

## Chaos in front of Prothom Alo; cops drive away demonstrators

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A group of people demonstrated in front of the daily Prothom Alo's office in the capital's Karwan Bazar almost throughout the day yesterday.

This caused disruptions to vehicular movement on the main road in the city's largest kitchen market.

In the evening, when trucks carrying essentials started arriving in the market area, law enforcers asked the protesters to clear the road. Many shopkeepers closed their stores, and the gates to the Karwan Bazar metro station were also shut.

The law enforcers tried to disperse the crowd using whistles, but the protesters tried to shove them away. Some threw brickbats at the officers, who then used tear gas and sound grenades to break off the crowd.

At that time, a clash broke out between the law enforcers and the demonstrators, resulting in injuries to some protesters and six police officers, including Tejgaon Police Station Officer-in-Charge Mobarak Hossain.

Around 9.00pm, Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sheikh Sajid Ali visited the scene.

Earlier, witnesses said, 15-20 people attempted to block the road in front of the Prothom Alo office around noon. However, police intervened and dispersed the crowd.

The protesters returned around 2.30pm and engaged in a scuffle with the police. Later, they sat on the road.

In the afternoon, they slaughtered a cow they had brought and chanted slogans denouncing the daily.

By the evening, the number of protesters rose to around 50, intensifying the situation.

This group demonstrated in front of the Prothom Alo office on Thursday and Saturday. They also staged protests at the entrance to The Daily Star office on Friday and Saturday.

Meanwhile, in a statement last night, the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal condemned what it said were "extremists' attempts to shut down the publication of Prothom Alo and The Daily Star".

The statement added that since August 5, there has been a series of attacks aimed at seizing control of the media and curtailing press freedom, freedom of speech, and independent journalism. The recent attempts to target Prothom Alo and The Daily Star are part of this ongoing campaign.

## Polls only after vital electoral reforms

FROM PAGE 1

Nasir and four other commissioners arrived at the EC office around 1:30pm, after being sworn in by Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed at the Supreme Court Judges' Lounge.

"We will use all of our might to keep our commitment to hold free, fair and acceptable elections."

The election commissioners – former additional secretary Md Anwarul Islam Sarker, former district and sessions judge Abdul Rahman Masud, former joint secretary Begum Tahmidah Ahmad and Brig General (retd) Abul Fazal Md Sanullah – were also present at the briefing.

Minutes before the press briefing, two EC employees were seen taking down a portrait of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman from a wall of the conference room. They were also cleaning a section of the roof.

Nasir said holding national elections was difficult. But the challenge has increased significantly as the country is going through a transition, he said.

Many are talking about proportionate representation, bicameral legislature and so on. These are related to the election process. "If it is decided that there will be bicameral legislature or proportionate representation, the Election Commission will hold the election accommodating in line with these changes.

"We will consider the next election only after the necessary electoral reforms are done."

Every party has the right to take

## Drivers again block roads in key city areas

FROM PAGE 1

rickshaws or auto rickshaws on the streets is a policy decision of the government and therefore, the HC cannot interfere in it.

On November 20, the HC directed the authorities concerned to take necessary steps to stop the battery-run three wheelers from plying the city streets within three days. The order aimed to reduce road accidents.

PROTEST

Around 11:30am yesterday, thousands of drivers gathered on the street in front of the Jatiya Press Club to press home their 12-point demand, halting traffic in the Paltan, Press Club, and High Court areas.

They held the rally under the banner of the Rickshaw-Van-Easy Bike Workers Union.

At the rally, Mujahidul Islam Selim, former president of the Communist Party of Bangladesh, demanded that the HC order against the battery-run rickshaws be withdrawn. He also

RAFFAT BINTE RASHID

The history of Dhaka is as fluid and majestic as the rivers that surround it. Over the centuries, the city's course has shifted, evolving with each new civilisation that passed through, leaving behind traces of their cultures in its soil.

I wanted to read up on Dhaka's history again because of the recent newspaper hullabaloo about the origins of Dhaka. Thanks to findings from the excavations at the site of the former central jail, located on the banks of the Buriganga, the story of Dhaka's origins got the attention of general people like me, as well as archaeologists and historians.

It is said that the excavation findings are thought to trace the history of the capital city back to the times of early medieval period or the Mughal Era, to the sultante rule from 1438,

to the pre-medieval times and finally, to the early historic period of sixth century BC to sixth century AD. I found that exhilarating.

