

GIJN picks 2 Star investigative reports

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Global Investigative Journalism Network on Thursday published its editor's pick for "Best Investigative Stories from Bangladesh in 2024". The list featured two reports from The Daily Star, "Count of a carnage: about 95pc killed by gunshots" and "Where the buffalo no longer roam".

The first was a joint effort from The Daily Star's newsroom to prominently highlight the 204 people killed by the then Awami League government between July 15 and August 1.

The latter report was written by staff reporter Sifat Ullah and tells the tale of buffalo herders from Urir Char, who were struggling to survive on the 13 sq km island amidst erosion and rising sea levels.

Alongside this, other reports featured in the list included Samakal's "Charity meat in officials' kitchens", The Business Standard's "CHT forests being razed for cassava farming", DW's "Torturers deployed as UN peacekeepers", Protidiner Bangladesh's "Population Puzzle", Channel 24's "Subsidies 'Stolen', Farmers Exploited", and Prothom Alo's "Not qualified for admission, yet police chief now a PhD".



Visitors stroll through the "Art of Resistance" exhibition at The Daily Star Centre, launched yesterday to mark the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence and Human Rights Day. The artworks on display are about challenging injustice, promoting equality, and inspiring social change. Story on Page 3.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS



Let's fulfil the martyrs' vision

Tarique calls on countrymen

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman yesterday called for a pluralistic political system and restoration of democracy in the country in line with the aspirations of the martyred intellectuals who were killed ahead of the country's independence in 1971.

In a statement on the eve of Martyred Intellectuals' Day, Tarique said, "On this day, we pay solemn tribute to the memories of the country's greatest sons who were martyred for standing up for freedom and justice."

He said the local collaborators of the invading army carried out the massacre to make independent Bangladesh meritless.

He lamented, saying that the country had veered away from its democratic aspirations post-independence.

"Just after victory, the undemocratic forces removed their masks and started undermining the universal democratic rights of the people one after another, as did the Pakistani occupation forces."

He said the undemocratic moves weakened the independence and sovereignty of the newly born country, which the people got in exchange for "a river of blood".

Tarique said following that tradition, the Awami fascists in the last 15 years sent democracy into exile and dashed the hope of a united nation by extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and sowing divisions among the people.

"Instead of fostering democratic development and transforming the country into a prosperous, self-reliant, and strong state, a system of one-party misrule was established," he said.

He urged all to unite and "practice real democracy" in the changed political situation after the ouster of the Awami League government.

"We have to restore the rule of law, establish an independent judiciary, and a pluralistic political system," he said, urging all to take inspiration from the martyred intellectuals.

"I call upon the countrymen — let's work together to build a Bangladesh in line with the expectations of the martyred intellectuals," he added.

Nation pays homage today

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measures of the Pakistani rulers, thus contributing to the Liberation War.

President Mohammed Shahabuddin will pay tributes to the martyred intellectuals by placing floral wreaths at the Martyred Intellectuals Memorial at Mirpur. He will place wreaths at the memorial at 7.05am, reports BSS.

Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus will follow the President to pay homage to the martyred intellectuals. The President and the Chief Adviser will stand there in solemn

silence for a while as a mark of profound respect to the memories of the illustrious sons of the soil, according to BSS report.

A smartly-turned-out contingent of the Bangladesh Armed Forces will offer a state salute.

The President and the Chief Adviser issued separate messages on the eve of the day.

M o h a m m e d Shahabuddin in a message said, "I call upon all to play an effective role from their respective positions to build a new Bangladesh, inspired by the spirit of non-discrimination," UNB

reported.

In his message, Prof Yunus said that the interim government, formed through the mass uprising, is committed to building a developed, prosperous, and well-governed Bangladesh.

He also called on everyone to unite, resist any conspiracy by anti-liberation forces, and fulfill their responsibilities from their respective positions.

People from different political and social organisations and walks of life and ages would place floral wreaths at memorials at Mirpur and Rayerbazar as well as elsewhere in the

country at the daybreak.

Bangladesh Radio, Bangladesh Television and private TV channels will air special programmes highlighting the sacrifices of the intellectuals for national independence.

