



PHOTO: SAZZAD IBNE SAYED

PLANTER SHOPPING

The quest for the perfect terracotta pot

RBR

For the gardeners of urban Dhaka, it's time to prepare for winter flowers. One might say it's too early, but October is when you need to prune your roses and feed them with compost, besides preparing beds and soil for other winter blooms.

In Dhaka, many of us do rooftop or balcony gardening, so pots and planters are what we always buy. We do most of our planter shopping in October for the lovely marigolds, zinnias, and snowballs. However, we tend to purchase multicoloured plastic pots or cut-up old drums and use them as big tubs. It looks unappealing; it is not the right choice for planters either.

I am not fond of plastic or tin planters. I think terracotta pots are gardening-friendly. The porous texture of terracotta helps the roots to exchange oxygen and carbon dioxide. It also absorbs the excess moisture after watering, which prevents the roots

from staying in soggy soil for too long.

Earthen products like huge urns and plant basins are not common in the Dhaka market. Even if you find one, it comes with an exorbitant price tag, which is not very cost-effective, especially if you opt for bulk buying. A simple regular 18-inch terracotta pot in local sidewalk pop-up stores is priced at Tk 250, and they keep on adding Tk 50 extra every season. Chari, a basin used to feed cattle, which can also be used as plant basins, is almost out of the Dhaka market. A shame really, since potting your colourful petunias in them gives your garden a happy lift.

People who desire them mostly collect them from places like Dhamrai, Patuakhali, and Faridpur, or go to the urban villages at the periphery of the metropolis. These places still wheel out big ornamental pots and other utilitarian items that were once used for carrying water and storing grains, and are now upcycled as planters.

So, I suggest you go on day trips to collect your

environment-friendly planters at wholesale prices. Many might think it to be an outrageous idea, but plant moms are crazy people with a bohemian spirit; they will go anywhere for garden accessories.

Recently, while coming from Joydebpur, I took a detour to avoid traffic and discovered a gem of a store, selling all sorts of local crafts and terracotta items. The sidewalks of the nameless inward lane were lined with three stalls owned by one entrepreneur. Items like palm leaf hand fans, wooden jolchoki or stools, terracotta plates to grind ingredients for bhortas or vegetable mash, pitchers, urns, etc were all there. The owner collected his stock from as far as Barishal.

The huge burnt-orange clay pot with whiplash curve designs, inspired by vines, caught my attention. I was on the lookout for a huge terracotta pot for my Ficus plant that I planned to keep indoors, and this unknown store in the middle of nowhere, had just what I was looking for, that too, for a price reasonable enough for me to get four more for my winter garden.

Jubo league man beaten to death in Noakhali

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Jubo League leader was beaten to death in Noakhali's Sadar upazila on Saturday.

Mohammad Shahid, 43, was a member of the convening committee of East Chramtua Union Jubo League.

A video clip of Shahid being tortured went viral on social media.

The clip shows Shahid screaming for help as he is being severely beaten with his hands tied.

Three other Jubo League activists -- Riad Hossain, Jamal Uddin and Javed -- were also beaten up inside a house in Surya Narayanbahar village in the district between 1:00pm and 2:00pm yesterday, said locals.

Mir Jahedul Haque Rony, officer-in-charge of Sudharam Model Police Station, said locals beat up Shahid and the other three and handed them over to joint forces.

Shahid died while undergoing treatment at the 250-bed Noakhali General Hospital around 8:00pm on Saturday. The other injured were admitted to the hospital.

Riad told The Daily Star, that around 11:00am on Saturday, Shahid and some Jubo League activists were having tea at a stall when some 70-80 armed people chased them.

"When we took shelter inside Ismail Muhuri's house, the attackers surrounded the house, grabbed Shahid and me and started beating us with sticks and hammers," he said.

"They also bludgeoned Jamal Uddin and Shahid's cattle farm manager Javed with hammers," he continued.

"The army rescued us and took us to the hospital around 6:00pm, but Shahid died," added Riad.

Jamal said, "Some followers of Faisal Bari took me from my shop and tied up my hands and eyes. They broke my legs with a hammer.

"My only fault is that I am involved in Jubo League politics. I don't know if I can walk again in life," he added.

Faisal Bari denied the allegations.

12 dead in air strikes on pro-Iranian fighters in Syria

AFP, Beirut

Twelve pro-Iranian fighters have been killed in air strikes of unknown origin in eastern Syria, a war monitor said yesterday, adding that a large number of people were wounded.

"Twelve pro-Iranian fighters were killed in air strikes of unknown origin targeting their positions in the city of Deir Ezzor and to the east of the city, as well as the Boukamal region, near the border with Iraq," said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

The strikes were not immediately claimed by any entity, according to the monitor. Five of the strikes had targeted military positions near Deir Ezzor airport, it added.

