

MY DHAKA

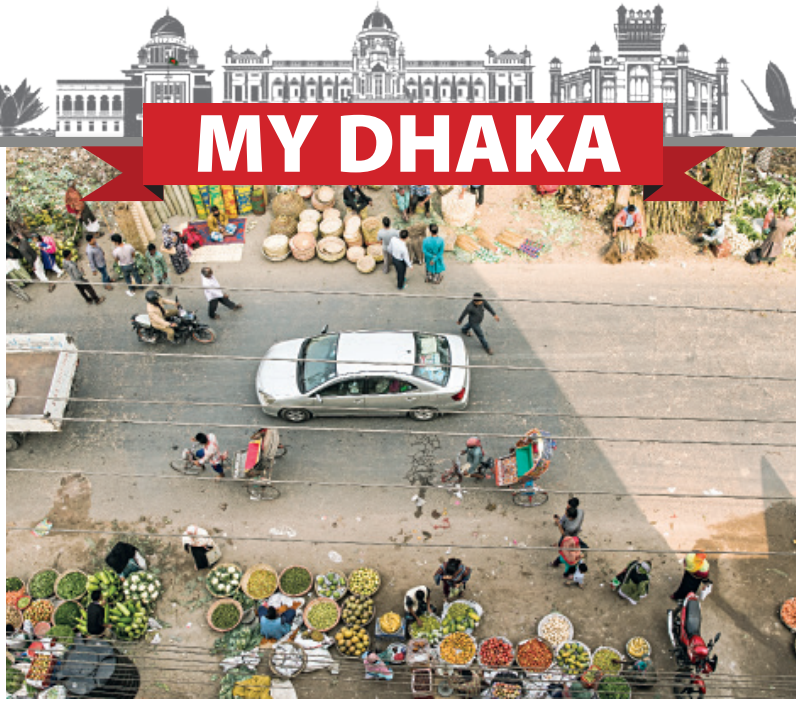


PHOTO: STAR

Scenes from a bazaar

RBR

Just a few kilometres off the city boundaries is a greener Dhaka. The colours and tempo of a busy market intrigues me with wafts of tea brewing in a soot laden old kettle in a tea stall. It is the people who make such bazaars come alive – their everyday rituals resembling the background scene of a movie. I was crossing through one such bazaar on the outskirts of Dhaka, early on a weekend morning. It felt like I was watching a motion picture, where everything moved at a slow, ritualistic pace. A group of beautiful women from the "bede" (snake charmers) community, caught my attention. Hot pink, saffron yellow, and green sarees with hibiscus flowers tucked in their high buns – these pretty ladies were decked up in jewellery. Rings on their toes, big dangling nose rings, and a pin stuck in their septum. Their colourful glass bangles jingled while their silver chains with fish or snake pendants made them look naturally beautiful.

As always, they were raising money for an orphan's wedding. To make me believe their cause, they invited me to a Friday afternoon wedding on their boat. This was my Chocolat movie moment, right there! At 7:00am, the shabby market was buzzing with activities. Cooks in makeshift hotels beside the big banyan tree were busy serving orders. One hotel cook made the trunk of the old tree his support wall, where he set up his stove. My breakfast of choice was the obvious egg roll and a steaming cup of sugary milk tea. The paanwallah with his assortment of jolly tins was making a sweet khili or a single betel leaf wrapped with sweet mouth fresheners for me, the treat was on the house for taking his pictures.

I was the odd one out in this "movie scene", a mere bystander envying their simple, easy life that was a shade of every colour of blue, black, and pink. If given the choice, I could have watched life go by in that unknown bazaar forever. But alas! I had to break the magic spell and return to my mundane city life. Just at the crack of dawn, when the sky is a hue of lapis lazuli, the crow's first cry brings these bazaars to life in a split second, almost literally rising out of the darkness of the night. Thanks to the Padma Bridge, going on such drives or day trips has become much easier than manoeuvring through city traffic. Drives to places like Bhanga Bazar for a cup of their fusion brew of tea and coffee in thick milk, or popping at least

five to six piping hot roshogollas of Khoka Miyar Mishiti shop in Tetul Tolar Mor in Faridpur. If you are lucky, you might even stumble upon a weekly bazaar or haat in an open space surrounded by old trees. These pop-up bazaars are the liveliest in the late afternoon and take up an almost fair-like atmosphere. These bazaars have everything ones heart could fancy, from people selling home-grown fresh vegetables, country chicken eggs, ducks, moa and narus, and handmade wares like cane baskets or pankhas. I love how men sit with a glass box full of local sweets under the shade of a tree, sharing the space acharwallahs or kuliwallahs. I love watching people. I love the green, the cool summer breeze on my face. A few kilometres off the city boundaries is a greener Dhaka like you have never seen. To the people of Dhaka, I suggest you sometimes venture out of the monotony and traffic of the city to discover all the little joys sitting on its outskirts.



