



MY DHAKA

PHOTO: SHADAB SHAHROKH HAI

LOVE ROAD AT MIRPUR

# A youthful street

ASHIF AHMED RUDRO

Certain neighbourhoods in Dhaka have that one spot where people gather to just sit back and relax. For Mirpur, it's the frequently discussed street referred to as "Love Road".

THE REGULAR PICTURE

The place starts to buzz from the afternoon. In the evening it reaches its prime and puts on its true bustling face, full of youth and vivacity. In the mild darkness of the evening, under the street lights, this place sparkles with energy, music, and the smell of street food.

The place is most busy during the evenings of holidays and a lot of people gather here. Noticeably, almost all of the people here are young adults. The place is popular amongst couples and friends who like to just sit back and talk.

Take Slowgan Ahmed Anik for example. Anik is a CA student looking to finish his studies; every other Friday, he comes here with his friends.

"I come here because it reminds me of campus life. Notice that all the people here are young and are having fun," said Anik referring to a group of youth who were singing together with one guitarist sitting in the middle of the gathering.



There are multiple such groups where people are carrying musical instruments and some are playing whatever they feel like at the moment.

Labonno from Mirpur-1 is an admission candidate this year who used to come here frequently.

"I don't come here as often as I used to. It's not the same as it was before. Even five or six years ago this place used to be more animated. There were more colours and more music. Now it's a bit different."

While this place is quite dominated

by people from Mirpur, Love Road is popular enough to draw people from different parts of Dhaka. Anik says he lives in Mirpur-10 but comes here for a walk while one of his friends comes from Mirpur-13 and another friend comes from Dhanmondi, just so they can spend some time together.

THE FOOD SCENE

The street food here is eye-catching because the place is always bustling. There are several restaurants on the roadside as well as street food stalls. There are multiple options for *matka*

*cha*, *fuchka*, and *panipuri*. There are street hawkers ferrying peanuts, different types of chutneys, chips, and regular tea.

If you feel like something heavier, fast-food options such as burgers and pizzas are available here along with kebabs and grills. Juice bars will offer you juices, coffee and shakes to soothe your soul.

Some of the stalls such as the *matka cha* stall or the *panipuri* stalls are well decorated to catch your attention. There's also sand tea (*baalu cha*) and several other interesting options to try.

"Some of the items here are really good. I liked the pizza from the street stall but I wasn't impressed by the drinks," said Shihabur Rahman who works at a consultancy firm and comes to Love Road regularly.

"I often sit at a tea stall across the street but this place is better than a tea stall. At least it presents a better environment," he added.

What becomes evident from people's reaction is that people in Dhaka are badly in need of more recreational places. Parks and open places have become a myth so naturally people are clinging onto any and every place they can find for a hangout and Love Road is as good an option as any.

## SSC, equivalent exam results on May 12

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has decided to publish the results of this year's Secondary School Certificate and equivalent exams on May 12.

The results will be handed over to the prime minister around 10:00am that day, said MA Khair, public relations officer of the education ministry.

As many as 2,024,192 candidates from 11 educational boards sat for the exams this year.

The SSC and equivalent exams started on February 15 and ended on March 12. The results are usually published within 60 days of the completion of the exams.

## 3 members of fake currency gang arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

Rapid Action Battalion yesterday said it busted a gang involved in the printing and circulation of counterfeit banknotes in Brahmanbaria.

Rab arrested three people during the raid and seized fake currency worth Tk 4,88,500 along with printing materials used in the fabrication process, said a press release signed by Moshirur Rahman Sohel, assistant superintendent of police of Rab-9 in Sylhet.

The operation was conducted in Kamalmora village under Bijoy Nagar upazila Thursday night, the release added.

The arrestees are Md Rassel Hagi, 32, a resident of Faridganj upazila of Chandpur, Alamgir Hossain, 34, a resident of Feni Sadar Upazila and Sani Miah, 19, son of Sahab Uddin of Bijoy Nagar in Brahmanbaria.

A case was filed against them with Bijoy Nagar Police Station. All three arrested have been sent to jail via a court order.

## Two siblings drown

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Munshiganj

Two siblings drowned in a pond while playing next to it in Munshiganj Sadar upazila yesterday afternoon.

The deceased were identified as Al-Amin, 7, and his sister Maryam Akhtar, 8, children of Noor Alam of Kewar Dhalibari area.

They were students of the local Al Jamiatul Tara Matia Khaliya madrasa.

Locals recovered their bodies from the pond around 7:30pm.

Thander Khairul Hasan, additional superintendent of police (Sadar Circle) in Munshiganj, said, "If the family has any complaint, legal action will be taken after the investigation."

## Bangladesh drops

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Bhutan, who previously led the region, now stands in third place in the region with a score of 37.29 and a global ranking of 147th.

