

SALUTING THE BRAVEHEARTS

36 days of **JULY**

PHOTO EXHIBITION

DECEMBER 1–7, 2024

Time: 10:00 AM–8:00 PM

Venue: The Daily Star Centre

STORYTELLING WEEK

Time: 3:00 PM–4:30 PM

WRITE TO PROTEST

Writers and poets on their experience

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 7

Workers erased from July mass uprising narrative

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pullers, and homeless individuals. Despite their sacrifices, these communities are being erased from the narrative.

“If we fail to include them as stakeholders in building a new Bangladesh, we are not heading towards true democracy,” said Mahfuzur Rahman Shamim, convener of Bangladesh Janatar Sangsad.

He criticised the tendency to label protesting marginalised groups, like battery rickshaw-pullers, as accomplices of fascists. He also said the government, like its predecessor, sided with RMG owners rather than the workers when discussing wages.

Asadul Islam, central office secretary of Bangladesh Garment Sramik Samhati, criticised the lack of recognition of RMG workers who played a key role in the uprising, many of whom were injured or killed.

“Their sacrifices remain unacknowledged, except for a few cases highlighted in the media,” he said, calling the Tk 1 lakh compensation for injured families “alms, not compensation”.

Prabir Saha, assistant general



Rubi, a domestic worker, breaks down as she speaks about her son Rana Talukder, who was shot dead by police in the capital's Uttara on August 5. She was speaking at the fifth storytelling session, “Marginalised voices of the July Revolution”, of The Daily Star's storytelling week titled “36 days of July: Saluting the Bravehearts”.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

secretary of the same platform, stressed the need to honour RMG workers and implement the 18-point demands submitted to the interim government.

“The demands include attendance

bonuses, minimum wage reform, an eight-hour workday, labour law reforms, and constitutional changes to ensure workers' dignity.”

Rickshaw-puller Noor Muhammad recalled being forced

by police to take martyred Golam Nafiz's injured body on his rickshaw on August 4.

After being turned away from hospitals, Noor eventually arranged for an autorickshaw to take Nafiz to Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College and Hospital.

Noor cried, “No mother should lose her child this way.”

Pria Khan, a member of the Hijra community, shared how she and her peers tirelessly served at DMCH from July 17, witnessing a relentless wave of death bodies, particularly on July 19.

“There were bodies arriving on stretchers, in ambulances, and even on rickshaws. There was no one to carry them inside.... I remember a BRAC University student being brought in by ambulance. I tried to carry him inside but couldn't do it alone. I begged for help, but he died before we could take him inside.”

Pria revealed the contributions of her community. “Our group of five Hijras collected 730 bags of blood, and our Guru Ma raised Tk 3 lakh in just two days for the treatment of the injured.

“Three morgues were overflowing, with bodies lying out

in the open. By July 24, the stench of decay filled the air, and there wasn't even space to stand or sit. Ambulances charged Tk 10,000-15,000 to transport bodies, turning the crisis into a business. I saw more than 1,000-1,500 people die at DMCH alone, yet we still don't have an accurate death toll.”

Pria also shared how her phone was snatched, videos deleted, and threats issued to silence her for documenting the atrocities.

Rubi, the mother of martyred Rana Talukder, recounted the devastating loss of her 32-year-old son, a driver by profession, who was shot dead near Uttara East Police Station on August 5.

Rana had left home that afternoon with his elder brother, Roni, to celebrate the fall of Sheikh Hasina.

“Hearing gunshots, I went out to bring them back. Rana said he'd find Roni, and they'd return home together,” Rubi said, her voice breaking.

Roni later found Rana shot near the police station. He was rushed to Uttara Modern Medical College Hospital, where he was declared dead at 8:10pm.

Baten Bahini of Tangail

FROM PAGE 1

“As the war began, we managed to get our hands on some weapons from EPR soldiers and local firearm owners and soon began training. Later, we joined forces with Baten Bahini, bringing with us 30-35 rifles and one LMG.”

Towards the end of April, another group of 35 freedom fighters led by Fazlul Haque Mallick joined Baten Bahini, also bringing with them arms and ammunition, Fazlul told The Daily Star.

Abdul Malek, a Baten Bahini member, said, “Our training initially took place in Lauhati. Later, we opened training camps in Tangail's Shahjani village and Manikganj's Tili village.”

According to Mir Shamsul's book, Baten Bahini initially consisted of locals. However, over time, it expanded to include civilians, as well as members of the East Bengal Regiment, East Pakistan Rifles, police, and Ansar who had abandoned their duties or were on leave.

Mir Shamsul said the force comprised 41 companies, 123 platoons, and 370 sections. The freedom fighters of this force fought in over 50 battles during the war. These battles resulted in heavy casualties for the Pakistani army, with over a thousand Pakistani soldiers killed.

OPERATIONS

The first successful operation of Baten Bahini was the attack on Singair Police Station in Manikganj on the night of May 4.

Fazlul Haque Mallick, a freedom fighter who participated in the operation, said, “We attacked the police station at 11 o'clock in the night, amidst drizzling rain. Initially, we caught the Pakistani soldiers off guard. However, they eventually managed to mount a resistance. After two hours of fighting, they were forced to flee, leaving a large arsenal of arms and ammunition.”

According to Mir Shamsul's book, on May 5, another group led by Lance Naik Mokhesur Rahman attacked the Satoria Police Station in Manikganj and looted a number of arms and ammunition.

On May 17, Baten Bahini attacked the Daulatpur Police Station. After three hours of fighting, they emerged victorious, capturing the police station and raising the flag of Bangladesh there.

In the early hours of May 20, four Baten Bahini freedom fighters snuck into the Chauhali Police Station in Sirajganj. Taking advantage of the sleeping Pakistani soldiers, they made away with around two dozen G3 and .303 rifles, along with a large cache of ammunition.

At the end of May, Baten Bahini fighters, disguised as traders, got inside the Ghior Police Station and occupied it.

On the same day, another group carried out an operation at Dhalla Bridge, detaining 20 Razakars and seizing their arms and ammunition.

IMPROVISED ATTACK

Mir Shamsul said as a result of continuous attacks, the Baten Bahini was running out of ammunition. At that time, they were tipped off about the location of some ammunition abandoned at a village near Jabra Bridge in Manikganj. Later, two Baten Bahini companies went there and got their hands on 17 boxes of rifle rounds.

On their way back, locals urged Khandaker Baten to attack the gunboat that Pakistani soldiers were using to loot and burn down villages every week.

Having quickly improvised an ambush on the gunboat, the freedom fighters dug trenches on both sides of the river. Although the attack did not materialise on the first day, it was carried out late on the following night as the gunboat entered the freedom fighters' position.

The Pakistanis resisted, but coordinated fire from both sides of the river resulted in the deaths of 38 Pakistani soldiers. In addition to capturing five injured soldiers, the fighters seized a significant amount of arms and ammunition from the gunboat.

In July, Abdul Baten travelled to India to procure arms, leaving Abul Kalam Azad, head of the Arms Department, in charge of the force. Following news of Abdul Baten's capture in India, the force faced a loss of morale. During this challenging time, Abul Kalam Azad's dedicated

Pakistanis retaliated from inside the police station. After several hours of fighting, as dawn broke, local villagers joined the battle, armed with whatever they could find.

“As their ammunition was dwindling following eight hours of continuous fighting, the Pakistani soldiers fled, leaving behind a number of casualties and their firearms.”

On December 7, Baten Bahini attacked a large jute-laden boat carrying Pakistani soldiers in Dhalla union under Manikganj's Singair upazila, resulting in the deaths of 33 Pakistani soldiers.

Upendranath Sarker, chief of the intelligence wing, told The Daily Star that this was the last major battle fought by the Baten Bahini in the war.

CIVILIAN WING

Upendranath said, “In addition to our military wing, we also had a well-organised civilian wing, which

SCAN THE QR CODE TO WATCH VIDEO

- Area:** Tangail, Manikganj, Sirajganj, and Pabna
- Command structure:** 41 companies, 123 platoons, and 370 sections.
- Civilian wing:** Ran a hospital, published a magazine.
- Timeframe:** May 4- Dec 7
- Operations:** At least 50
- Members:** At least 3,500

File photo of Baten Bahini during an operation in 1971.

PHOTO: MIR SHAMSUL ALAM SHAHZADA

Recent photo of the Satoria Police Station in Manikganj. The Baten Bahini attacked this station a total of three times during the course of the war.

PHOTO: AHMAD ISTIAK

efforts prevented the force from collapsing, Mir Shamsul writes in his book.

In the early hours of August 14, the Baten Bahini conducted a notable operation when the fighters attacked the Satoria Police Station for the second time, capturing it and raising the flag of Bangladesh in the morning, according to the book.

However, the Pakistani forces eventually recaptured the establishment after the freedom fighters had withdrawn.

On November 21, the Baten Bahini attacked the Satoria Police Station for a third time. In this battle, alongside 500 freedom fighters, local villagers in Satoria participated. Ziarat Hossain, a Baten Bahini member, was martyred.

