

EYE CARE
Bangladesh
keen to work
with Orbis
Says Prof Yunus

BSS, Dhaka
Chief
Advisor
Professor
Muhammad
Yunus has



expressed Bangladesh's willingness to collaborate with global non-profit Orbis International to expand eye care services across the country.

During a meeting with Orbis President and CEO Derek Hodkey at his office on Wednesday, Prof Yunus acknowledged Orbis's significant contributions to Bangladesh's eye health sector. Derek is visiting the country as part of the Orbis Flying Eye Hospital's training programme, currently underway in Chattogram.

Highlighting Orbis's global impact, Derek shared that the organisation has been delivering sight-saving programmes in over 200 countries and territories since 1982. In Bangladesh, Orbis has worked with the health ministry for 39 years, screening 7.8 million individuals, providing over 4.5 million treatments, performing 258,000 surgeries, and training more than 40,000 professionals.

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New CEC,
four election
commissioners
take oath
tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The newly appointed chief election commissioner and four other election commissioners will take oath tomorrow.

Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed will administer the ceremony at the Supreme Court Judges' Lounge, Supreme Court Registrar General Aziz Ahmed Bhuiyan, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Earlier on Thursday, President Mohammed Shahabuddin appointed former secretary AMM Nasir Uddin as the new CEC and four others as election commissioners under section 118 (I) of the constitution.

The four new election commissioners are former additional secretary Md Anwarul Islam Sarker, former district and sessions judge Abdur Rahman Masud, former joint secretary Begum Tahmida Ahmad and Brig Gen (retd) Abul Fazal Md Sanaulah.

Shot, shackled, blinded

Rahat was picked up from ambulance, beaten at police station and then sent to jail; despite losing an eye during July uprising, the 18 year old refuses to abandon his dreams

MASHFIQ MIZAN

Eighteen-year-old Alif Hassan Rahat, a student from Milestone College in Uttara, dreamed of becoming a rocket engineer.

On July 18, when he joined the quota reform protest, he was struck by 29 police-fired pellets -- two struck his eye, 13 on his face, and 14 his chest.

The ambulance carrying him was intercepted by cops, he was detained, and beaten up for a whole night at a police station, before being sent to jail.

Rahat was sent to Dhaka Central Jail, where he was confined to a small, dark room with four other protesters. As he languished in jail without any treatment, his health deteriorated further.

Rahat was finally allowed proper medical treatment after Sheikh Hasina fled the country. By then, it was too late.

A pellet had reached the optic nerve of his right eye, leaving him completely blind. The pellet was too deeply lodged to be removed.

Rahat had sat for his HSC

to join them.

Suddenly, police opened fire, said Rahat.

"But we remained undeterred. Suddenly, near Uttara Square Hospital, law enforcers on a white microbus, started firing indiscriminately. Suddenly, I started bleeding. Blood was streaming from my eye like tears," Rahat said.

He was rushed to Uttara Adhunik Hospital. Some of the pellets from his face and chest could be retrieved.

Doctors couldn't stop the bleeding in his eye, so they bandaged it and told him to seek treatment elsewhere.

Then he went to Kurmitola Hospital but did not receive much help.

All the hospitals nearby were stretched thin as injured protesters were arriving in numbers.

So, he went back home. The next day, when Rahat woke up, he panicked as he couldn't see anything through his right eye.

AMBULANCE INTERCEPTED TWICE
On July 20, Rahat went to an

One officer sneered, "Look, we have some fighters here," before hurling abuse at them for participating in the protests.

Despite their visible injuries and need for medical attention, the police detained all of them and took them to the Uttara East Police Station.

Once inside, officers seized all their belongings, including medical reports.

A group of five cops then surrounded the 18-year-old, punching, slapping, and kicking him.

The psychological torment began in the afternoon.

A police personnel was reloading his gun in front of Rahat. "I've already killed a few. You're next," the cop told Rahat.

Rahat was thrown into a cramped holding cell, packed with over 40 detainees, while

leave jail, and even if I did, I'd never resume my studies," Rahat recounted.

At dawn, detainees were lined up outside the station. Rahat was handcuffed. They were herded onto a prison van bound for the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court in Dhaka.

At court, Rahat and other detainees were thrown into an iron cage. "Over 100 people were crammed into the small cage. Just like animals," Rahat said.

By 1:00pm, after hours in the cramped cage, they were sent to Dhaka Central Jail in Keraniganj, without any hearing as no judge showed up.

Sending accused detainees to jail without any hearing is a violation of relevant laws.

Rahat was accused of attacking a Rab-1 team and vandalising their vehicle with weapons, intending to kill them.

Md Abdul Hakim, a warrant officer of Rab-1, filed the case, accusing 1,000-1,500 unnamed individuals.

The senior officials of Uttara East Police Station have been on the run since August 5. All attempts to reach them have been unsuccessful.

