

# How NGO ship rescued 35 Bangladeshis

AFP, Aboard The Ocean Viking

In the darkness, a shape emerged among the Mediterranean waves — over 30 men, huddled shoulder to shoulder in the hold of a fibreglass boat.

“We’re here to help you!” called out Giannis, a member of the search and rescue team of the Ocean Viking charity ship, on patrol in the waters between Malta and Italy.

A few hours earlier, the crew had been pulled from their bunks at 4:00am by news of the boat in distress.

The crackly call to action — “SAR Team, Ready for Rescue!” — was relayed across walkie-talkies around the ship, a former supply vessel for oil rigs now run by SOS Mediterranean.

The team pulled on life-jackets, hats, gloves, boots and waterproof trousers, before launching a semi-rigid boat in the water.

The beam of their flashlight cut through the darkness and swept across the foam of the waves before David, at the controls, shouted out that the boat had been spotted.

As they pulled alongside the migrant boat, the Bangladeshi men on board grabbed the rescuers’ arms and life jackets.



**Volunteers take care of migrants on board the Ocean Viking rescue ship of European maritime-humanitarian organization ‘SOS Mediterranean’ following a rescue operation off Malta early yesterday.** PHOTO: AFP

Haggard and trembling, their clothes soaked, their feet bare and their eyes red, they threw themselves into the rescue boat. Ten minutes later they were back on Ocean Viking.

The 35 men said they had been sailing for three days, covering nearly 600km from Benghazi in northern Libya. They wanted to reach the Italian island of Sicily.

They are the latest among what SOS Mediterranean says are about 10,000 people rescued by the Ocean Viking in the Mediterranean since 2019.

On board, nursing staff identified three men needing immediate attention. One unconscious young man was wrapped in a survival blanket.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