Sri Lanka follows closely behind at fourth place with a score of 35.21 and a global rank of 150th.

Pakistan occupies the fifth position in the region, standing at 152nd place.

India holds the sixth position regionally and has climbed to 159th globally from last year's 161st.

Afghanistan now ranks at the bottom of the region, plummeting 26 places to 178th, with a score of 19.09.

The report highlights that in the Asia-Pacific region, which is the world's second most challenging region for journalism, Myanmar, China, North Korea, Vietnam, and Afghanistan are among the top 10 most dangerous countries for media personnel.

Norway retains its top spot in the global index with a score of 91.89, followed by Denmark, Sweden, Netherlands, Finland, Estonia, Portugal, Ireland, Switzerland, and Germany, rounding up the top 10.

The 2024 World Press Freedom Index assesses the level of freedom enjoyed by journalists and media across various countries and territories, analysing five contextual indicators: political context, legal framework, economic context, sociocultural context, and safety.

The report underscores that press freedom worldwide faces threats from political authorities, as indicated by the significant decline in the political indicator, which has experienced a global average decrease of 7.6 points.

## All secondary edn institutions to stay shut in 25 dists

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incursion, the discomfort may increase, said the message.

On Thursday, the education ministry announced that secondary educational institutions in some districts may remain closed today depending on weather conditions.

The ministry yesterday disclosed the districts' names.

Meanwhile, the primary schools will resume in-person classes tomorrow as per the earlier announcement of the primary and mass education ministry while the pre-primary classes will remain shut until further notice.

## How empowered are they really?

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influential politician, they added.

Women MPs, in fact, do not have any constituency and are not given authority or any responsibility to be effective political leaders.

Speaking to this correspondent, several reserved seat MPs said they not only faced obstacles but also humiliation. They could not carry out any activities in their localities due to rival general seat MPs who, they said, have all the power.

Amatul Kibria Keya Chowdhury, an independent lawmaker from Habiganj-1, who was a reserved seat MP in the 10th Sangsad, says, "It was challenging for me to work as a reserved seat MP, as we didn't have any constituency. Officially, all of Bangladesh was my area."

"We were actually MPs only in name as we weren't given any specific responsibilities."

Keya recalled attending many political programmes as a reserved seat MP where she was not even given a chair to sit on.

"Even if there was a chair for me, others occupied it because I was just a reserved seat MP."

"In many official events, people asked me why I was there, which was so humiliating for me... I didn't get any cooperation from the local administration either due to my 'reserved seat' status. However, after being elected in a general seat, I don't face such problems anymore."

In the most recent election on January 7, only 20 women were elected from a total of 300 general seats. In the 11th parliament, the number was 22.

As a matter of fact, in the last four parliamentary polls, the number of women in general seats was limited between 18 and 22.

In the current parliament, of the 50 reserved seats for women, the ruling Awami League got 48 and the opposition Jatiya Party two.

Three of the 48 from AL were ministers or MPs in general seats in the previous parliament.

As they could not win the general seats in the January 7 polls despite being nominated by the party, they were later nominated for the reserved seats.

The case was similar for the two women JP MPs in the current parliament's reserved seats.

Women's rights activists have expressed their frustration about the failure to include most of the reserved seat MPs in the mainstream politics or leadership.

Shireen Huq, founding member of Naripokkho and a prominent women's rights leader, said the demand for direct elections for women's reserved seats was made by the women's movement in Bangladesh for long.

"The current arrangement of nominations [for reserved seats] by political parties ensure that the women MPs have their allegiance, first and foremost, to the party."

She explained how the original idea of reserved seats for women was to ensure female representation in parliament and their participation in the important task of lawmaking.

"Secondly, it was to advance the cause of women and women empowerment at a national level."

She added, "Unfortunately, women MPs in the reserved seats have by and large failed to fulfill that expectation."

Constitution expert Shahdeen Malik said reserved seats for women in parliament was introduced in 1972 under a certain context, which was logical and befitting at that time.

The relevance of reserved seats, however, has gradually decreased, he believes.

"In order to increase the empowerment of women, it's now necessary to increase the nomination of women in general seats."

Prof Tofail Ahmed, political analyst and a local government expert, said, "Family identity has now become the biggest criteria for getting nominated in the reserved seat in our country. It's difficult to get a nomination if you aren't a relative, wife or daughter of a big leader."

He too thinks there is no need for the reserved seats for women in the current context.

Prof Tofail further said, "The women who are coming in the quota system aren't politicians in the real sense. Eligible women are not nominated anymore... I don't think it's necessary to nominate MPs just for them to enjoy some benefits and privileges."

The ruling AL, however, insists no one is being unduly favoured through the reserved women's seats, and that merit and political background of the nominees are considered in this regard.

AL Presidium Member Abdur Razzaque said women still face many issues contesting in direct elections.