Iran has been providing military aid to Syria since the civil war there began in 2011, while Israel has carried out hundreds of strikes targeting pro-Iranian groups in eastern Syria. The United States has also targeted such groups in the country's east.

Israeli authorities rarely comment on individual strikes in Syria, but have repeatedly said they will not allow arch-enemy Iran to expand its presence there.

Israel has launched an intense bombing campaign against Hezbollah strongholds in Lebanon in recent days, intensifying fears of a regional war.

Distressed loans

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considerations over the past years worsened the situation further, he said.

"I think the actual situation is more horrible if the money taken away by the directors of many banks is taken into consideration.

"This shows how the banking system has turned into a looting ground and influential people have taken away money from banks by using connections. I am afraid that a large part of these loans are not recoverable. This is the biggest concern," Prof Selim said.

However, the Dhaka University teacher is optimistic that the current authorities will be able to find a way out of the problem because an expert like Ahsan H Mansur has been appointed as the governor of the Bangladesh Bank.

Zahid Hussain said distressed loans would have been bigger had the defaulted loans, which were not calculated due to court's stay orders, been taken into consideration.

However, it is too early to say that the initiatives of the interim government in this regard will be successful, he said. "More time is needed to see the result."

CSA will be amended, not struck down

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"We will act on whatever is immediately feasible," he added.

He also expressed surprise that The Daily Star Editor and Publisher Mahfuz Anam faced over 80 cases for what he had said at a programme.

Prof Nazrul said he believes that a lack of awareness about the right to information is one of the reasons people have not been able to fully exercise this right.

"If we think deeply, we will realise that every right is meaningless without the right to information..."

"We could not turn the right to information into a movement, as our neighbouring country India did," he said, added that withholding information had been a common strategy here for oppression and abuse.

He said if the executive, the legislature, and the judiciary did not function properly, then bodies like the information or human rights commissions would also be ineffective.

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman questioned whether the country was transitioning from one authoritarian regime to another.

He said people fear that there

might be written, or unwritten, instructions sent to the NGO Bureau telling them not to release funds to organisations working on women's rights, indigenous rights, gender diversity, and LGBTQ issues.

Iftekharuzzaman called on everyone to be alert.

He said that people don't ask for information because they know that seeking it leads to harassment. "We must create an environment where ordinary people feel encouraged to seek information."

He noted that the so-called security agencies had previously infringed on people's rights and pointed out that institutional development was still not up to expectations. He also called for amendments to the Right to Information Act.

Iftekharuzzaman said the commissions are stuck in red tape, and they have become rehabilitation centres for former bureaucrats. He urged for reforms to the commissions, including the Information Commission, and suggested that public opinions be considered when appointing commissioners.

Badiul Alam Majumder, head of the Election System Reform Commission, said the ghosts of

the deposed autocrat still linger. "Harassment continues in various ways, and this must end quickly. I, too, was once a victim of harassment for seeking information."

He said, "We must take steps to ensure that we can access information from political parties as well. Without democratic political parties, unrestricted access to information cannot be established."

Delivering the keynote paper, Shaheen Anam, convener of the Information Rights Forum, said in the new Bangladesh, they want to ensure that no one faces any issues in obtaining information.

She mentioned poor preparedness of the authorities; inadequate skills of designated officers; and a lack publication and dissemination of information, among others, as obstacles to implementation of the right to information law.

Among others, Md Anwar Hossain, director of the NGO Affairs Bureau; Hasibur Rahman, executive director of MRDI; Mahmudul Hossain Khan, secretary of the Coordination and Reform of the Cabinet Division; and Saidur Rahman, director general of the NGO Affairs Bureau, spoke at the event.



Law Adviser Asif Nazrul among the speakers at a views-exchange meeting on the "Right to Information in Establishing Transparent and Accountable Good Governance: The Supporting Role of NGOs" at the NGO Affairs Bureau yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Shakib will have security just like another cricketer

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as much as a player receives. This is our responsibility, we will give him that if he comes to the country.

"But if the general people are angry at him because of his political identity... I have five police constables and an armed man for my security, and if 100 million out of the 160 million people are angry, then will these five or six people protect me?"

"If the people are angry at me, I have to calm them with words. I think he has to make his position clear and talk about where he stands politically.

"Mashrafe Bin Mortaza already talked about his situation. So, if there are security risks from the people, then no one can give security to anyone. Even Sheikh Hasina could not be given that security and she had to flee. So, Shakib has to make his position clear."

Israel bombs 'dozens of targets'

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days of Israeli strikes.