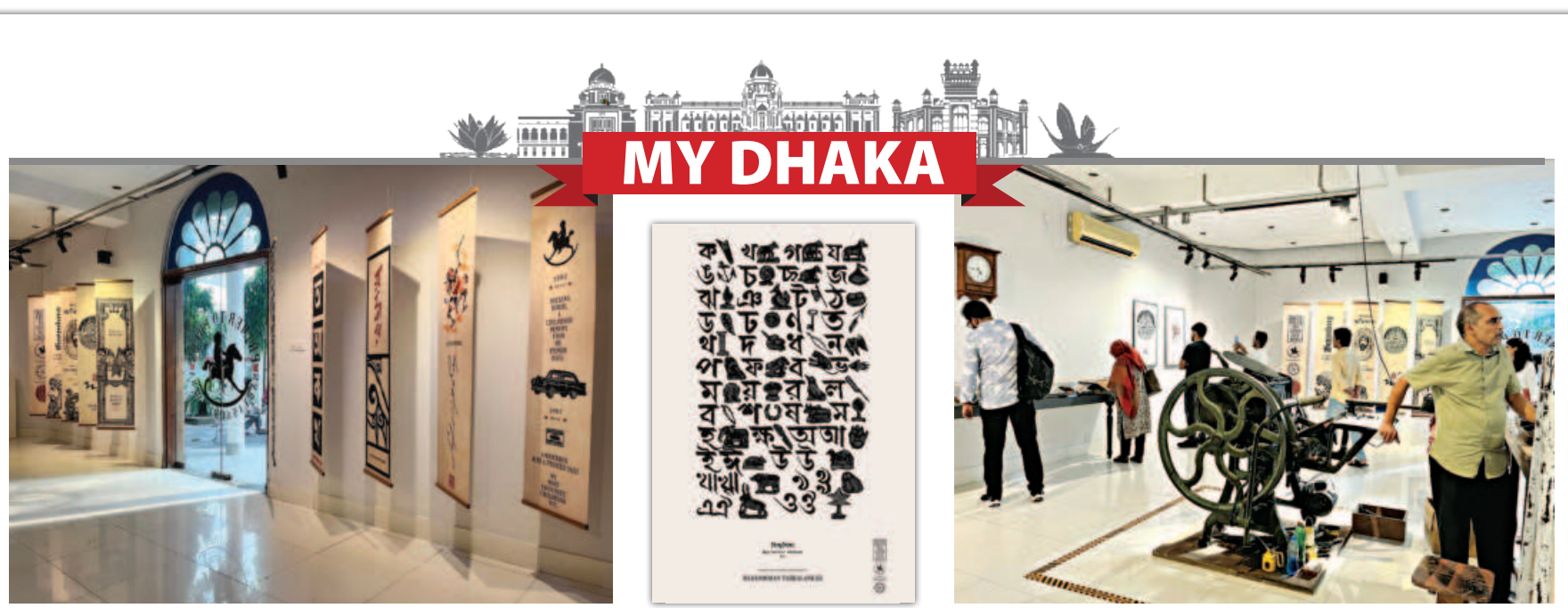


PHOTO: KAMRUL HASAN MITHON

## PRIMER TO PRESS

Celebrating the evolution of Bangla alphabets

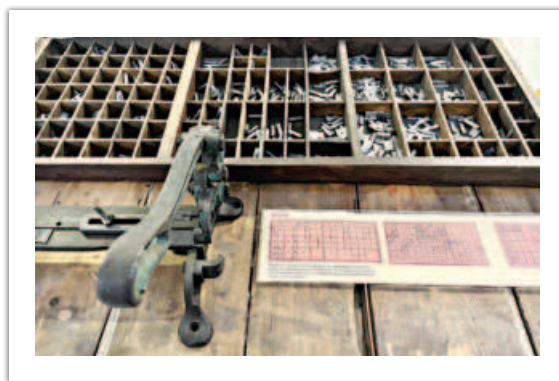
RBR

The recently held exhibition along with the book launch event of Bornomala: Bangla Alphabet Book Collection by Sabyasachi Hazra was profoundly insightful. As an artist, researcher, and prolific book cover designer, Hajra needs little introduction. He has been working to promote Bangla fonts, typography and calligraphy for a while and his efforts went into showing the evolution of Bangla alphabets at the show, Primer to Press.

Visitors were seen raving in appreciation for his attempt to touch on the fore eight Bangla primers published between 1849 and 1948. Primers are books that introduce a language to preschool students and interestingly Bangla primers were all done by progressive-minded, socially conscious people of their time like Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Rabindranath Tagore, Abanindranath Tagore, Madanmohan Tarkalankar, and others.

“The inception and flourishing of Bangla primers are deeply intertwined with the context of the Bengal Renaissance. It is regrettable though that this significant chapter of history is not adequately archived or considered as a valuable historical document,” said the artist.

He was thrilled to see people of all walks of life, particularly faculty members of different institutions like schools, colleges, and universities taking an active part in promoting the show to their students. They came in groups of 40 or so and Hajra happily explained the evolution of Bangla primers, calligraphy, and typography to them.



Dr Shisir Bhattacharja, professor, Institute of Modern Languages, is an academic who has taken the exhibition to heart.

“Languages,” Dr Bhattacharja said, “have four types of recognition — social, political, economic, and international. Social recognition of Bangla and the Bangla alphabet was achieved in the Middle Ages, political recognition was achieved in 1948-52. Economic recognition of the language has not been fully achieved, because economics and politics are two inseparable pages of the same sheet of paper. Bangla is still not the language of justice in Bangladesh. Bangla is not the language of instruction, even in Dhaka University, which vainly boasts of being the cradle of the language movement.

“I don’t think Sabyasachi has any aim other than to attract children to Bangla and promote the effectiveness of the Bangla alphabet in their lives. Our

Bangla language is falling behind with the widespread use of English and Hindi... Might I remind you that whenever we lose our alphabet, we lose much in the language competition.”