Abdus Sattar, a freedom fighter who participated in the battle, said, “As planned, we attacked the police station around 3:00am. The

focused on security, food, finance and justice, public relations, and leadership training.”

Baten Bahini had also set up a mobile hospital to provide medical care to injured freedom fighters. A newspaper was also published to keep people informed about the war.

Narendra Kumar Poddar, a Baten Bahini freedom fighter, said that the hospital was run by Bengal Regiment doctor Jahirul Islam and Mymensingh Medical College doctor Basanta Kumar Saha. “Furthermore, we published a magazine called ‘Agnishikha,’ edited by Ali Akbar Khan Dollar.”

Baten Bahini freedom fighters received a fixed allowance. Mir Shamsul explained, “The freedom fighters in the force used to receive a monthly allowance, the fund for which came from donations made by generous, well-off members of society.”

PHOTO: STAR LIFESTYLE ARCHIVE

Dhaka's must-visit festivals and fairs this December

RBR

December is a month of festivity in Dhaka. Besides the mild chill in the air, the wafts of jaggery-filled rice cakes steaming by the roadside stalls, or enjoying a sip from a cup of strong milk tea, the month is dotted with fairs, exhibitions, yoga festivals, marathons etc.

In fact, so much is happening this month, that I am finding it difficult to keep tabs on all the events. So, bring out your diary and mark the fun days ahead to plan your December well.

First and foremost, with great pleasure, I want to invite My Dhaka readers to The Daily Star premises and enjoy our remarkable exhibition, titled “36 Days of July: Saluting the Bravehearts”, where we are celebrating journalism. We are exhibiting our in-depth coverage of the July Uprising through our reporting, photojournalism, and multimedia videos. The Daily Star's unique exhibition pays tribute to the spirit of resilience, courage, and sacrifice displayed by students and ordinary Bangladeshis during the historic July Uprising. Our exhibition will remain open to all till December 7 (tomorrow) between 10:00am and 8:00pm.

My recent favourite event of the year is the “Paara Utshob” by Heroes for All Inc. in collaboration with Baridhara Society and DNCC at Baridhara Diplomatic Zone. The open for all Paara Utshob will step into its fourth year of successful consecutive shows this year, and is set to happen today (December 6) from 9:00am to 9:00pm.

What I love about this event is the relaxed mood and joyful atmosphere that prevails throughout the day. You can casually stroll through the streets with a popsicle or coffee in your hand and with your pet tagging along. Pet lovers can bring their pets to the event dressed in their finery for a pet fashion or stage show. This is indeed a unique concept in Dhaka.

The streets are decorated in a fair-like manner with set-ups of craft shops and cafes. Activity zones have deshi street games, open-mike sessions, bioscope, an art wall for all, storytelling corners, and health and well-being info stalls. There are

mini workshops on arts and crafts that are sought after. People playing a board of carom, or opting for fortune tellers to read their future; the event is simply jam-packed with activity!

However, you need to work on the timings if you are to join the “Bangladesh Reimagined: Dhaka Flow Festival of Yoga & Wellness” at Gulshan Society Lake Park. The event, by Dhaka Flow, is for the public and free of cost, but they insist on registering early on. You do not want to miss an exclusive event catered to your wellness, both in regards to your mental and physical health happiness. It is also coinciding with your Friday plans today; however, if you happen to be busy today, then you also have tomorrow to pop in from 10:00am to 7:00pm.

There will be yoga and fitness classes, music and theatre performances, art and meditation workshops, expert panel discussions, a 5km run, a wellness bazaar, and much more. I am looking forward to the Sound Healing and Sound Meditation sessions and I must remember to carry my earphones for the immersive experience zone. The Sustainable Fashion Boulevard and Fashion Show by the likes of Humaira Khan of Anokhi is an added attraction.

Friday is set to be the most happening day of the month because there is also a 21.1km and 7.5km marathon today at the capital's Hatirjheel, titled “Run for the Earth 2024”, with the slogan “Run for Health, Run for Unity”.

Besides these carnivals, there will be scores of Christmas bazaars and tradeshows throughout the month, which are the perfect places to go for your Christmas shopping. Later in the month there is a jazz night at Spaghetti Jazz. Then a trendy K-pop Fancy Fest Dhaka-2024, featuring an electrifying K-pop dancing and singing competition, will be held on December 20 at Tokyo Square Convention Centre in Mohammadpur (Level 8).

But the much-awaited fair of the month will be the three-day-long “Zainul Utsab” and “Zainul Mela,” to be held at Charukola (Faculty of Fine Arts, Dhaka University). This is a perfect way to end your year; explore the fairgrounds for artworks from faculty departments and handmade heritage crafts from local artisans.