

## ARMED FORCES DAY Khaleda receives warm welcome at event

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia made her first public appearance in six years yesterday when she attended the Armed Forces Day reception at Senakunja in Dhaka Cantonment.

This also marked her first attendance at the annual celebration in 12 years.

During the reception, Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus exchanged greetings with Khaleda. The two were seated next to each other and were seen interacting cordially.

The 79-year-old former prime minister arrived at the venue around 3:30pm from her Gulshan residence.

She was accompanied by Sharmila Rahman, the wife of her late son Arafat Rahman Koko, and BNP standing committee member, Dr AZM Zahid Hossain.

According to party sources, upon her arrival at Senakunja, Khaleda Zia was greeted by the Chief of Army Staff General Waker-uz-Zaman, the Chief of Navy Admiral Mohammad Nazmul Hasan, and the Chief of Air Force Air

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Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus adorns army chief General Waker-uz-Zaman with a rank badge at the Dhaka Cantonment yesterday on the occasion of the Armed Forces Day.

PHOTO: PID

## Romania signs deal with US to buy F-35 jets

AFP, Bucharest

Nato member Romania yesterday signed a deal with Washington to buy 32 F-35 jets, citing an “acute need for credible deterrent and defensive capabilities” as war rages on in neighbouring Ukraine.

With an estimated cost of \$6.5 billion approved by Romania’s parliament, it is the most expensive military purchase by the poor eastern European country, which has gained in strategic importance since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022.

The F-35A combat aircraft, which are expected to begin arriving in the early 2030s, will “significantly strengthen” Romania’s defence capabilities, Romanian Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu said at the signing ceremony.

## Electric rickshaw

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Hossain, 45, a battery-run rickshaw driver said his seven-member family depends on his income and it will put them under serious hardship if the government bans battery-run rickshaws.

He said they just want to be able to use their battery-run rickshaws in Dhaka city to earn a living. It’s the government who should tell them on which streets they can drive, he said.

Humayun Kabir, a driver who is from Raipur of Lakhmipur, said his four-member family moved to Dhaka a few years ago as there was a scarcity of work in their village.

“I have been running my own battery-powered rickshaw for the last two months after taking out a loan of around Tk 80,000 to buy the rickshaw. I cannot do other work as my left leg got broken in an accident last year.”

He said he has to pay Tk 2,200 every week as instalment for the loan and it will take him another 10 months to pay off the loan.

Meanwhile, supreme court lawyer Md Bahauddin Al Imran yesterday sent a legal notice to the authorities concerned, asking them to take necessary steps in three days to stop the plying of battery-run rickshaws on highways and flyovers across the country.

If they do not take steps, a writ petition will be moved before the HC, seeking necessary directives, he said in the legal notice.

On Tuesday evening, Afsana Karim Rachi, a student of the 53rd batch (2023-24 session) of the Department of Marketing at Jahangirnagar University, died after being hit by a battery-run rickshaw on the campus.

According to witnesses, the victim was crossing the road in front of the New Arts Building when a battery-run rickshaw struck her at speed and pinned her to a tree.

Earlier on May 15, former road transport and bridges minister Obaidul Quader asked the authorities concerned to take steps to ban battery-run rickshaws on Dhaka streets.

Battery-run rickshaw drivers on May 18 took to the streets and clashed with police that left at least 20 injured.

Then on May 19, former prime minister Sheikh Hasina instructed the scrapping of the decision to ban battery-run rickshaws on Dhaka streets.

## New Election Commission takes shape

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Awal, resigned. The EC had never been vacant for this long since it was founded in 1972.

Awal and the other commissioners were about halfway through their five-year tenure.

On October 29, the interim government formed a six-member search committee led by Justice Zubayer Rahman Chowdhury of the Supreme Court’s Appellate Division to come up with the names of two individuals for each EC membership. BNP and several other parties proposed the names of Nasir and former secretary Shafiqul Islam as the chief election commissioner (CEC).

Nasir Uddin, aged 72, would be the 14th CEC and the seventh former bureaucrat to be in the position.

### REACTIONS OF NEW COMMISSIONERS

Nasir said he would leave no stones unturned for a free, fair, and credible election. The commission will work independently with the goal of establishing people’s right to vote.

