



## Award those who work for silent altruism: PM

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday asked all to identify and honour the dedicated souls who have been working silently for the welfare of people.

"I would like to call upon you to find such persons who have been working not for themselves but for people's welfare. They never can come to the limelight or don't want to come to limelight," she said.

The premier was giving out the Independence Award-2024 to 10 individuals for their outstanding contributions to the country, at the Osmani Memorial Auditorium.



Parked rickshaw-vans occupy a significant part of the footpath on Townhall road in the capital's Mohammadpur, obstructing movement of pedestrians. Some are even compelled to walk on the road amid speeding vehicles. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

## 1971 GENOCIDE Recognition from world must: speakers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Global recognition of 1971 genocide is important to prevent future genocides, said speakers at an event yesterday.

The programme titled "Bangladesh Genocide Day Lecture" was jointly organised by the ministry of liberation war affairs and the ministry of foreign affairs in collaboration with the Liberation War Museum in Agargaon.

Presenting the keynote, Elisa von Joeden-Forgey, Executive Director of the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention, criticised the West for ignoring Bangladesh's 1971 genocide, emphasizing the importance of global recognition. She highlighted the West's tendency to prioritise geopolitics over addressing such atrocities.

Bangladesh's fight for recognition is a global call for justice and a reminder that the past is never dead — its lessons must guide us to prevent future atrocities, she added.

Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM Mozammel Haque said the scale of Pakistan's crimes during the war was so massive that it was impossible to quantify them, according to the International Commission of Jurists.

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## Seventeen gang members held

OUR CORRESPONDENT,  
Narayanganj

Rab arrested 17 members of two notorious gangs. Members of "Tension group" and "Devil-exo group" were held in Siddhirganj, Narayanganj on Sunday night.

Maj Sanria Chowdhury, deputy director of Rab-II, said, "The arrested, aged 18 to 29, were involved in mugging, drug peddling, and extortion."

Raisul Islam Simanto who heads the "Tension Group", is the son of Shafikul Islam, a president candidate for Siddhirganj Swechhasebak League, said Jewel Hossen, former president of city Swechhasebak League.

One Sarib leads "Devil-exo group".

Among the arrestees was Robayet Esfak Pretom, son of former Narayanganj BNP convener Monirul Islam Robi.

Earlier, he was arrested over possessing explosives.

The arrestees are accused in looting and vandalising houses in Siddhirganj.

## WAPDA MASSACRE

# Memories still haunt survivors 53 years later

SUSHANTA GHOSH, Barishal

Even 53 years after Bangladesh's independence, the chilling memories of the Wapda massacre continue to haunt Jagannath Dey, an artist by profession.

According to freedom fighters and eyewitnesses, around 5,000-7,000 people were killed at the Wapda army camp on the bank of Barishal's Kirtankhola river in 1971. The bodies of freedom fighters and civilians were dumped in the river and a surrounding canal almost every other day, they added.

**Around 5,000-7,000 people were killed at the Wapda army camp on the bank of Barishal's Kirtankhola river in 1971.**

FREEDOM FIGHTERS AND EYEWITNESSES

In 1971, the Pakistani occupation forces turned the then Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) compound in Barishal into a torture and execution centre.

**THE LUCKY ESCAPE**

"On August 12, 1971, a jeep of Pakistan army stopped at the city's Bazar Road. The army men then broke the doors of houses and took many people, including me, to the army camp in Wapda



area. We were all waiting to meet a cruel death," said Jagannath.

Back then, Jagannath was a rising artist. "After breaking into our home, the army looked for my sisters. But I had already sent them to a safer place. They did not find my sisters and took me to the army camp."

"Many others were there — being inhumanely tortured. The sound of gunshots wailed now and then."

For those held captive at the Wapda camp, being gunned down was considered a stroke of "luck". For many of the captives, death was preferable to the horrors that awaited them inside, said Jagannath, who prayed for death himself, believing it to be the only escape from the unimaginable suffering.

In the middle of this nightmare,

Jagannath received an unexpected reprieve. A Pakistani soldier recognised him as an artist. Pakistan's Independence Day was on August 14, and the regiment needed someone to decorate their compound for the celebrations. The soldier brought him before the major who was in charge.

The major tasked him with decorating a gate, with the following theme "Pakistani victory over the Indian army in a war". Jagannath, desperate for survival, complied. His artistic skills became his unlikely escape card.

**THE LOST FRIENDS**

Sounds of gunshots, and groans of dying people were followed by an almost everlasting silence.

MAG Kabir Bhulu, a freedom fighter, is another individual who

survived the massacre. "In May 1971, my friend Anwar and I were brought to Wapda Army Camp in Barishal city along with many others. I was earlier tortured a lot at Gourandi camp. I could hardly walk," he recalled.