Md Mohibullah, newly-appointed officer-in-charge of the police station, said he does not know the whereabouts of his predecessor. He said normal operations resumed at the station in the last week of September following partial repairs.

INSIDE PRISON WALLS

Inside the jail, Rahat was taken to the prison hospital. But the facilities were a far cry from the advanced treatment he needed.

Later, he was moved to a cell, surrounded by hardened criminals. The reality of his circumstances started to set in, and he started crying in despair.

A man with shackles in his legs and ropes binding his arms tried to offer comfort.

Another inmate handed him some biscuits.

"These were the only signs of humanity I experienced in days," Rahat said.

The only treatment he received that night was some eye drops and a few painkillers.

"The next morning, I was taken to a field to register my name. They stamped a mark on my arm -- a prisoner's identity," Rahat said.

From there, he was led into a cramped, dark room already

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JULY UPRISING

Women activists feel sidelined and forgotten

Demand equal representation in state reforms at discussion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Women leaders and activists, who actively participated in the July uprising, yesterday said despite their contributions at every level, they have been systematically sidelined in the post-movement period.

They pointed out that equal representation of women was not ensured in the reform commissions or other state institutions.

They added that the longstanding culture of denying women their rightful roles and excluding them from various sectors continues unabated.

They made these remarks at a discussion titled "Dialogue on Women of the Mass Uprising: Where Did the Women Go?" held at the Jatiya Press Club, where injured participants and female activists shared their experiences.

The event was jointly organised by two volunteer organisations, Loraku 24 and Empowering Our Fighters.

Umama Fatema, spokesperson for the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, said it has become evident that there was a deliberate and successful attempt to sideline women in the aftermath of the uprising.

"When male leaders were arrested, women stepped up to lead and continued until August 5. But after that, I was completely sidelined. Attempts were made to portray men as the heroes of the movement, and I began experiencing an identity crisis," she said.

"Women leaders were harassed on social media, and those in power took no action. This further marginalised the women who participated in the movement," she added.

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JOB SCAMS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Travel alert issued for five countries

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment has issued a travel alert for Bangladeshi citizens planning to visit Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia.

In a recent press release, the ministry warned about fake job advertisements on websites, emails, and social media offering high-paying positions like computer operator, typist, and call centre operator.

These scams lure victims, only to force them at gunpoint into illegal activities.

The Bangladeshi embassy in Thailand has already helped some citizens return safely after escaping these fraudsters.

The scammers often use Facebook and WhatsApp to target victims, asking them to invest in cryptocurrency accounts, which are then closed after stealing the money.

The ministry urged citizens to be cautious while using social media and to verify job offers carefully, especially those involving computer operator roles.

They advised job seekers to consult the ministry's relevant section or contact Bangladeshi embassies abroad to confirm the legitimacy of potential employers.

Climate change behind prolonged dengue season

Say experts; 123 die in 22 days in November

HELEMUL ALAM

In the first 22 days in November, the country has already witnessed over 123 deaths and 23,009 dengue cases, showing an alarming trend this year.

Experts identified climate change as one of the main factors behind this prolonged dengue season this year, which is also the picture of the last few years.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), November 2022 saw 274 dengue deaths and 40,716 cases, while December recorded 83 deaths and 9,288 cases. The figures for 2021 and 2022 were significantly lower, with 27 deaths and 5,024 cases in 2021, and 113 deaths and 19,334 cases in 2022.

This year, dengue has claimed 438 lives, with total cases reaching 84,826 so far.

According to the LANCET Countdown on Health and Climate Change data sheet 2023, from 2018 to 2022, the average summer temperatures that people were exposed to were 0.9 degrees Celsius higher than the 1986-2005 baseline average.

The conditions are suitable for the spread of malaria for more than half of the

year, and the basic reproduction number (an indication of how many other people each infected person will make sick) for dengue has been above 4 since at least the 1950s, it said.

Climate change also changes the pattern of humidity in weather, which has changed the adaptation pattern of Aedes mosquitoes and also changed the behaviour of Aedes mosquitoes. This is why the seasonal dynamics of Aedes mosquitoes have changed.

PROF KABIRUL BASHAR
Entomologist at JU

Entomologist Manzur A Chowdhury noted that the warm, humid conditions, which typically taper off by November, persist this year.

"Temperatures between 16°C and 30°C are ideal for Aedes mosquitoes, and biting tendencies increase in such conditions," he said.

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After a photo was published in The Daily Star on November 16, *inset*, showing a man crawling through a gap in a road divider on the Dhaka-Aricha highway in Hemayetpur, Savar, local resident Ahmed Ali took an initiative to address the safety hazard. Despite a footbridge just 60 metres away, many pedestrians were risking their lives by using the unsafe shortcut. Motivated by a sense of responsibility, Ahmed, along with his family, sealed the hole to encourage safe practices.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