Lebanon's Prime Minister Najib Mikati yesterday said his country could be witnessing its largest wave of displacement ever amid intense Israeli air strikes. Lebanon's army warned Lebanese against actions that would disturb public order.

In Beirut, some displaced families spent the night on the benches at Zaitunay Bay, a string of restaurants and cafes on Beirut's waterfront.

Lightning strikes kill 6

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A total of six people were killed in separate incidents of lightning strikes at five upazilas of Sunamganj and Sylhet districts today (Sunday).

Of them, two died in Sunamganj's Dowarabazar, one each in Sunamganj's Jamalganj and Chhatak, and Sylhet's Sadar, Bishwanath and Companiganj Upazilas.

In Dowarabazar, Jalal Miah, 30, and Jashim Uddin, 18, of Polirchar village died at nearby Dekhar Haor while

fishing with other fishermen in the morning. Jahidul Haque, officer-in-charge of Dowarabazar Police Station, confirmed the deaths.

In Jamalganj Upazila, Sharif Miah, 35, of Kalaguja village died while fishing at Pagnar Haor. SM Kamal Hossain, officer-in-charge of Jamalaganj Police Station, confirmed.

In Chhatak Upazila, Sundor Ali, 50, of Mallikpur village died while fishing in a haor near his home. Golam Kibria Hasan, officer-in-charge of Chhatak Police Station, confirmed.

Students cannot

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"Students must strictly adhere to the university ordinance, and any violations will result in appropriate disciplinary action taken as per the rules of the ordinance," the statement reads.

On April 1 this year, the High Court stayed the effectiveness of the university's 2019 ban on student politics.

The stay order came in response to a writ petition filed by Buet student and Chhatra League leader Imtiaz Hossain Rahim Rabbi.

On October 7, 2019, a group of Bangladesh Chhatra League men murdered a second-year student at a dormitory. Buet banned politics after that.

Contacted yesterday, Professor Al Amin Siddiqui, director of student welfare, said, "We made the decision considering the current situation."

No students will be allowed to be members of organisations that have any form of political involvement, he added.

"For instance, Swadhinata Chikitsak Parishad or Doctors Association of Bangladesh are not political organisations, but they have political affiliations. Our students cannot be part of such bodies."

He said as per Section 16 of the Board of Residence and Discipline of the Buet Ordinance, students always needed permission from the Directorate of Student Welfare to be involved in a political organisation.

Talking to The Daily Star, Nasir Uddin, general secretary of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, said, "Banning student politics is unconstitutional and

undemocratic. Banned organisations will be active now. It puts many students at risk of harassment. We believe Buet students will welcome all student organisations except Chhatra League."

Mashur Rahman Richard, president of Bangladesh Chhatra Federation, said, "All Buet students are voters. They must be free to support any group or opinion. The administration has interfered with their freedom. They will eventually criminalise them, which will go against the spirit of the July mass-uprising."

Mahir Shahriar Reza, president of a faction of Chhatra Union, said, "We think it's an autocratic decision of the administration, a violation of constitutional rights. It is a part of a scheme to depoliticise the educational institutions."

A student of the 19th batch said, "We strongly condemn the decision and urge the authorities to change it. Otherwise, we will go to court if necessary."

Noted Supreme Court Lawyer ZI Khan Panna said, "Who gave them the right to decide what a student should do or not do outside the campus?"

"We got independence because of student politics. Any adult individual can harbour any ideology. It is their constitutional right. They are not above the constitution of Bangladesh."

Anu Muhammad, former professor of economics at Jahangirnagar University, said, "To be able to do politics and express opinions is a bare minimum democratic right of a citizen. Buet authorities are behaving like a dictator."

S Alam took out 86pc

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Traders; Tk 163.23 crore to Epic Able Traders; Tk 160.94 crore to Momentum BG; Centre; Tk 136.68 crore to Monir Trade International; Tk 168.50 crore to Masum Trading House; Tk 161.58 crore to Hossain Traders; Tk 163.82 crore to Dominion Karpa; Tk 143.54 crore to Chowdhury and Hossain Trade, said a senior official of the bank seeking anonymity.

The bank, however, became mired in irregularities within years of its operation. In 2015, it appointed Prashanta Kumar Halder, popularly

known as PK Halder, as its managing director.

Halder, said to be a close associate of Alam, amassed hundreds of crore from several non-bank financial institutions (NBFIs), which he laundered abroad.

The Daily Star could not reach Mohammed Saiful Alam, the chairman of S Alam Group, at the time of filing the report.

Contacted, Subrata Kumar Bhowmik, executive director of the business group, told the newspaper that he is not in the position and does not have such information as well.