3 Bangladeshis killed in Saudi Arabia road crash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chandpur

Three Bangladeshi migrant workers were killed in a road accident in Saudi Arabia on Thursday. They were residents of Chandpur's Faridganj and Haimchar upazilas. The deceased were identified as Sabuj Chowkidar, 38, of Paschim Bishkatali village of Faridganj upazila, Md Sabbir, 21, of Charbhanga village of Haimchar upazila and Md Rifat, 20, of Kamalapur village of Haimchar upazila. The accident occurred around 9:00am (local time) on Thursday when they were going to their workplace from Alif, a city in Saudi Arabia. Sabuj's father Jamal Chowkidar said they received information about the accident at 4:00pm on Thursday. Later, they were taken to a local hospital where doctors declared three people, including Sabuj, dead around 10:00pm, he said quoting relatives staying in Saudi Arabia. Sabuj was driving the car at the time of the accident, he added. Families of the victims are urgently calling for the cooperation of the departments of the government concerned in bringing the bodies of their sons.

French left vows 'total break' with Macron policies

AFP, Paris

France's left put up a united front yesterday, vowing a "total break" with President Emmanuel Macron's policies if it wins historic polls, while far-right figurehead Marine Le Pen pledged a "national unity government" if her party emerges victorious. President Emmanuel Macron on Sunday stunned France by calling snap legislative elections for June 30, with a second round on July 7, after Le Pen's far-right National Rally (NR) scored more than double the number of votes of his centrist alliance in last week's European elections. After four days of intense negotiations, left-wing leaders including the hard-left France Unbowed (LFI), the Socialist, Communist and Green parties said late on Thursday they had agreed on an election alliance called the New Popular Front. Yesterday, they unveiled a joint manifesto, whose headline measures included jettisoning Macron's controversial immigration and pension reforms if they win the polls.

Two men

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The complaint said the accused stole three computers and a monitor from the office. Sarwar was appointed as the manager by a committee formed by the district administration to manage the confiscated property and deposit the proceeds to a bank account. The accused include Sajeb Majumder, 33, Subrata Roy, 23, and Animesh Sen, 30, of Rajoir in Madaripur; and Bilpob Baul, 40, and Sanjoy Baul, 28, of Gopalganj town. Of them, Biplob and his nephew Sanjoy, who live near the resort, earlier told reporters that the former inspector general of police often forced religious minorities to sell their properties. According to the complaint, CCTV footage shows three men entering the office of the resort on Wednesday night and stealing some object. Two members of the management committee, Bijon Kumar Nandi, fisheries officer, and Abdul Quader, deputy director of the agricultural extension department, said the faces of the suspects were not seen in the footage. They added that the individuals were accused based on suspicion of several employees of the resort. Besides, the complainant said he had gone to bed when the alleged theft happened. Contacted, Sanjoy said, "We have been falsely accused because we spoke to the media against former IGP Benazir and other government officials. We are not poor. Why would we steal computers?" "Fear has gripped our family. Maybe we should leave the country." Subrata, another accused, said he had not been anywhere near the resort in the last one month.

Hasina to visit India on June 21

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deepened over more than a decade, especially in trade and connectivity. One of the major points could be on the Teesta water sharing deal that could not be signed despite all preparations in 2011 because of the opposition from West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. Also, from regional perspectives, Bangladesh faces the Rohingya crisis that has worsened because of intensification of conflicts between the Myanmar military and the Arakan Army in the bordering Rakhine State. "The details of the bilateral visit was yet to be prepared," a foreign ministry official told this correspondent. Hasina is likely to visit Beijing on July 9-12.