"That's why we think that this system [of reserved seats] should exist for some more years," he said, adding, "However, we should become more careful so that more eligible women with strong political backgrounds are nominate for the seat."

AL Joint General Secretary Mahbulul Alam Hanif says, "Awami League has given the utmost importance to political commitment by giving nominations for the women's reserved seats."

Speaking to The Daily Star, Nurun Nahar Begum, a JP lawmaker elected in the reserved seat, said most reserved seat MPs face discrimination while trying to discharge their duties as lawmakers.

"We are not given any fund allocation to discharge our duties, like those in general seats get. We feel ashamed when people of our areas come to ask for various kind of government assistance. Not having our own constituencies is a big obstacle."

Shireen Huq said, "Our demand now is that political parties nominate greater numbers of women in their electoral list, so that a certain number of women are nominated to contest directly in the national election."

"The Election Commission has an important role to play in ensuring that greater numbers of women are able to enter parliament and play effective roles in lawmaking, law reforms and law enforcement."

Dr Fauzia Moslem, president of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, echoed the sentiment.

"Those who are nominated for the reserved seats are mostly representatives of their respective parties. That's why they talk more about issues related to their parties instead of focusing on women's rights issues."

"We don't want the scrapping of the provision for reserved seats for women. What we demand is direct election in those seats."

## 2,200 arrested

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Similar camps have sprung up at universities in Melbourne, Canberra and other Australian cities.

Unlike in the US, where police have forcibly removed scores of defiant pro-Palestinian protesters at several colleges, protest sites in Australia have been peaceful with scant police presence.

Yesterday, protesters rallied to demand University of Sydney divest from companies with ties to Israel, echoing calls from students in the US, Canada and France.

In Canada, Quebec Premier Francois Legault said on Thursday the encampment at Montreal's McGill University should be dismantled as more students erected pro-Palestinian camps across some of Canada's largest universities, demanding they divest from groups with ties to Israel.

Students also set up encampments at Canadian schools including the University of Toronto, the University of British Columbia and the University of Ottawa.

"We want the camp to be dismantled. We trust the police, let them do their job," a spokesperson for Legault said.

There was also a pro-Israel counter-protest in Montreal Thursday. The two sides were kept separate.

In France, police entered Paris' Sciences Po university yesterday to remove dozens of students staging a pro-Gaza sit-in in the entrance hall.



Firefighters try to douse flames at the grasslands of Yamuna floodplains in New Delhi, India yesterday. Soaring temperatures and dry spells have caused frequent forest fires in other parts of India.

PHOTO: AFP

## Lightning fatalities on the rise

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In 2010, the number of people killed by lightning strikes was 123. Last year, it was 350, says the NGO.

"The pattern and characteristics of the weather drastically changed in Bangladesh due to global warming, resulting in extreme climatic events like prolonged heatwaves, cold waves and shifts of seasons. That's why we see a rising trend in lightning," said Muhammad Abul Kalam Mallik, one of the authors of GIS-based spatial analysis.

The study analysed data from Bangladesh Meteorological Department records and NASA's Lightning Imaging Sensor data from the International Space Station's Near-real Time mission to assess lightning-related incidents from 2015 to 2022.

"As a consequence of its geographical location, Bangladesh ranks among the countries most prone to lightning fatalities globally," reads the study.

The pre-monsoon and monsoon seasons are characterised by soaring temperatures and frequent lightning strikes, driven by intense solar radiation. These seasons witness the highest density of cloud-to-ground lightning strikes.

As this is also a period of intense agricultural activities, farmers and fishermen remain particularly vulnerable to lightning strikes, it says.

Experts link climate change, inadequate early warning systems, and absence of big tree coverage with the increased frequency of lightning-induced deaths in Bangladesh.

According to Nayeem Wahra,

member secretary of Disaster Forum, "Local warning systems should be enhanced and lightning arresters should be installed in the lightning-prone areas. If we can make people aware, these deaths can be prevented."

Lightning-related fatalities are different because it is often the most active person of the family or breadwinner who dies, Wahra says, urging the government not to cut large trees as these can save lives during lightning strikes.

The government declared lightning a natural disaster in 2016 and took steps to plant around 5 million palm trees along roads, but experts say the project has yet to yield the expected result because the trees that had been planted take a long time to grow.

"We have sent a proposal to the planning commission, seeking approval for installing lightning arresters in the open fields with little tree coverage. Hopefully, we will get the approval and will be able to install the arresters from the next fiscal year," says Mizanur Rahman, director general of the Department of Disaster Management.

The BMD installed lightning detection sensors in eight lightning-prone districts to send early warnings, says its Director Azizur Rahman.

"We send messages to the Department of Disaster Management and Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority 30 minutes before lightning. We are also running a pilot project to send messages to the people present in a particular area," he adds.