How Dhaka thrived when it has been ruled by the many dynasties and empires over the ages, including the Hindu Gauda Kingdom, the Buddhist and Shaivite Pala Empire, the Hindu Sena Dynasty, the Hindu Deva Dynasty, the Turkic and Afghan governors, the Bengal Sultanate, and the Mughals and finally, the British?

It was my reason to look through history books and sites, and I thought I would share these interesting facts and theories with our My Dhaka readers. The earliest mention or clue

of a place called Dhaka was found in an inscription of Sultan Rukunuddin Barbak Shah, dated 1460, and discovered in Birbhum district. It might very well be our modern Dhaka!

In 1582, Akbar's Finance Minister Todar Mal's revenue settlement divided Mughal Bengal into 24 Sarkars (districts). Mughal emperor Akbar's court historian Abul Fazal, who authored Ain-i-Akbari, refers to

"Dhaka baju" as a pargana of Sarkar Bazukha of Bengal. Akbar's name refers to a thana in Dhaka baju as a place of importance in connection with the war against the independent Bhuiyans of Bhati (lower Bengal) from 1583-1605.

Now, the discovery of the fort on the premises of the Dhaka Central Jail provides a broader context of the importance of the city in the Mughal empire.

Mirza Nathan, writer and commander of Subahdar Islam Khan's army, referred to a fort in his book "Barahistan-e-Gayebi" as being "surrounded by mud walls and the largest and strongest in a pre-Mughal era".

It was asserted that the Subahdar and his army of 50,000 soldiers lived in the palace fort

and its surrounding area. Thus, it was commonly thought of as Islam Khan's fort. However, the fort has existed long before the arrival of Subahdar Islam Khan.

The first ever Radiocarbon

absolute dating, or carbon-14

dating, done on the relics from

the fort, now the Dhaka Central

Jail, at the US Beta Laboratory,

has been found to date back

to 1430 AD. This was done

by archaeology students and

region's significance as a thriving settlement in the pre-Islam Khan period. The dated inscription of this mosque could have been a part of Iqtim-i-Mubarakabad, administrative divisions in the Sultanate reign.

There is evidence of Dhaka being a thriving city even in the pre-Medieval period (sixth-13th century AD) to Early Historical period (sixth century BC-6th century AD). The discovery of glazed potteries and rouletted wares from the fort in the jail premises showed similarity to the ones found in Mahasthangarh and Wari Bateshwar from the Early Historic Period.

The earth has layers, and working through them, you find different archaeological wonders one above another. So, if you get one charcoal and conduct carbon-14 dating, then the other artefacts in the layers are automatically dated through relative dating, which links Dhaka's existence from the Early Historic Period. The discovered potteries imply the possibility of international trade in Dhaka through the ancient Silk Route, because the potteries were foreign in origin.

These are such intriguing facts about our Dhaka that we are not aware of. Working through layers of ancient civilisations, and combing through the remains of human settlements, an archaeological dig ascertains the age of any civilisation, how it flourished, and why it got buried under the debris of the next evolution.

Dhaka's rich history continues to unfold, as archaeologists and historians work to piece together its past. From its ancient roots to its modern incarnation, Dhaka's story is far from finished – it's still being written, one discovery at a time.



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Besides, the shrine of Shah Ali Baghadi, a saint and disciple of Shah Bahar of the Chishti Order, has been an enduring presence in what is now the Mirpur area since 1412.

At the National Museum, there is an exhibit of an inscription, from near the fort on the gate of the Naswalla Gali Mosque that further highlights the

researchers at Jahangirnagar University.

The Binat Bibi Mosque, constructed in 1454, during the Bengal Sultanate dynasty (13th-16th century AD) in the Narinda area of Dhaka, stands as the city's oldest surviving brick structure. Built during the reign of Nasiruddin Mahmud Shah, the Sultan of Bengal (1435-1459), it bears testament to a prosperous settlement even before the arrival of Islam Khan.

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authorities. The public's lack of trust in the entire system which is severely flawed, discourages victims from filing and reporting cases, ultimately undermining the court's ability to deliver justice."

Legal researcher Taqbir Huda, author of the 2018 BLAST study, says the absence of a state compensation mechanism for victims is responsible too. "Without such a system, rapists can essentially buy impunity by offering survivors or their families small sums, preventing them from filing a case in the first place or coaxing them into abandoning the prosecution later."

Experts pointed out there has been no fundamental societal shift to reduce rape incidents; instead,

insecurity, distrust in the justice system, and doubts about legal processes continue to grant impunity to rapists.

"Social power dynamics remain the same, regardless of which party is in power, so reporting may dip, but actual incidents likely have not," said Jotirmoy.