Today’s children hardly speak Bangla, let alone write, and parents let them go by emphasising that the alphabet and the language are difficult. Some even take to a sense of false pride as to how their children can only speak in English.

Theatre activist Reetu Sattar said, “Time has changed and many of our children are distant from their mother language. As a primer, they might think of the English alphabet. When I learned that Sabyasachi Hazra’s long-honed research is coming as an exhibition, I felt the emergency need to expose the exhibition to as many children as possible.”

Aziza Ahmed was seen visiting the exhibition with her teenage son and nephew.

“Seeing all the Bangla language primers framed in one place gave me goosebumps, bringing my childhood rushing back,” said Ahmed. “The letterpress machine was incredibly nostalgic as well.”

Ahmed fondly recalled that growing up in Old Dhaka, she had the opportunity to see many presses and while the one at the exhibition was a bit older, it was quite familiar. To her, the whole experience was like taking the children to a museum, introducing them to our heritage and history.

And people Bhattacharja, Sattar and Ahmed hopes that the entire exhibition can be converted into an alphabet and printing museum, and that it can travel all over Bangladesh for all to enjoy.

## Personal data up for sale online!

FROM PAGE 1  
The CDRs sold on social media groups and messaging apps were taken from the NTMC server, said the letter.

The NTMC requested that the individuals responsible for the unauthorised use and illegal transfer of sensitive information be identified and proper action be taken against them.

Until then, “all user IDs of ATU and Rab-6 will remain suspended”, read the letter. During the suspension, officers of the two organisations will collect information from the NTMC headquarters.

The data breach was first noticed in the login report from 8:57pm-9:27pm on April 25, the letter said. Between March 25 and April 25, the two police and Rab officers’ IDs collected way more data than any other users did.

The NTMC enclosed four pages of screenshots of secure messaging app Telegram, one page of screenshots of login report by ATU and Rab-6 officers, two pages of summary on information accessed by ATU and Rab-6, and a 23-page report on a Telegram channels.

Meanwhile, the ATU in a letter to the NTMC on May 2, said, “In a primary investigation, the ATU

found that constables Mrityunjoy Chandra Roy of the cybercrime wing and Khairul Islam of the operations wing were involved in selling sensitive data, including call detail records, in exchange for money. The constables admitted to it during interrogation.”

The constables were suspended on April 29, said the letter, adding that it had evidence of unauthorised data transfers through the login credentials of SP Farhana.

Rab Director General M Khurshid Hossain said the Rab-6 officer was closed and an investigation over the matter was going on. He added that constables who operate computers were probably responsible for the breach.

Mofiz Uddin Ahmed, deputy inspector general (admin) of ATU, said a departmental investigation was underway to find those who are involved. Action will be taken against them.

Neither Farhana nor Tarek responded to calls and text messages seeking comments.

Cybersecurity expert Sumon Ahmed Sabir told The Daily Star that one’s personal data and NID details can be used to open bank accounts and avail loans based on forged

documents. And that is only one of the crimes that can be committed through private data.

NTMC made some recommendations to prevent personal data theft. These include setting up a Network Operations Centre (NOC), Security Operations Centre (SOC), and auditing platform to secure the servers of NID and birth registration, centralising NID server management and overseeing connected organisations through a hub.

It also recommended replacing all API connections to national dataset servers with secure APIs and user role management, ensuring unique API credentials for each organisation, collecting mobile network operators’ data exclusively from NTMC, ensuring multi-factor authentication for all systems, and integrating biometric matching in the NID API for the Prison Inmate Database System (PIDS).

The NTMC said it may provide technical support for ensuring NID and birth registration security. Along with BTRC, NTMC needs to be included as a focal point for direct communication with Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube.

## Iran mourns Raisi’s death, vows continuity

FROM PAGE 1  
85-year-old Khamenei, whom Raisi had been expected to one day succeed by many observers.

