

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

Young Tigers crush Pakistan

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unbeaten on 61 off 42 balls with seven fours and three sixes to guide his to the target in just 22.1 overs.

Skipper Tamim credited his pacers for their sensational bowling performance against their Pakistani counterparts.

“Today [yesterday] everything was in our favour. All the bowlers did really well, especially Emon, Maruf and others as well. That’s why we could dismiss them for 117 [116] runs,” Tamim said in a video message after the match.

Meanwhile, pacer Emon was elated with his performance and happy to contribute to the team’s winning cause.

“The wicket was really good, it was a pace friendly wicket. I bowled in good areas and got success. I am very excited and happy to get the player-of-the-match award. My performance was very vital for the team,” said Emon, who also said he wants to bowl in good areas in Sunday’s final against India, who beat Sri Lanka by the same margin in the day’s other semifinal in Sharjah.

Meanwhile, Tamim was hopeful of retaining their title, saying, “Inshallah, we will try to give our best in the final.”

Last year, Bangladesh beat hosts UAE by 195 runs to clinch their maiden U-19 Asia Cup title.

Project cost to shoot up by 80pc

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for development projects “but I told them that the projects have to be cost-effective.”

He said a Japanese delegation is expected to visit Bangladesh later this month, and they would discuss the railway project, particularly its cost in detail.

WHY TRAINS TAKE SO LONG

Trains between the capital and the north-west region being late has become all too common over the last few years.

Dhaka and those regions are linked by the single-line section between Joydebpur and Ishwardi.

Twenty-two trains can smoothly run every day using the single line, but the line is being used by around 40 trains. As a result, most of the trains, except a few, have to wait at nearby stations to make way for oncoming trains, officials said.

This is made worse by the fact that the distance from one station to another between Joydebpur and Bangabandhu Bridge (East) Station is relatively long, causing each train to wait even longer.

PROJECT DELAY

To fix this, the government in November 2018 took up the Tk 14,250.61 crore project to turn Joydebpur-Ishwardi section into a dual-gauge double line.

This was among the projects for which Dhaka and Beijing signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) during Chinese President Xi Jinping’s Dhaka visit in October 2016.

China was supposed to provide Tk 8,756.75 crore for the line expansion and BR completed negotiation with China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation for implementing the project.

Between March 2019 and January 2021, the railways ministry wrote to the Chinese government several times requesting the signing of a deal.

But, China in March 2021 declined to finance the project citing several reasons, including “a lack of in-depth preliminary work and insufficient feasibility study”.

Sources claimed that China’s backtracking may have something to do with geo-politics. Bangladesh’s rail communication, especially the operation of freight trains with India, would have got a boost once the double line project was completed. The PMO’s directive to cut costs also played a role, they said.

Amid allegations of inflated project cost, the PMO in October 2020 formed

Halim Bahini of Manikganj

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Bahini was spread over an area of about 800 sq km, which covered 22 police stations, including Sadar, Singair, Ghior, Shibalay, Daulatpur, and Harirampur in Manikganj; Dohar, Nawabganj, Dhamrai, and Savar in Dhaka; and Sreenagar in Munshiganj.

In June this year, The Daily Star spoke to over 50 freedom fighters of Halim Bahini during a visit to five upazilas of Manikganj and two upazilas of Dhaka.

ARMS AND TRAINING

On March 27, a group of freedom fighters led by Abdul Halim raided the Manikganj treasury, looting a number of rifles and a large cache of ammunition.

Speaking to this newspaper, freedom fighter Awlad Hossain said later that day, a meeting was held in Shibalay, chaired by Abdur Rouf Khan, director of operations, where it was decided to set up training centres in every union of the upazila. The next day, a meeting was held in Harirampur to organise a comprehensive resistance movement. The initial training began in Manikganj town using weapons looted from the treasury.

On April 8, when Pakistani troops entered Manikganj town, Abdul Halim divided his arsenal and dispatched 26 rifles and 200 bullets to arm the unit to be led by Matin Chowdhury, associate director (general), in Azimnagar.

From the first week of April, training of freedom fighters commenced in Manikganj’s Sadar, Shibalaya, Ghior, Harirampur, and Singair under the supervision of the Halim Bahini.

In the second week of April, the Halim Bahini established its headquarters on the banks of the Padma in Harirampur.

FIRST OF BATTLES

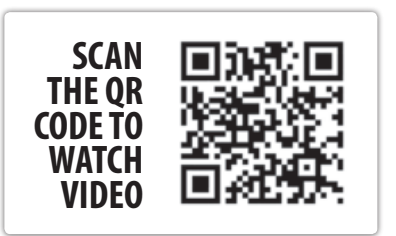
In mid-May, the Pakistani army, aided by Razakars, set up a camp in Harina, Harirampur, triggering a series of battles between the Halim Bahini and the Pakistani forces across Manikganj.

According to the book, the Halim Bahini engaged in over 40 battles against the Pakistani forces, inflicting heavy casualties on Pakistani soldiers and Razakars.

One of the most notable battles fought by the Halim Bahini against the Pakistanis was the Charigaon Launch Ghat operation in Singair on June 17.

On June 17, freedom fighters, led by unit commander Tabarak Hossain, ambushed two Pakistani launches at Charigaon, located on the banks of the Kaliganga River in Singair.

Yakub Hossain, a freedom fighter who participated in the battle, said, “The two launches, unaware of our



ambush, were easy targets. Our attack was swift and decisive, resulting in the deaths of around a dozen soldiers on board.

“We then looted the launches of their arms and ammunition before sinking them in the river.”

The Halim Bahini also attacked multiple enemy vessels on the Dhaleshwari and Padma rivers.

In September, a group of eight freedom fighters, led by Abdul Halim, attacked a Pakistani launch on the Padma near Harirampur, resulting in the deaths of 11 Pakistani soldiers and 3 Razakars.

The freedom fighters later recovered a significant amount of arms and ammunition from the launch, said Khandaker Abdul Baten, who took part in the attack.

In addition to their victories on the water, the Halim Bahini also engaged the Pakistani army on land.

One such instance was the attack on the Nayadingi Bridge at Saturia on August 29, which restricted Pakistani movements, Abdul Baten also said.

HALIM’S INDIA TRIP

As the series of battles against the Pakistani army continued, the Halim Bahini’s ammunition supply dwindled.

In September, Abdul Halim travelled to Melaghar in Tripura, India, to seek additional arms support. During his visit, he met with Sector 2 Commander Major Khaled Mosharrar, according to the book.

He would go on to stay in India for two months and return in November with additional fighters.

In his absence, Abdul Matin, associate director, Abdur Rouf, director of operations, and Awlad Hossain, additional director, conducted the operations.

TURNING POINT

October marked a turning point, with the Halim Bahini dealing heavy blows on the Pakistani forces in various parts of Manikganj.

On October 13, the Halim Bahini launched a fierce attack on the Pakistani army’s Harina camp in Harirampur. Freedom fighters, along with Baloch soldiers who deserted the Pakistani army, successfully captured the camp.

Awlad Hossain said, “Four Baloch soldiers, enraged at the Pakistani army’s transgressions, reached out to us to join our cause.

“On October 13, we encircled the Pakistani camp and launched an attack. The assault resulted in the deaths of 53 Pakistani soldiers.”

Area: Manikganj, Dhaka, and Munshiganj.

Command structure: 5 companies under 3 units

Timeframe: Apr - Dec

Operations: At least 40

Members: At least 2,000

Recent photo of the Padma river in Harirampur, Manikganj. On the banks of this river, Halim Bahini set up its headquarters in the second week of April in 1971.

Freedom fighter Mahfuzur Rahman Khan was seriously injured in a grenade attack by the Pakistanis during the battle. He died on October 15.

The most devastating defeat inflicted on the Pakistani army

by Halim Bahini was the Battle of Golaidanga in Singair on October 28, when 82 Pakistani soldiers were killed without any casualties to the freedom fighters.

Acting on a tip off that a group of Pakistani soldiers on 10-12 boats was approaching their camp at Golaidanga

began heading back to their boats, the freedom fighters, hiding in plain sight, swooped on them.

Freedom fighter Lokman Hossain said, “There were only 30 of us. Armed with few weapons, we forced the Pakistani soldiers into the muddy waters. We scattered their force, which was more than twice our size. The bravery displayed by our forces was broadcast by Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra.”

Among other battles fought by Halim Bahini are the battle of Baira village in July, the battle of Machain Bazar on July 18, the ambush at Maluchi village on August 9, the battle of Narchi and Kustagram in Ghior on November 28, and the battle of Daskandi village in Shibalay on December 8.

RETURN OF FORCE CHIEF

The book reads that after spending two months in India procuring weapons, Captain Halim was appointed regional commander of 22 police stations across Dhaka, Manikganj, and Munshiganj in November.

In the third week of November, Captain Halim returned to Bangladesh with a sizable force and weaponry. The freedom fighters under his command fought valiantly on the battlefield until the ultimate victory.

STRUCTURE

According to its members, the Halim Bahini was organised into three units. Rouf Khan led the forces operating in the Harirampur-Shibalaya-Ghior-Daulatpur area. Tabarak Hossain Ludu commanded the forces in the Singair-Manikganj-Saturia and Savar areas. Sirajuddin led the unit operating in the Nawabganj-Dohar-Keraniganj region of Dhaka.

Initially, the Halim Bahini consisted of four companies. However, after the martyrdom of freedom fighter Mahfuz in October, a fifth company, named the Mahfuz Company, was formed in his honour. The company commanders were Abdur Razzak (Alpha Company), Abul Bashar (Bravo Company), Mainuddin Chowdhury/Sipahi Abdul Hakim (Charlie Company), Abul Khalek (Delta Company), and Rezaur Rahman (Mahfuz Company).

The Halim Bahini’s achievements during the Liberation War were made possible by the support of the local people. “We couldn’t have done anything without the help of the local villagers,” said Awlad Hossain. “We relied on donations from affluent community members to fund our operations. Moreover, the villagers provided us with food and shelter all the time.”

Translated and edited from Bangla by Subrata Roy.

49 Indian media

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fact-checking organisation.

In a report titled “Spread of Fake News About Bangladesh in Indian Media Outlets” published on its website yesterday, Rumor Scanner debunked the false claims and identified the media outlets responsible for spreading the misinformation.

According to Rumor Scanner, since the fall of the Awami League-led government on August 5, Indian media outlets have been circulating a series of rumours about the situation in Bangladesh.

Republic Bangla topped the list of Indian media outlets with most false reports about Bangladesh by broadcasting five rumours. The Hindustan Times, Zee News, and Live Mint each spread three false reports. Meanwhile, Republic, India Today, ABP Anand, and Aaj Tak each broadcast two false reports. The remaining 41 media outlets spread one false report each.

The debunked claims included: a fake letter from Sheikh Hasina after her resignation; a video of a Muslim man falsely claimed as Hindu during a search for his son;

false reports about Bangladesh’s Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus’s health and location; baseless claims of withdrawal of bans on militant groups; arms smuggling via a ship from Pakistan; misrepresentation of lawyer Saiful Islam’s murder; alleged ban on Indian TV channels; idol immersion in India misrepresented as a reaction to attacks on Hindu idols in Bangladesh; an alleged attack on a Shyamoli Paribahan bus from India; and false UK travel advisories for Bangladesh.

According to the fact-checking organisation, soon after Hasina fled and took refuge in India, the Indian media circulated an alleged open letter from her blaming the US for her removal. However, Rumor Scanner confirmed no such letter existed. It originated from a Facebook post and was published by a page, “Tripura Bhoishyot”.

It also debunked a viral video that was broadcast by an Indian news outlet claiming a Hindu man was protesting for his missing son. Rumor Scanner found the man, Babul Howlader, was Muslim. His son had been missing since 2013.

The Indian media also used a

morphed photo to falsely report that Prof Yunus was admitted to ICU after he was sworn in as chief adviser, according to the Rumor Scanner. It also debunked an Indian media report that said Prof Yunus fled to France after Trump’s November 5 presidential win. The photo with the story was taken on August 8 when Yunus returned home from France to take oath as the chief adviser.

Claims of bans being lifted on militant organisations were also baseless, as verified by Rumor Scanner.

On November 13, the Indian media reported that a Pakistani military ship docked at Chattogram port. Rumor Scanner confirmed it was a commercial vessel carrying goods.

After the arrest of Chinmoy Krishna Das Brahmachari, spokesperson for Sammilita Sanatani Jagaran Jote, for disrespecting the national flag, rumours spread about lawyer Saiful Islam Ali’s murder. Indian media outlets claimed that Saiful was murdered for defending Chinmoy at court. However, this claim was incorrect. Chinmoy’s lawyer was Subhashish Sharma, not Saiful.

Some Indian media claimed Indian

satellite channels were shut down in Bangladesh, but Rumor Scanner confirmed they remain operational, as verified by the information ministry and the Cable Operators Association.

Another claim suggested that the Bangladesh Air Force, with Chinese support, planned Asia’s second-largest airbase near the so-called Chicken Neck, aka the Siliguri Corridor. However, Rumor Scanner identified this news as false. Lalmonirhat airport, which has been unused for over six decades, saw no such activities as claimed by the report.

The fact-finding organisation identified a viral video claiming to show a temple attack in Bangladesh as fake. The video was taken in India during idol immersion.

Reports of anti-India slogans following a bus accident in Brahmanbaria were also identified as rumours by the Rumor Scanner.

UK travel advisories were falsely portrayed as Bangladesh-specific, whereas they applied to multiple countries, including India, with no heightened warnings for most of Bangladesh.

Govt must improve law and order fast

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transparent governance needs to be presented, he said.

Ahmed’s observation comes at a time when Bangladesh’s net FDI was found to have been overstated by \$5.7 billion between fiscal years 2019-20 and 2022-23.

In the four fiscal years, Bangladesh actually received \$5.86 billion as net FDI, a disappointing amount given the seeming political stability and stellar economic growth in those years.

Ahmed termed the last 10 years of the previous Awami League government “very pathetic”.

“What I think is that our institutions were severely damaged in those years.”

Institutions like the Public Service Commission and the Election Commission and the regulatory agencies such as the National Board of Revenue (NBR), the Bangladesh Bank (BB) and the police were compromised.

“This led to widespread disorder in the country and everything became politicised.”

The previous AL regime saw widespread corruption and money laundering.

“The Anti-Corruption Commission

and the Bangladesh Bank were supposed to foil those but they did not do their job.”

Even the agencies meant to support businesses such as the port were not spared from politicisation, which, ultimately, weakened the business environment, and the business ecosystem suffered.

“If the ACC is not truly independent and effective, corruption will continue unchecked. Similarly, our Public Service Commission needs to ensure a fair recruitment process free from political influence. Only then we can build the foundation for sustainable economic growth.”

Institutional reform is key, said Ahmed, country manager and managing director of Expeditors (Bangladesh), a global logistics company.

“We need strong, independent institutions that aren’t swayed by political pressure or financial incentives. Without strong institutions, our business environment will continue to suffer,” he said, while lauding the interim government’s reform initiatives.

And all the institutions should be

led by strong, impartial individuals who are not money-minded.

“Only then can we create a truly democratic atmosphere. The challenges we are facing, like cronyism and the politicisation of business organisations, are deep-rooted. And these issues won’t just go away without structural changes.”

Bangladesh’s politicians practised the wrong sort of politics all these years, according to Ahmed.

They were supposed to pick politicians as leaders. Instead, they invited businesspeople to politics and made them ministers.

For instance, in January, two-thirds of the lawmakers elected in the 12th parliamentary election were business people, according to Shushasoner Jonno Nagarik, a non-government organisation.

“So, we made a big mistake here. Because politicians are supposed to be individuals who are connected with the people, those who have the tendency to sacrifice for people. What we saw was that those who became councillors were engaged in business also.”

Parties should pick those people

as leaders who have the mentality to serve the people and do not have the mentality to expand their wealth.

While businesspeople have the right to engage in politics, they should distance themselves from businesses when they become active in politics.

“When you are a politician, your focus should be on politics. But if you are involved in politics and business, there will be no benefit.”

He cited the case of the US where successful businesspeople who join politics step aside from their businesses. They leave the businesses to the top management of their firms.

“Here, in our country, you will find that the politicians remain involved in their business directly. This should not be.”

Some businesspeople had political aspirations, and they joined politics after becoming leaders of trade bodies such as the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

“This is a regret for us. Had the trade bodies worked in favour of businesses, then our business environment would not have deteriorated so much.”