“I am not interested in knowing who nominated me. I will work independently. If I find out which party chose me and which did not, it might make me biased, even if subconsciously,” he said.

“We must learn from [past ECs’] mistakes. We aim to avoid those flaws so that no allegations are raised against us.”

All political parties desire a free and fair election, he said.

There are controversies regarding one particular party, he said,

referring to the Awami League.

“I would rather not comment on this at the moment. When it is time for the election, we will see. You will see. We aim to include everyone in the electoral process, but for now, I refrain from making comments.”



Rahmanel Masud



Anwarul Islam

After meeting the other commissioners, he will sit with the electoral reform commission and set priorities.

Born in 1952 at Kutubdia, Cox’s Bazar, Nasir studied economics at Chittagong University. He was a lecturer at the same department for a brief period before joining the civil service in 1979.

He was also a member of the Planning Commission and served as the secretary to the ministries of information, energy, and health before retiring in 2010.

Rahmanel retired as a member of the Administrative Tribunal-1 in Dhaka in 2017. He began his career in 1981 as a lawyer and joined the judiciary as an assistant judge in 1983.

He worked as an assistant registrar and deputy registrar at the High Court Division before being

promoted as a district judge in 2000.

The former judge also taught law at private universities and wrote about legal matters.

Tahmida was born in Sunamganj. She joined the civil administration through the 11th BCS exams. She



Abul Fazal



Tahmida Ahmad

worked as a joint secretary to the civil aviation and tourism ministry and retired as a director of the Department of Jute in 2020.

Brig Gen (retd) Sanaullah joined the army in 1988 and served for 34 and a half years. His last work station was Bangladesh High Commission in Islamabad. Prior to this, he worked at the Bangladesh Embassy in Tehran. He also studied at Defence Services Command and Staff College, National Defence College, US Army Command and General Staff College, and College of Defence Management, India.

“I am grateful. This is a huge responsibility, but I am sure we will be able to meet people’s aspirations,” he said.

Anwarul joined the public service through the BCS exams in 1985. He retired as additional secretary to the sports ministry.

home and tortured at the police station on his instruction,” he said.

“Many politicians of other parties had taken advantage from and compromised with Bodi. But I didn’t. That’s why he was angry with me.

“He is a mafia. He smuggled yaba and arms into the country,” the BNP leader added.

Abdullah alleged Bodi closed the legal cattle corridor from Myanmar and smuggled cows through hilly bordering areas to establish a monopoly in the business.

Bodi also controlled the Teknaf Port through his relative Omar Faruq and bought hundreds of acres of land in the name of Faruq and many of his close aides, according to the BNP leader.

“I have video footage where Bodi is ordering his goons to set my petrol pump on fire. In the footage, he is seen shooting with a gun at my business centre. However, police didn’t recover the gun and completed the remand at the jail gates,” Abdullah said.

He alleged a conspiracy was still going on to let Bodi get out despite many serious allegations against him.

Faruq could not be contacted for comments on the allegations made by Abdullah since the former is reportedly in hiding.

### UNRESTRAINED YABA TRADE

Despite Bodi and many of the drug lords in jail or hiding, yaba trade is still going on unrestrained in Teknaf.

Some of his close aides were trying to blend in with the supporters of other political parties, said locals who wished not to be named.

Two of Bodi’s accomplices, Md Moniruzzaman and Enamul Haque of Teknaf, are roaming freely in Teknaf.

The ACC in recent months seized Moniruzzaman’s wealth worth around Tk 4.16 crore and Enamul’s Tk 35 lakh, allegedly earned through yaba trade.

According to the district police, around 80 lakh yaba pills and 32 kg of crystal meth were recovered in Cox’s Bazar this year until September.

The hauls recovered last year totalled over 1.5 crore yaba pills and 78 kg of crystal meth.

## Armed forces

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“Today, I recall with great respect all the brave martyrs who sacrificed their lives in the war,” he added.

The chief adviser also remembered all those who were martyred and injured in the July uprising. “Their sacrifice has created a new scope to rebuild the country.”

At the onset of his speech, Prof Yunus expressed gratitude to former prime minister and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia for joining the reception despite her illness. The chief adviser wished Khaleda Zia a speedy recovery.

