan, the highest 6,760 MW would come from gas-fired power plants subject to the availability of around 1,300 million cubic feet of gas per day.

"In a recent meeting, the Petrobangla officials said they will be able to increase the gas supply from March," said Khandaker Mokammel Hossain, member (generation) of PDB.

However, Petrobangla officials told The Daily Star supplying that volume of gas to the power sector is unlikely.

The coal-based power plants are expected to produce 4,100MW of electricity during the peak season, while 2,340MW will arrive from India.

The furnace oil-based power plants are unlikely to contribute much towards meeting the summer electricity demand.

While the government cleared about 38 percent of their outstanding bills amounting to Tk 27,000 crore by issuing special bonds, the power plants are facing issues in getting their fuel.

"The government cleared the bills by issuing bonds to the banks. But those banks have a liquidity and a dollar crisis," said a PDB official informed with the proceedings.

Regarding power generation from the high-cost diesel-fired plants, he said that those have been left as backup options in PDB's summer plan.

Last year, the highest power generation was 15,648MW on April 19, against the demand of 16,096MW.

## A carpenter's literary paradise

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Still, Narayan can boast a curated collection of rare historical and cultural volumes from both home and abroad, including the complete works of Michelangelo.

As he opens the library for the day, he single-handedly manages all its operations, with 15-20 readers coming in daily between 5:00pm and 10:00pm. On Fridays, the library operates from 9:00am to 12:00pm and then 4:00pm to 10:00pm.

Adding another dimension to his skills, three years ago Narayan embarked on creating wood portraits of people and landscapes. When visitor turnouts are low, he dedicates his time to his art, which he then

decorates his library with.

Regardless of the hour, if someone requests access to the library, Narayan obliges. Over the last three years, the library has welcomed a total of 6,500 readers.

Oyshi Halder Pritha, a college student, is one of his regular readers.

"To make the most of my free time, I often visit the library. It has helped in expand my knowledge on foreign books."

Another visitor, Priya Debnath, lauded Narayan's library, deeming it capable of satisfying readers from all walks of life.

"We are thrilled to have such a library in our town."

Mohammad Mostafa, another

resident of Jhalakathi, commended Narayan's relentless efforts for the library's survival, highlighting the challenges of maintaining it without external support.

However, Narayan is anxious about future of his library, which is akin to paradise for him.

"I want to create a larger and lasting library, for which securing permanent land is crucial."

Otherwise, he believes, sustaining the expenses will become increasingly challenging, especially as he grows older.

However, despite reaching out to relevant authorities for help, his efforts have so far proven futile.

## Myanmar army counterattack may spark fresh Rohingya influx

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border posts in Rakhine after defeating the troops in the last 18 days.

They said the gains by the rebels have resulted in a temporary lull in fighting along the Naikhonchhari border in Bandarban and Ukhyia and Teknaf in Cox's Bazar.

However, they, quoting Rohingyas in Rakhine, said the fighting is going to be intense as the army reprisal is expected in the coming days.

"Whoever wins in the fight won't change the fate of Rohingyas much," said Mohammad Zubair, chairman of the Arakan Rohingya Society for Peace and Human Rights.

He said the Rohingyas are being targeted by both the government troops and the Arakan Army.

"Both are trying to oust Rohingyas. Rohingyas are now facing a grave crisis in Rakhine," said Zubair added.

This correspondent talked to several other Rohingya leaders in the refugee camp and they also said more Rohingyas could try to enter Bangladesh to flee attacks.

Taking into account the possibility, Teknaf Upazila administration is urging people to help prevent Rohingya infiltration through loudspeakers.

So far, Border Guard Bangladesh and Coast Guard have intercepted 372 Rohingyas attempting to cross the Naf river on small boats this month.

Lieutenant Tahsin Rahman, media officer of Coast Guard Chattogram East Zone (Teknaf) said, "Our patrol has been strengthened in the Naf to prevent influx."

On Tuesday evening, this correspondent saw a boat carrying some 15/20 people on the Naf on the Myanmar side.

Coast Guard members were seen keeping a close eye on them.

Early this month, fierce clashes broke out between the Myanmar troops and the Arakan Army across the border from Tumbru area of Bandarban's Naikhongchhari upazila.

The fighting forced 330 members of the Myanmar junta forces to flee to Bangladesh. They were handed over to the Myanmar authorities on February 15.

RECENT GAINS BY REBELS

According to media reports, the opposition camp in Myanmar has recently made big gains against the military across the country.

However, the fight is still in the early stages as the junta still controls the levers of government, the main cities and larger towns.

According to Myanmar news outlets, Myanmar junta lost more bases and troops in the past four days as People's Defense Forces (PDFs) and Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) – two coalitions of rebels against the junta rule – continued to attack regime targets across the country.

Incidents were also reported in Kachin, Rakhine and Mon states and Sagaing and Bago regions.

In Rakhine, the Arakan Army said it seized a junta military outpost in Pae Yoon Taung Village of Maungdaw Township on Feb 19.

A strategic junta base on the Mandalay-Myittha Road in Kachin State was seized by ethnic armies after three days of fighting on Monday, the Arakan Army said.

It said it seized the base in Mansi Township's Sikhangyi Village in a coordinated offensive with the Kachin Independence Army and Kachin Region People's Defense Force.

Meanwhile, opposition forces said it used drones to drop bombs on the housing of regime officers

at the headquarters of Military Operation Command Center 19 in Ye Township, Mon State on Monday.

Meanwhile, at least seven regime forces were injured in Myinmu Township, Sagaing Region on Saturday when five PDF groups used improvised fixed-wing drones to drop bombs on a junta base of 40 junta troops in Gway Pin Tav Village.

## Israel behind gas pipeline sabotage: Iran

AFP, Tehran

Iran said yesterday that Israel was behind twin sabotage attacks against gas pipelines that disrupted supplies in at least three provinces last week.

The February 14 explosions hit pipelines in the cities of Safashahr in the southern province of Fars and Borujen in the southwestern province of Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari.

Officials said at the time it was an act of "sabotage and terrorism."

There were no reported casualties but state media said supplies were disrupted in the provinces of North Khorasan in the northeast, Lorestan in the west and Zanjan in the northwest.

"The explosion of the country's gas lines was the work of Israel," Oil Minister Javad Owji told reporters after a cabinet meeting. "The plot was foiled," he added.

Since the Islamic revolution of 1979, Iran has made the Palestinian cause a centrepiece of its foreign policy.

The Islamic republic does not recognise Israel and the two countries have engaged in a shadow war for years.