One morning, soldiers dragged Anwar away from the torture cell along with a few others. What followed was the sounds of gunfire and desperate screams and cries of those being killed. Anwar was never seen again.

"The then student leader Feroz Kabir was also shot dead in the same way," said Bhulu.

"The army would take 25-30 people to the bank of a canal nearby in the early morning every day, shoot them to death, and throw their bodies in the canal," he added.

**THE MARTYRED FATHER**

Shafiqur Rahman Jamal, a resident of Kalishchandra area of the city, lost his father at Wapda camp.

Pakistani soldiers stormed Jamal's home, searching for his father — Mujibur Rahman Kanchan, a prominent theatre artist. Failing to catch Mujibur, the occupation forces detained Jamal and his brother instead, taking them to the dreaded Wapda camp.

There, they gave a horrifying ultimatum: release of the sons in exchange of their father's surrender, or else...On Eid, their father walked into the camp,

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## DHAKA-ROME Biman to resume flights from tomorrow

RASHIDUL HASAN

Biman Bangladesh Airlines is going to resume its flight on the Dhaka-Rome-Dhaka route from tomorrow.

The maiden flight on the route — BG355 — is scheduled to depart from Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport at 3:30am on Wednesday, said Tahera Khondoker, general manager (public relations) of Biman.

On December 21, Biman Managing Director and CEO Shafiqul Azim announced the resumption of Dhaka-Rome flight, after around nine years, from March 26, marking Independence Day.

Biman's flight to Rome was discontinued in 2015 due to losses.

However, aviation experts questioned whether the much-awaited route would be viable without proper market analysis and business strategy.

Aviation expert Kazi Wahidul Alam told The Daily Star, "Biman will have to consider why flights on this route were suspended before and carry out a proper techno-financial assessment."

Carrying passengers only on a point-to-point basis may not make this route viable, he added.

Contacted, Biman MD said they had carried out a proper market analysis before re-launching the route.

Respective visa centres for Italy have already tripled their capacity to cope with the pressure of people intending to go to Italy, he said.

Biman hopes the route will be economically viable for the national flag carrier, as many non-resident Bangladeshis and migrant workers are living and working in Italy.

They also hope passengers from India, Nepal, and SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

## We have friends, not lords abroad: Quader

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

When a foreign master of BNP was plotting to foil the national election, a friendly country stood firmly by Bangladesh, said Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday.

"We do not have any masters abroad, rather we have friends. It's BNP who has a master... who advocates for BNP. Our friend is the tested friend of 1971," said Quader.

He was speaking at a discussion marking Genocide Day held in front of the AL headquarters in the capital's Gulistan.

While addressing the event, Quader blamed BNP for the lack of recognition of March 25 genocide.

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## People will not accept any foreign supremacy: Fakhrul

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday said people's aspirations for which they fought the war in 1971 against Pakistani army are now elusive due to Awami League's undemocratic rule.

Bangalee students, youth, farmers, labourers, and soldiers joined the Liberation War to build a democratic Bangladesh where people will have freedom of speech, people's government, and economic emancipation, but the dreams of 1971 are now elusive, said Fakhrul.

He said this at a rally of freedom fighters organised by BNP on the occasion of Independence Day in front of the party's Nayapalton central

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## Skilled midwives can save lives

### Speakers tell workshop to implement better training

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Skilled midwifery care can save lives in rural and remote areas, as trained midwives can provide support regarding maternity healthcare and safe delivery services, said speakers at a programme yesterday.

Speakers made the remarks at a workshop organised by Concern Worldwide Bangladesh at a hotel in the capital, focusing on maternal and child healthcare services.

To reduce maternal and newborn deaths in rural areas, they called for the development of a national deployment plan with the retention of midwives in hard-to-reach and low-performing areas of maternal healthcare.

They also called for strengthening collaboration among community, national, and local government actors to improve the midwifery-led healthcare service model in hard-to-reach areas of the country.

Concern Worldwide, along with Partners in Health and Development (PHD), has implemented the "Midwifery-led Health Services" project in Monpura and Charfesson upazila of Bhola district with financial support from Swedish Postcode Foundation since 2022.

Four midwives, two medical assistants, and six volunteers were appointed through the project to ensure services for around 600 institutional deliveries in the two islands over the last two years, said Fatema Showkot Jahan, senior project director of Concern Worldwide Bangladesh.

Speaking as chief guest, Ahmedul Kabir, additional

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Visitors of the Chattogram zoo welcome Prokriti, Srotoshini, and Ruposhi — the three tiger cubs — yesterday. Born to Joe and Joya last month, addition of these much-awaited little ones took the zoo's tiger count to 17.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN