

# 'We want to know if they are alive'

Say family members of two enforced disappearance victims in Ctg

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN

In Chattogram, families of two individuals, who were allegedly picked up by law enforcers years ago, are still desperately seeking answers.

Jahid Hasan, 18, was reportedly taken by members of the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab-7) on October 14, 2018.

Jahid, son of late Md Yasin, was a key witness in a shootout involving Jubo League leader Asim Roy Babu.

The incident occurred in Chattogram's Muradpur on October 12, 2018, where Babu was killed and four Rab personnel were injured. Jahid was Babu's personal driver and had been interviewed by the media about the incident.

According to Jahid's elder brother, Mehedi Hasan Biplob, the family was awakened around 3:30am by men claiming to be administrative officials.

These men, armed and dressed in plain clothes, broke into the home, seized Jahid, and took him

away in a black SUV.

Despite Biplob's efforts to locate Jahid and file complaints with Rab and local police, his whereabouts still remain unknown.

"We have tried everything to find Jahid. My mother is bedridden; she does not know whether her son is alive. We are now preparing to file a case," said Biplob.

Lieutenant Commander Mihta Uddin Ahmed, then CO of Rab-7, said at that time, "Rab is also searching for Jahid, as we did not find him during the gunfight."

The second missing person, BNP leader ASM Shahidul Alam Siraj, has been unaccounted for since March 6, 2012.

Siraj, a prominent figure in Fatickchhari upazila and former chairman of Lelang Union Parishad, disappeared after attending BNP's "Dhaka Cholo" movement.

His mobile phone was found switched off the following morning.

Azim Aunon, Siraj's elder son, voicing his

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Jahid Hasan



Shahidul Alam



Amid the daily chaos of Mirpur Road, a large pothole filled with water near Dhaka College stands as a silent hazard. Marked but unfenced, it forces vehicles and pedestrians to navigate a perilous path. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

## Polls soon after stability returns

Hopes BNP; Fakhru calls on Yunus

UNB, Dhaka

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir yesterday said his party is optimistic that the interim government led by Chief Adviser Dr Muhammad Yunus will hold an election by restoring stability soon in the country.

"We're hopeful that this interim government led by Professor Yunus can take the country to a stable situation shortly with their sincerity, patriotism and competence. At the same time, they can go for an election," said the senior BNP leader.

Fakhru was talking to reporters after a meeting with the chief adviser at the state guest house Jamuna in Dhaka.

Talking about the meeting that lasted for over an hour, the BNP leader said the chief adviser invited them for a discussion. "It has been a very fruitful discussion," he said.

He said they believe this government would bring necessary reforms (to different systems and institutions of the state).

Replying to a question if the date for election came up for discussion in the meeting, Fakhru said, "We've not discussed any date (for holding election). We won't say the date. They will say it."

He said there will be talks with political parties in phases.

Fakhru was accompanied by BNP standing committee members Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury and Salahuddin Ahmed in the meeting that started at 4:00pm.

Planning and Education Adviser Wahiduddin Mahmud and Law Adviser Prof Asif Nazrul were also present at the meeting.

# Overhaul election system

Urge experts, propose proportional representation and bicameral legislature

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Election experts yesterday proposed major reforms like introduction of proportional representation system, bicameral legislature and neutral administration and police for an acceptable election system.

They made these proposals while taking part in a discussion organised by Sushashoner Janno Nagarik on reform of the election system at the Daily Star Centre.

They also called for the inclusion of representatives from the treasury, opposition benches, and the third-largest party in parliament in the search committee responsible for appointing the Chief Election Commissioner and other election commissioners.

They also urged political parties to practice democracy inside their own parties.

Former CEC Justice Abdur Rouf said the proportional representation system will enable voters to vote for a party rather than an individual candidate.

"The current nomination system will be transformed if we adopt a proportional representation (PR) system, which will also put an end to the practice of trading party nominations for money. It will simply reduce 80 percent corruption," said Rouf.

"In the current system, some spend Tk 20 crore for getting nomination, another Tk 20 crore on motorcycles and goons. So, they aim to make Tk 200 crore [through corruption once elected as MP] during his or her period," he added.

PR is an electoral system in which the

distribution of seats corresponds with the proportion of the total votes cast for each party. For example, if a party gained 40 percent of the total votes, the PR system would allow them to get 40 percent of the seats in parliament.

Currently Bangladesh practices the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system in which the candidate receiving the highest number of votes in a constituency wins a seat in parliament.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶▶ Reintroduce "no vote" option on ballot papers
- ▶▶ Let EC publish posters on behalf of candidates
- ▶▶ Organise projection meetings for candidates
- ▶▶ Make candidates disclose foreign assets
- ▶▶ Appoint returning officers from among EC officials

Local governance expert Tofail Ahmed said bicameral legislature, a system in which the legislature comprises two houses, is practiced successfully in many countries that also creates a balance while enacting laws.

Election expert Abdul Alim suggested that all political parties should conduct

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## No alternative to rewriting constitution

Says Prof Ali Riaz

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

To repair the democratic institutions of the state, there is no option other than rewriting the constitution, even if it requires a constitutional assembly, said Prof Ali Riaz yesterday.

He said the former Awami League government destroyed the state institutions to maintain its hold on power, and without strengthening these institutions, democratic reconstruction is impossible.

"But in this situation, there is hardly any scope to amend the constitution. So, my personal opinion is to rewrite the constitution," said Ali Riaz, a distinguished professor of politics and government at Illinois State University, during a press conference organised by the Centre for Governance Studies (CGS) at a city hotel.

The responsibility of addressing these ongoing critical issues does not lie solely with the government but also with citizens, who must act in the best interest of future generations, he said.

At the event, Prof Riaz said CGS plans to hold a series of dialogues titled "Democratic Reconstruction" over the next five months.

These dialogues will be held to gather insights and recommendations from civil society, intellectuals, and experts across various sectors to establish a sustainable democracy and ensure justice in the country, he added.

A total of eight dialogues will be held in Dhaka, with four additional sessions in Chattogram, Rajshahi, Sylhet, and Khulna, according to CGS.

The dialogues will focus on

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## Withdraw all CSA and DSA cases Demand rights activists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

All repressive laws and draft laws that hinder freedom of expression should be scrapped, as those were formulated to keep the former government in power, said rights activists yesterday.

They demanded that all the cases, including those filed against journalists, under the Cyber Security Act (CSA) and now repealed Digital Security Act should be withdrawn.

They made the demands at a press conference organised by Forum for Freedom of Expression, Bangladesh (FFEB) at Dhaka Reporters Unity.

Criticising the CSA, rights activist and researcher Rezaur Rahman Lenin said the cyber security law fails to distinguish between activities in the public interest and criminal activities.

"Almost all definitions in the law contain

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## Australia to give AUS \$1b to flood victims Acting envoy meets CA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Acting Australian High Commissioner to Bangladesh, Nardia Simpson, paid a courtesy call on Chief Adviser to the interim government Prof Muhammad Yunus, at the state guesthouse Jamuna yesterday.

During the meeting, she expressed condolences for the loss of lives during the student-led protests and reaffirmed Australia's commitment to working with the interim government of Bangladesh.

Their discussions covered a wide range of issues, including security in the Bay of Bengal, the Rohingya crisis, human rights, economic cooperation, tax tariffs, and minority rights.

Simpson highlighted Australia's ongoing efforts to promote peacebuilding, culture, and leadership development in the Rohingya camps. She also announced that Australia would donate AUS \$1 billion to support flood-affected people in Bangladesh.

## POLICE INACTION

# Rickshaws rule Dhaka streets

RAFIUL ISLAM

It was around 11:30am.

A pair of rickshaws passed by State Guest House Jamuna, the residence and office of the chief adviser of the interim government, located on Hare Road.

Within a short time, at least 10 more rickshaws, including two battery-powered ones, traversed the same route.

This has become the new normal seen all throughout the city, but even just over a month ago this would have been very unusual as rickshaws are banned from plying on most major roads of Dhaka.

But ever since the student-led protests intensified, and especially after the fall of the Awami League government on August 5, the pedal and battery-run rickshaws are ruling city streets in full view of police.

Rickshaw-pullers started to completely flout the ban when Dhaka's traffic system collapsed amid the absence of police for around a week following the AL government's fall.

While traffic police have been on the streets since August 12, they are largely limited to directing traffic, but are not enforcing laws.

"My income has increased now that we can go anywhere in the city," Zubair

Hossain, a pedal rickshaw puller, told The Daily Star while taking a breather in front of the chief justice's residence yesterday.

Zubair said he came to Dhaka six months ago, but before August 5, he could only operate his rickshaw in the alleyways of Farmgate, Nakhla Para, Karwan Bazar, Madhubagh, and the surrounding neighbourhoods.

Minutes later Zubair started pedalling his rickshaw towards Moghbazar through



PHOTO: STAR

The photo was taken from Dhaka's Karwan Bazar intersection yesterday.

Shaheed Captain Mansur Ali Sarak, another road where rickshaws are banned.

A study carried out by the Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS) in 2019 said Dhaka had over 11 lakh pedal rickshaws.

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PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

The Daily Star and ActionAid Bangladesh are jointly organising Season 3 of "Our Planet, Our Responsibility". A grooming session was held for the nine finalist teams selected under three categories -- Water Rights, Energy Transition, and Circular Economy -- at the capital's The Daily Star Centre yesterday. On August 31, the finalist teams will present their ideas to the judges as they compete for the championship title.