Earlier in the day, Prof Yunus said the interim government wants to build Bangladesh in such a way that the people become the true source of all power.

“We want to establish the idea that we are all equal. None is above anyone and

none is below anyone in national life,” he said.

The chief adviser made the remark while addressing a reception accorded to the gallantry award-winning freedom fighters and their inheritors arranged by the Armed Forces Division in Dhaka Cantonment’s Multipurpose Complex.

He also said his government’s responsibility is to bind people into a larger family.

“There will be differences of opinion in the family... but we will not be enemies to each other. We will not think of anyone as an enemy because of his or her opinion. We will not consider anyone an enemy because of religion,” he added.

The chief adviser also paid respects to the award-winning and war-wounded freedom fighters and all the family members of the valiant freedom fighters.

## No one paying any tolls

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In many cases, they claimed that the tolls collected had already surpassed the cost of constructing the bridges and thus refused to allow further toll collection, according to officials.

The issue was discussed during the monthly coordination meeting of the Road Transport and Highways Division on September 24. The meeting decided that the division will send a letter to the home ministry seeking help for toll collection on the 16 bridges, read the meeting minutes.

A subsequent monthly coordination meeting on October 29 discussed the same issue. The meeting was informed that a letter was sent to the home ministry, and toll collection from 12 bridges was halted.

The meeting also decided to send a second letter to the home ministry.

According to the RHD, as of yesterday, toll collection from nine bridges remained suspended. At one bridge, battery-run rickshaws are not paying toll.

The nine bridges are: Shambhuganj Bridge, Khurshid Mahal Bridge, Banar Bridge and Rafiq Uddin Bhuiyan Bridge in Mymensingh; Chandpur Bridge in Chandpur; Toildarwip Bridge in South Chittagoram; Dalla Bridge (Shaheed Rafiq Bridge) in Dhaka; Syed Masood

Rumi Bridge in Kushtia; Tulshikhali and Maricha bridges in Munshiganj.

Battery-run rickshaws are not paying tolls on Mohananda Bridge in Chapainawabganj.

Tolls for seven of these bridges are being collected by lessees while RHD is handling toll collection for three, shows document.

The government is losing revenue due to the suspension of toll collection, but the RHD cannot give the figure.

RHD Chief Engineer Syed Moinul Hasan said they were trying to resume toll collection from the 10 bridges through discussions with the local administrations and the communities.

“The number of bridges from which toll collection is not possible is decreasing,” he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Moinul said they were collecting tolls following a toll policy, and they have to do so until the government declares those toll free.

Officials said there is no government policy for stopping toll collections for those bridges where toll collection has exceeded construction costs.

Toll collection is a source of government income which is supposed to be used for maintenance of roads and bridges, they added.

## 18-member executive

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Rashidul Islam Rifat, Nusrat Tabassum, Lutfor Rahman, Ahnaf Sayeed Khan, Tarekul Islam Reza, Tarikul Islam, Mehrab Hossain Sifat, Asadullah Al Galib, Mohammad Rakib, Sinthia Jahin Ayesha, Asad Bin Rony, Nayeem Abedin, Mahmuda Sultana Rimi, Ibrahim Nirob, Rasel Ahmed, Rafiqul Islam, and Muinul Islam.

While unveiling the central committee on October 22, Abdul Kader, a coordinator of the movement, said, “This committee will not emerge as a political party.”

He said the formation of the committee was based on the opinions of 158 coordinators across the country.

### LIST OF MARTYRS, INJURED SOON

A complete list of those martyred and injured during the July-August mass uprising will be published by December 31, said Sarjis Alam, general secretary of the July Martyrs Memorial Foundation.

“We want this list of the injured to remain unquestionable – not just today, but even 20 years from now,” he told reporters at a press briefing organised by the foundation and the health ministry yesterday.

To ensure that, the foundation is verifying every case with the highest caution.

By the end of November, verification of information concerning the martyrs’ families will be complete, said Sarjis, a key coordinator of the Students Against Discrimination movement.

The financial assistance for the injured has been increased from Tk 1 lakh to 3 lakh with lifelong allowances for those unable to work, said Mir Mahbubur Rahman Snigdho, chief executive officer of the foundation.

Those who spent out-of-pocket on medical bills will be reimbursed under a second initiative taken by the foundation.