AT LEAST 1 IN 3 RAPES REMAIN UNFILED

Of the 4,787 rapes reported by media, only 3,419 resulted in filed cases, leaving nearly one in three incidents unfiled.

Women's Rights Activist Khushib Kabir attributed this to the lack of support in the legal system. "Women face distressing conditions in court, and cases can drag on for 8-10 years. This makes it nearly impossible for complainants to endure the costs, social pressures, and lengthy battle."

Barrister Jotirmoy asked, "There's no guarantee that a victim will get justice even if they file a case, so why would they bother?"

He added, "Rape cases often remain unresolved beyond the mandated 180-day timeframe, and convictions are rare."

"The court alone cannot deliver justice, as 99 percent of the process – filing the case, conducting investigations, and presenting witnesses – is carried out by state

authorities. The public's lack of trust in the entire system which is severely flawed, discourages victims from filing and reporting cases, ultimately undermining the court's ability to deliver justice."

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Despite the Law Commission submitting the draft Crime Victims Compensation Act to the home ministry in 2007, it remains unaddressed till date, leaving survivors of rape and violence feeling alienated from the state mechanism.

DEATH PENALTY IN 2020

Experts also cite the death penalty, introduced in 2020, as a possible reason behind low convictions.

Taqbir said judges currently can only choose between life imprisonment and the death penalty, which leads to convictions only in the most severe cases.

Jotirmoy Barua said, "The death sentence achieves little; rather, it often increases the chance that cases never reach a verdict. Every criminal case requires guilt to be proven beyond a reasonable doubt, with no deviation. The death penalty has frequently stalled the legal process, delaying justice even further."

3 OF EVERY 5 VICTIMS ARE CHILDREN

The five-year data analysis also revealed that 2,862 children aged 18 and under were raped during this period, accounting for three out of every five victims.

Of the cases which identified the victims' ages, 47 percent were aged 13

to 18.

According to Zi Khan Panna, children are often targeted for sexual abuse because they are minors, less conscious, and unaware of their surroundings.

"Their vulnerability combined with their inability to protest or fully comprehend the situation makes them easy targets for perpetrators who exploit this psychological advantage."

On October 12 this year, a nine-year-old girl was raped by an unknown man after he lured her with the promise of Tk 200 if she would carry a bag to his house.

The sexual assault left the girl in need of surgery to create a path for eliminating waste, her mother told reporters. "Doctors are working to restore normal [bodily] functions, but my daughter's health risks remain uncertain."

Panna said, "If every school introduced mandatory martial arts training and included comprehensive sex education in the curriculum, incidents of rape, sexual harassment, and domestic violence could decrease significantly."

Roksana Sultan, executive director of Breaking the Silence – a child rights organisation, highlighted how the culture of silence enables sexual abuse within families.

"From a young age, children are often pressured to stay silent about abuse, especially within families. The fear of blame or disbelief forces them to endure repeated harm in silence."

Roksana stressed teaching children about body boundaries and empowering them to say "No".

"Weak state mechanisms fuel all forms of abuse," she said, urging major state reforms.

"As long as there are no interventions to protect women and girls, we cannot decrease the crime against them," stressed Zi Khan Panna.

3 'KNA criminals' killed: ISPR

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Inter Services Public Relations yesterday said three Kuki-Chin National Army members were killed in a gunfight with the army in a forest in Ruma upazila of Bandarban.

The army discovered a secret hideout of KNA there during a drive and recovered weapons and other equipment, the ISPR said in a press release.

The drive would continue, it said.

## Another complaint filed with ICT against Hasina

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Another complaint has been filed with the chief prosecutor at the International Crimes Tribunal against former prime minister Sheikh Hasina and 43 others, accusing them of committing genocide and crimes against humanity during the Hefajat-e-Islam rally in the capital's Motijheel Shapla Chattar on May 5, 2013.

It was filed yesterday by Iffat Ara, the mother of Rehan Ahsan, a former student of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) who was killed during the 2013 rally, said her lawyer, SM Tasmirul Islam.

Besides the former PM, her defence adviser Tariq Ahmed Siddiqui, then home minister Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, leaders of Awami League and its alliance are named in the complaint. It also named top law enforcement officials, including then Police IGP, Rab director general, and DMP commissioner who allegedly led the joint operation that day.

Speaking to the media, Tasmirul Islam said Rehan was shot dead on the night of May 5, 2013, near the Mohammedian Sporting Club, located next to Shapla Chattar. His body was later found in the morgue of Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Rehan's family didn't even receive his autopsy report despite making several requests, he added.

Rehan's mother, Iffat Ara, said, "I had truly given up hope that I would ever