



PHOTOS: SHADAB SHAHROKH HAT

Unmukto Library invites you to read under the open sky

AYMAN ANIKA

When we talk about libraries, what image first comes to our minds?

Perhaps, rows upon rows of bookshelves filled with countless books. In such libraries, confined within four walls, there is a silence so deep that you could hear a pin drop.

But have you ever seen a roadside open-air library, especially in a bustling place like Dhaka University? An exception to the conventional notion of libraries bounded by walls, Unmukto Library is built in an open space.

The concept of Unmukto or open-air library is rooted in the idea that access to books and knowledge should be open and unrestricted. These libraries do not have walls or doors and are typically located in public spaces such as parks, bus stations, or footpaths where people naturally gather and spend time.

Located at the entrance of Suhrawardy Udyan, adjacent to DU's Teacher-Student Centre, the library was established on February 9, 2022, by Tanbir Hasan Shaikat, a student of the university and the general secretary of DU's Chhatra League. He was lauded as a "Real Life Hero" by the United Nations.

"My childhood was spent in Lakshmipur, with the public library as my sanctuary. It shaped my dreams, my thoughts, and my future. I founded Unmukto Library to offer the same experience to the current



generation and to kindle in them the habit of reading," he said.

The library is open to everyone and aims to be a space for diverse interactions, fostering mutual respect and a liberal mindset. Before the library was established, according to Shaikat, the chosen location was neglected and polluted.

"We took the initiative of turning this dumpster into something beautiful – a welcoming space for learning and cultural activities," he noted, emphasising the transformational impact of the library on the area.

Unmukto Library, since starting its journey, has organised stage performances, folk music events, qawwalis, and movie premieres, while also promoting book reading.

The library's open-air setting encourages intellectual growth and a connection with nature.

Amidst the greenery of Suhrawardy Udyan, readers find a peaceful retreat from the chaos of city life, a space where they can lose themselves in the pages of a book or find themselves in the words of a poet.

Shaikat harbours a vision for the future where libraries become catalysts for societal transformation. "I hope that Unmukto Library will be a patron of culture and will motivate everyone who visits this place to develop a liberal and secular mindset. I also believe that if we establish more such libraries, people will learn to think beyond the superficial and appreciate the true value of books."

More such libraries in Dhaka can ensure that individuals from all walks of life, regardless of their socioeconomic status, can get access to invaluable resources such as books.

Moreover, spaces that promote cultural and educational activities, like Unmukto Library, can become hubs for community engagement, bringing together diverse groups of people and fostering a sense of unity and social cohesion.

The library has an assorted collection of books, with many donated by writers and teachers. The founder welcomes everyone to donate and further enrich the collection.

Unmukto Library remains open to the public from 10:00AM to 10:00PM.

UP member murdered in broad daylight

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narsingdi

A union parishad member was murdered in broad daylight by unidentified criminals in Sadar upazila of Narsingdi yesterday.



Rubel Ahmed

Rubel Ahmed, 40, was a member of Ward No 8 of Amdia Union Parishad, said KM Shahidul Islam Sohag, additional superintendent of Police (Sadar Circle) in Narsingdi.

The incident took place in front of Pakuria Government Primary School under Madhabdi Police Station around 1:20pm, he added.

Police and family said Rubel was returning home from a Narsingdi court on a motorcycle around noon.

When he reached in front of the school around 1:20pm, a group of 5-6 armed criminals attacked him.

They shot him and hacked him with sharp weapons, leaving him dead on the spot.

Police said they found bullet and knife wounds on various parts of the victim's body.

He died on the spot due to excessive bleeding due to the injuries, said Additional SP Shahidul Islam.

Rubel might have been killed due to previous enmity, he said, adding that an investigation has been launched into the murder.

"Those who are found involved in the murder will be brought to the book," he added.

AL leader detained for assaulting journalist

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

A local Awami League leader was detained yesterday for allegedly assaulting a journalist in Tangail's Sakhipur upazila.

The victim Saiful Islam, 45, upazila correspondent of the Asian Television and editor of News Tangail, an online portal, is undergoing treatment at the Sakhipur Upazila Health Complex.

For the last couple of years, Saiful has been renting a space for his online portal's office at Upazila Road.

Yesterday, the landlord Monir Uddin, also a member of AL's upazila unit, got into an argument with Saiful over the matter of renewing the rental agreement, witnesses said.

The victim alleged that at one stage of the argument, Monir hit him on the head with an iron rod. Later, locals rescued him and took him to the hospital.

Contacted, Monir Uddin, however, denied the allegation of attack, claiming that Saiful might have accidentally received the injury during a scuffle between them.

Contacted, Tangail Addl Superintendent of Police Md Sharfuddin said a written complaint has been filed over the incident and meanwhile, Sakhipur police have already detained Monir and questioned him at the station.

Correction

We made a factual error in a story headlined "Audit at Sonali Life Insurance: Ex-chairman, family pocketed Tk 187cr" published on April 7, 2024.

The 14th paragraph of the story mistakenly read: On the same day, on June 14, 2018, three other directors -- Maya Rani Roy, A Rajeeb Samdani and Hoda Ali Selim -- received shares, also without having to pay the share price, but at double the face value.

In fact, these three directors got the shares upon making the payment, and not without having to pay as our report mistakenly said.

We stand corrected, and apologise for the mistake.

5 more BGP members take refuge in Bangladesh

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the border with injuries, he added.

On March 11, 179 BGP members took refuge in Bangladesh through the Jamchhari border in Bandarban's Naikhongchhari upazila. They are currently under BGP custody in Naikhongchhari.

On February 15, 330 Myanmar nationals, including 302 BGP officials and four of their family members, two army personnel, 18 immigration members, and four civilians, who had entered Bangladesh were returned to their country.

The conflict claimed two lives on February 5, killing a Bangladeshi woman and a Rohingya man in the explosion of a mortar shell (fired from Myanmar) in Bandarban's Ghumdhum.

MV Abdullah en route to UAE

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Pirate activities reportedly began in Somalia's water territory long ago, but incidents rapidly increased during the war in Somalia from 2006 to 2009. The situation had been grave until 2012 when piracy dropped dramatically due to improved anti-piracy measures.

According to the reports under the project titled "Oceans Beyond Piracy", 31 vessels were released by Somali pirates in 2011 after they got ransom. The number dropped to eight in the following year. The average hostage period for a vessel was 178 days in 2011 while it was 316 days in 2012.

Pirate activities in and around Somalia's water territory increased again since November last year.

Expert mariners say the Somali pirates have become active again due to a lack monitoring by foreign navy forces as their ships were diverted to Gulf of Aden and Red Sea due to Yemeni Houthi attacks on ships passing through the Red Sea during the Israel-Hamas war.

On March 16, 2024, Indian Navy by forceful intervention freed Bulgarian ship MV Ruen from Somali pirates. The ship had been under captivity for three months.

It also reportedly tried to use force to free MV Abdullah but it backed out in face of opposition from the Bangladesh government and the ship

owner.

Shakawat Hossain, secretary of Bangladesh Merchant Marine Officers' Association (BMMOA), said KSRM officials could take prompt measures due to the firm's previous experience about dealing with such a situation.

This time they were more confident about securing the release of the ship and its crew members, he said.

KSRM Group Deputy Managing Director Shahriar Jahan Rahat said they had no idea about what to do when MV Jahan Moni was hijacked in December 2010.

"We were in a fix over the hijacking as we had no idea about what to do and whom we should contact," he told this correspondent yesterday.

But this time the KSRM authorities formed a seven-member team within an hour after hearing about the hijacking of MV Abdullah.

The officials completed preparations for the negotiation within a short time before the pirates made their first contact, said Shahriar.

The ship's insurer, British P&I (Protection and Indemnity) Club, also took prompt steps. A day after the hijack, it sent a crisis management team to Bangladesh to assist the KSRM team.

"The negotiation with the pirates became a mind-game duel as the attitude of the pirates' representatives

changed several times. Sometimes they were adamant not giving any space for bargaining over the terms and conditions," said Shahriar.

The pirates also seemed to be keen to complete the negotiations at the earliest, he added.

BMMOA President Anam Chowdhury said the deployment of war ships by the European Union Naval Force in the vicinity of MV Abdullah also put pressure on the Somali pirates.

Sabbir Mahmood, principal officer at the Mercantile Marine Office of the shipping department, said negotiations with the pirates reached final stage by April 4.

Negotiations on some issues, including finding a suitable way for handing over the ransom money, were done later, he told The Daily Star.

The negotiation ended by April 12 when both parties almost agreed to all the terms and conditions, said KSRM CEO Meherul Karim.

"We asked the pirates to send videos of each of the 23 crew showing that they all were physically well and sound. The pirates obliged."

Escorted by an Italian navy frigate, the ship travelled 200 nautical miles from the Somali coast till yesterday evening, said the KSRM CEO.

It would take one more week for the vessel to reach the port of Al Hamriyah in the UAE, he added.

section of Milestone College in the capital's Uttara, was recovered the next day.

Reyad and his brother-in-law Jewel drowned while trying to rescue Ramin, who was swept away by strong currents.

Quoting the victims' relatives, police and fire service officials told our Munshiganj correspondent that the three went to Besnal area of Tongibari from Dhaka's Mohammadpur on April 12 to visit their relative Alam Molla.

Around 4:30pm, the three, along with others, boarded a trawler in Dhankora area to cruise the river. Later, Ramin and several others got off the trawler to bathe there.

Eid journey turns tragic for many

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Families of two other victims, Robiul Islam, 19, and Ripon Hawlader, 38, were also devastated by the incident.

BIWTA, who is investigating the incident, filed a case against five staffers of Tasrif 4 and Farhan 6, who were arrested meanwhile.

ROAD CRASHES

The number of vehicles rose sharply amid the Eid rush, which resulted in a higher number of road crashes and deaths.

At least 122 people were killed and 195 others injured in 117 road crashes between April 8 and 14, according to the BRTA.

This means around 18 people were

killed on the road every day during this period.

The data shows that the highest number of people killed in a single day – April 9 – was 26, with 61 injured, in 27 road crashes.

DROWNING

Meanwhile, a railway engineer, his son and brother-in-law drowned while bathing in the Padma in Munshiganj's Tongibari upazila.

The bodies of Reyad Ahmed Raju, 45, additional chief engineer of Bangladesh Railway, and Mohammad Jewel, 40, a Prime Bank official, were recovered from the river on April 12.

The body of Reyad's son Ramin Arid, a 10th grader at the school

Israel war cabinet

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Countries including France, Belgium and Germany summoned the Iranian ambassadors. The French foreign ministry said France was working with its partners to de-escalate the situation.

Russia has refrained from criticising its ally Iran in public over the strikes but expressed concern about the risk of escalation on Monday and also called for restraint.

"Further escalation is in no one's interests," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

Iran mounted the attack in response to a suspected Israeli airstrike on its embassy compound in Syria on April 1 that killed seven Iranian Revolutionary Guards officers, including two senior commanders.

Its attack, involving more than 300 missiles and drones, caused only modest damage in Israel and no deaths. Most were shot down by Israel's Iron Dome defence system and with help from the US, Britain, France and Jordan.

In Washington, Biden reiterated US commitment to Israel's security ahead of a meeting with Iraq's Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani.

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said the Group of Seven major democracies were working on a package of coordinated measures against Iran.

"I spoke to my fellow G7 leaders, we are united in our condemnation of this attack," Sunak said in parliament.

Italy, which holds the rotating presidency of the G7, said it was open to new sanctions against individuals engaged against Israel.

In an interview with Reuters, Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said new sanctions would need the backing of all the G7. He suggested any new measures would be focused on individuals rather than whole nations.

Asian shares fell and gold prices rose yesterday as risk sentiment took a hit. But oil prices dipped and Israel's shekel rose against the dollar after the comments by two senior Israeli officials – Defence Minister Yoav Gallant and centrist minister Benny

Gantz – suggesting an Israeli response was not imminent.

Iran's attack has caused travel disruption, with at least a dozen airlines cancelling or rerouting flights, and Europe's aviation regulator reaffirming advice to airlines to use caution in Israeli and Iranian airspace.

Israel remained on high alert, but authorities lifted some emergency measures that had included a ban on some school activities and caps on large gatherings.

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian said Tehran had informed the United States that the attack on Israel would be limited and for self defence, and that regional neighbours had been informed of the planned strikes 72 hours in advance.

White House national security spokesperson John Kirby yesterday told reporters that the United States did exchange messages with Iran but that there were never any messages regarding Iran's timeframe or targets for its weekend attack.

Kirby would not be drawn into explaining what the messages were about. He said that reports suggesting Iran tipped off the United States about its plans were "categorically false" and "malarkey."

Turkish, Jordanian and Iraqi officials said on Sunday that Iran gave wide notice days before its drone and missile attack on Israel.

In the first-ever attack against Israeli territory, Iran launched more than 300 drones and missiles towards Israel.

The attack included 170 drones and 30 cruise missiles, none of which entered Israeli territory, and at least 110 ballistic missiles, of which a small number reached Israel, military spokesman Rear Adm Daniel Hagari said in a televised statement.

At least nine countries were involved in the military escalation – with projectiles fired from Iran, Iraq, Syria and Yemen and downed by Israel, the US, the UK and Jordan.

The shortest distance from Iran to Israel is about 1,000km (620 miles) across Iraq, Syria and Jordan.