Khamenei had urged Iranians Sunday, as the search was still ongoing, to “not worry” about the leadership of the Islamic republic, saying “there will be no disruption in the country’s work.”

The cabinet yesterday vowed that the government’s work would go on “without the slightest disruption” and said that “we assure the loyal nation that the path of service will continue with the tireless spirit of Ayatollah Raisi”.

Thousands of mourners massed in central Tehran’s Valiasr Square to pay their respects to Raisi as well as to Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian.

Funeral rites were set to start Tuesday in Tabriz, East Azerbaijan province, for them and the other victims — three crew, two bodyguards, an imam and a provincial governor — before Raisi’s body was to be taken to Tehran.

Iran’s military chief of staff Mohammad Bagheri ordered “a high-ranking committee to launch an investigation into the cause of the president’s helicopter crash”.

State TV broke the news early yesterday that “the servant of the Iranian nation, Ayatollah Ebrahim Raisi, has achieved the highest level of martyrdom”, showing pictures of him as a voice recited the Koran.

Flags soon flew at half-mast and a black banner was hoisted at a major Shiite shrine in city of Qom south of Tehran.

Global allies Russia and China and regional powers voiced their condolences, as did Nato, while the UN Security Council observed a minute of silence.

Condolences also came from Palestinian group Hamas, Lebanon’s Hezbollah and from Syria, all members of the so-called Axis of Resistance against Israel and its allies, amid high tensions over the Gaza war.

No such message was received from the United States, which had placed Raisi, a former head of the judiciary, on its sanctions blacklist for complicity in “serious human rights violations”.

Tehran has rejected those charges as null and void.

Meanwhile, an anonymous Israeli official told Reuters that Israel was not responsible for the crash, simply saying: “It wasn’t us.”

The price of gold hit a record high

in the morning as the shock news boosted support for the precious metal seen as a haven investment.

But analysts did not expect major changes, pointing out that ultimate power in Iran is held by the supreme leader and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps who work with a regional network of armed groups.

“It will be (the) status quo,” Jason Brodsky, an expert at the Middle East Institute, told the BBC of Iran’s relations with these groups.

“The IRGC reports to the supreme leader and liaises with Hezbollah, the Huthis, Hamas and the militias across the region. The modus operandi and the grand strategy of the Islamic republic will remain the same.”

Iranian authorities first raised the alarm on Sunday afternoon when they lost contact with Raisi’s helicopter as it returned from a border meeting with Azerbaijan’s President Ilham Aliyev to inaugurate a dam.

Only two of the convoy’s three helicopters landed in Tabriz, setting off a massive search and rescue effort, with multiple foreign governments soon offering help.

Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi at first spoke of a “hard landing” and urged citizens to ignore hostile foreign media channels and get their information “only from state television”.

Guards, army and police personnel joined the search as Red Crescent teams trudged up a steep hillside in the rain while rows of emergency services vehicles waited nearby.

As the sun rose yesterday, rescue crews said they had located the destroyed Bell 212 helicopter, with no survivors.

State TV reported that the aircraft had “hit a mountain and disintegrated” on impact, and the Red Crescent soon confirmed that “the search operations have come to an end”.

Raisi had in 2021 succeeded the moderate Hassan Rouhani, at a time the economy was battered by renewed US sanctions over Iran’s contested nuclear programme.

Iran saw a wave of protests in 2022 triggered by the death in custody of Iranian-Kurdish woman Mahsa Amini after her arrest for allegedly flouting strict dress rules for women.

In March 2023, regional rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia signed a surprise deal that restored diplomatic relations.

The Gaza war sent tensions soaring and a series of tit-for-tat escalations led to Tehran launching hundreds of

missiles and rockets directly at Israel in April.

In a speech hours before his death, Raisi emphasised Iran’s support for the Palestinians, a centrepiece of its foreign policy since the 1979 Islamic revolution.

“We believe that Palestine is the first issue of the Muslim world,” said Raisi.