People suffer as highways clog up

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Ziaul Islam, in-charge of Mawa Traffic Police Outpost, told our Munshiganj correspondent that vehicles were caught in a snarl-up on the expressway early yesterday after a goods-laden truck broke down near the toll plaza. The truck was removed from the expressway after around five hours. Kanchan Kumar Sinha, in charge of Hashara Highway Police Station, said traffic became normal around 3:00pm. Another traffic congestion was seen on the Dhaka-Tangail highway at the east end of the Bangabandhu Bridge. Vehicles moved slowly on this part of the highway for about five hours since early yesterday, causing suffering to the Eid holidaymakers. Traffic was slow moving on a 20km stretch from the east end of Bangabandhu Bridge to Rabna

Bypass in Tangail sadar upazila from 5:00am, said passengers and transport workers. Sajedur Rahman, in-charge of Elenga Highway Police Outpost, told our Tangail correspondent that traffic situation deteriorated around 6:00am when a cement-laden truck overturned on the highway in Pauli area of Kalihati upazila. The situation started becoming normal after the truck was removed from the highway around 8:30am, said the police official. A huge pressure of vehicles on Nabinagar-Baipail-Chandra highway and Abdullahpur-Baipail road led to traffic congestions in some places, said Ayub Ali, officer-in-charge of Savar Highway Police Station in Dhaka. Rush of vehicles led to a 3km congestion, stretching from Gabtoli to Baliarpur area, on Dhaka-Aricha

Highway, Ayub told our Savar correspondent in the evening. TRAIN SERVICES A large number of people left Dhaka by trains yesterday and their journeys back home were largely hassle free. More than 30 trains left Dhaka as of 7:00pm and only two of them ran behind schedule, Shah Alam Kiron Shishir, divisional commercial officer (Dhaka division) of Bangladesh Railway, told The Daily Star. Rajshahi-bound Silkcity Express departed the capital one hour late while Chattogram-bound Chattala Express was one and a half hours, he said. Departure of Rajshahi Commuter was delayed by two and a half hours. Many passengers expressed satisfaction at the railway services as almost all trains left Kamalapur Railway Station on time.

IMF board to meet on June 24

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Bangladesh could not meet the condition set for foreign currency reserves. As per the loan conditions, the target for net international reserves (NIR) in December last year was \$17.78 billion. However, a recent IMF review found the NIR was \$16.73 billion at that particular time. The NIR is defined as reserves assets minus reserve liabilities. Reserves liabilities are all foreign exchange liabilities to residents and nonresidents, including commitments to sell foreign exchange arising from derivatives and all credit outstanding from the IMF. Bangladesh Bank and finance ministry officials said the country has met five other conditions, including a maximum limit of Tk 90,520 crore for the primary budget deficit in December. The government saw a budget surplus of about Tk 50,000 crore at that particular time. The tax revenue collection target was set at Tk 1,43,640 crore for the first six months of the current fiscal year, but the government collected over Tk 1,62,000 crore. The social spending target was set at Tk 30,990 crore for the same period, but the country spent more than Tk 55,000 crore. For capital spending, the target was set at Tk 22,280 crore. However, Bangladesh spent about Tk 36,000 crore during the same period. Bangladesh also met the two other targets – maintaining a ceiling on

reserve money and repaying foreign debt. Ahead of releasing the third tranche of its loan, an IMF mission, led by Chris Papageorgiou, visited Dhaka from April 24-May 8 to review the programme performances. In a media statement after the review, the IMF said its staff and the Bangladesh authorities have reached a staff-level agreement on the policies needed to complete the second review of the authorities' programme. "The review is pending IMF Executive Board approval. Upon the Board's approval, Bangladesh will have access to SDR871 million [about \$1,152 million] in financing," read the statement. The Bangladesh authorities have made significant progress on structural reforms under the IMF-supported programme, including the implementation of a formula-based fuel price adjustment mechanism for petroleum products, it added. The IMF also welcomed Bangladesh Bank's "bold actions" to realign the exchange rate and simultaneously adopt a crawling peg regime with a band. Following the liberalisation of retail interest rates, IMF also said additional tightening of monetary policy should help alleviate any inflationary pressures resulting from the exchange rate reform. On May 26, Finance Minister Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali told reporters that Bangladesh would get the third

instalment by June. The IMF approved the \$4.7 billion loan in January last year. Bangladesh has received more than \$1 billion in two instalments. Tunisia sentences five over missing migrants AFP, Tunis A Tunisian court has sentenced five people to prison for organising an illegal migrant sea crossing that resulted in 18 deaths or disappearances, a spokesman said yesterday. The boat carrying the migrants, all Tunisians, went missing off the coast of the southeastern city of Zarzis during an attempt to reach Italy in September 2022. The five Tunisian defendants, including two still at large, received prison terms ranging from four to 10 years on Thursday night, said Lassad Horr, spokesman for the Medenine court. The incident sparked protests and a general strike in Zarzis. President Kais Saied later ordered an investigation to uncover what happened. The court spokesman said yesterday that a boat, two cars and a GPS device had been seized as part of the investigation.