Hamas hailed Raisi as an “honourable supporter”, Hezbollah mourned “a protector of the resistance movements” and Yemen’s Huthis declared his death a loss “for the entire Islamic world”.

Analysts said the death of Raisi could lead to a period of political instability in Iran but is unlikely to change Iran’s foreign policy or its role in the Middle East.

“A successor may emerge who is as conservative and loyal to the system as Raisi was,” said Ali Vaez, an Iran specialist at the International Crisis Group.

“On foreign policy, the supreme leader and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps will continue to dominate strategic decisions”, he said on social media site X, anticipating “more continuity than change”.

**PRESIDENT, PM SEND CONDOLENCES**

President Mohammed Shahabuddin and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday expressed shock and sorrow at the death of Iranian President Dr Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi and Foreign Minister Dr Hossein Amir-Abdollahian.

In a condolence message to Iran’s newly-appointed interim president Mohammad Mokhber, Shahabuddin said, “President Raisi’s visionary approach as well as courage and dignity in dealing with difficult issues stand as a model and inspiration for all of us. Iran has lost a wise and erudite leader whose empathy with the people made him outstanding.”

Hasina also conveyed her condolence in a letter to Mohammad Mokhber.

“I am deeply shocked and saddened to hear about the sad demise of President Dr Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi, Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, and members of the entourage in the tragic accident of the helicopter carrying them,” she said.

She said, “In this hour of grief, on behalf of the Bangladesh government, I convey our deepest condolences to the government and the people of Iran.”

## Govt allows battery-run rickshaws

FROM PAGE 1  
“You should have informed me [of the decision of ban]. What measures have you taken for their livelihoods? They are huge in number and taking such a hard decision was illogical without ensuring their livelihoods,” Mahub quoted Hasina as saying.

Motors are being installed in paddle rickshaws. It must be ensured if the conversion is done properly. If need be, appropriate chassis will have to be imported, he said quoting PM.

Hasina asked all these work to be done quickly to reduce the number of accidents.

She also instructed that the vehicles cannot operate on major and national highways, said the cabinet secretary.

Earlier in the day, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader at an event announced that the battery-powered rickshaws will only be permitted on Dhaka streets.

He said the prime minister directed the authorities to allow the three-wheelers considering the sufferings of the low-income people, who have

already been hit hard by price hikes of daily essentials. However, the vehicles cannot ply 22 highways as per the earlier decision, he added.

During the first meeting of the advisory council of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) on May 15, Quader asked the authorities concerned to take steps to stop the operation of the battery-run three-wheelers on Dhaka streets.

Following the instructions, police on Sunday began a crackdown on the vehicles, triggering angry protests. The rickshaw-pullers demonstrated, clashed with police, vandalised vehicles, and torched a police box.

Four cases were filed against around 2,500 people, mostly rickshaw-pullers, with Pallabi, Kafrul, and Mirpur police stations. At least 44 have been arrested so far.

The charges include attacks on the law enforcers and obstructing them from performing duties, arson and vandalism of police boxes, unlawful gathering on streets, and vandalising vehicles.

Yesterday, the rickshaw-pullers

continued their demonstration in different parts of the city, including Mohammadpur, Demra, Khilgaon, and Agargaon, causing sufferings to commuters.

They later greeted the government decision to allow them on Dhaka streets.

“We were in complete uncertainty as the crackdown began. We are happy. Now, I hope I will be able to maintain the family by running my rickshaw,” Abul Kalam, a rickshaw-puller of Kazipara, told The Daily Star.

However, many took to social media to oppose the decision on the grounds of congestion and safety.

“From now on, [battery-run] rickshaws will also run on the roads where they did not ply before. #victory will definitely come #Jam will prevail,” wrote a social media user, apparently ridiculing the decision.

In 2014, the High Court banned mechanised and battery-run rickshaws across the country as the vehicles are running without any registration.