BNP revamping

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polls, party high-ups evaluated the movement outcome and its leaders' role and decided to reorganise the party based on the evaluation report. "Movement, organisation, and election are interrelated. The move to reorganise the party is to strengthen the party's organisational capacity and to intensify the movement," BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir told The Daily Star. He, however, said the process of dissolving committees and forming new ones is a routine task carried out by a political party. BNP leaders said party acting chairman Tarique Rahman started the process following its post-election report. He held a series of meetings with the leaders, including the latest one with the Dhaka city unit leaders on Thursday. "He [Tarique] told the meeting that new committees will be formed

and he sought cooperation from all," said a senior leader, wishing not to be named. BNP standing committee member Goyeshwar Chandra Roy said dedicated and competent leaders would be included in the new committees. Sources said new faces will be included in those committees which are yet to expire. However, those who failed to carry out their duties during the movement will be dropped. "The party's acting chairman already has a list of such failed leaders," Goyeshwar said. The BNP enforced hartals, blockades, and waged a non-cooperation movement to press home its one-point demand – resignation of the government and parliamentary polls under an interim administration. The government rather cornered the opposition party through pressure, arrest, and implicating top and mid-ranking BNP leaders in numerous cases, said party leaders.

Babu confesses meeting hitman

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The duo then met in a vehicle on the Bhanga Expressway in Faridpur on May 17 to settle how the blood money will be paid. They also exchanged photos of murdered MP Azim. The meeting was held in the vehicle of Amanullah. Babu then assured him of paying a portion of the blood money on May 23. The Detective Branch of Dhaka Metropolitan Police disclosed the summary of Babu's interrogation in the investigation progress report to a Dhaka court yesterday. Mahfuzur Rahman, assistant commissioner of the DB, also investigation officer of Azim abduction case, appealed for recording Babu's confessional statement. Following the petition, Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Jasim recorded his statement. The court later sent Babu, also a cousin of Aktaruzzaman, one of the masterminds of the murder, to jail. Besides Babu, three others – Amanullah, his nephew Tanvir Bhuiyan, and Celesty Rahman, a friend of Aktaruzzaman – earlier gave their confessional statements in the case. They are now in jail. A court source quoted Babu as saying that Azim was elected lawmaker from Jhenaidah-4 (Kaliganj) three times in a row. Saidul Karim Mintu, general secretary of Jhenaidah AL, who is close to Babu, did not get the party ticket for the national polls. That's why a plan was made to clear his path to party nomination. The source said Mintu, who is now on an eight-day remand in DB custody,

tried to get the party ticket from the constituency in the last two national polls, but was not able to secure it due to Azim. In 2022, Azim also wanted to become district AL general secretary. For this, there was a rivalry between the two. Even on June 5, Babu filed a general diary with Jhenaidah Sadar Police Station, alleging that his three mobile phones were stolen, but those were with Mintu, investigators said. Mintu gave Babu the idea so that police could not get the trace of communications between Babu and Amanullah. Mintu even joined different programmes to get the AL ticket for the by-election in the constituency even before the government declared the seat vacant, sources said. Ashrafur Alam, Kaliganj municipality mayor, told The Daily Star, "The district general secretary has long been trying to get the AL ticket." Azim went to Kolkata on May 12 and stayed at a friend's home for a night. He left the following day, saying that he would visit a doctor. On May 22, India and Bangladesh police said the lawmaker was murdered. Harun Or Rashid, additional commissioner (DB) of the DMP, said Mintu had a desire to become a lawmaker from the Jhenaidah-4 constituency. "Amanullah worked for Akhtaruzzaman as the coordinator of the killing and Babu worked for Mintu to maintain communication with the killers," he added.