Moreover, special prayers and services will be held at mosques, temples, churches, pagodas, and other places of worship across the country on the Martyred Intellectuals Day.

To preserve the sanctity of the day, the Ministry of Liberation War Affairs has requested the public to refrain from using microphones or

loudspeakers in the vicinity of the memorial at Mirpur.

To mark the day, different socio-cultural and political organisations have chalked out elaborate programmes, including seminars, discussions and placing wreaths at the memorials at Mirpur and Rayerbazar.

Dhaka University has also prepared programmes to pay respect to the martyred intellectuals, many of whom belonged to the university. Black flags will be hoisted at all dormitories, at the vice-chancellor's residence and buildings of the university in the morning.

No list of martyred intellectuals for now

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War ministry and chief of the national committee.

"This is a policy matter, and I cannot make the decision alone. Either the interim government or the next political government can reconsider it," she added.

The Pakistani army, with the help of local collaborators, began abducting and killing the country's leading intellectuals, who were the guiding light for Bangladesh, from the night of March 25, 1971.

Faced with impending defeat, the Pakistani army killed more and more luminaries in the days ahead of December 16, 1971 and to cripple the future nation intellectually.

These shining individuals were instrumental in the mass movements against the widespread disparity and oppressive Pakistani rulers. The movements ultimately contributed to the war efforts.

A committee member said that names of martyred intellectuals can be found in the "Shaheed Buddhijibi Koshgrantha," the 1972 government documentary "Bangladesh," "Banglapedia," and on postal stamps.

"Shaheed Buddhijibi Koshgrantha" listed 328 martyred intellectuals, but said the list was not complete.

The documentary "Bangladesh" said 1,109 intellectuals were martyred.

Banglapedia estimated that 1,111 intellectuals were killed — including 991 academics, 49 physicians, 42 lawyers, 13 journalists, nine litterateurs and artists, five engineers, and two others.

Many war researchers, however, believe the total number of martyred intellectuals could be much higher. The members of the "Buddhijibi Nidhan Tathanusandhan Committee", set up in 1972, had made a primary list of

20,000 intellectuals who were killed.

On November 19, 2020, the ministry formed an 11-member committee — comprising freedom fighters, liberation war researchers, and government officials — to prepare the list.

In its first meeting in December 2020, the committee approved 1,222 names for the primary list. Of them, 1,070 are names the ministry already had, and 152 were obtained from postal stamps issued in the name of martyred intellectuals at various times.

L i t t e r a t e u r s , philosophers, scientists, artists, teachers, researchers, journalists, lawyers, physicians, architects, sculptors, government employees, politicians, social workers, cultural activists, musicians, and people involved in film-making, theatre and arts, who were killed by the

Pakistani forces or went missing between March 25, 1971, and January 31, 1972, are being defined as martyred intellectuals, several committee members said.

F o l l o w i n g the committee's recommendation, the government in May 2021 published the names of 191 martyred intellectuals, and in May 2022, it published the names of 143; in February this year, it published the names of 108; and in March, it published the names of another 118.

At least two members of the scrutiny committee said that they reviewed names of intellectuals from different books and research. They received lists from different professional bodies of doctors and engineers and applications from persons.

A sub-committee member said the ministry received more than 1,000 applications for the list. After the announcement

of the fourth gazette, they were scrutinising more than 300 such names to publish in the next gazette.

The member said they faced no hurdles in preparing the list for the first two gazettes.

"But we faced challenges while preparing the names for the next two gazettes as many influential people tried to include some names, complicating our jobs," the member added.

Asif Munier, son of martyred intellectual Prof Munier Chowdhury, said, "I don't know why the government postponed the process, but I can only assume that they have other priorities."

He said the list can be prepared in the future, but it must be ensured that it is done transparently to avoid any debate.

He proposed a wider consultation with various groups, including family members of martyred intellectuals, during the preparation of the definition and the list.

Partisan link

FROM PAGE 1
THE APPOINTMENTS

The government appointed Prof Kamrul Ahsan as the new VC of Jahangirnagar University. Before his appointment, he was the president of the pro-BNP teachers' organisation Jatiyatabadi Shikkhak Forum at JU.

His colleague Prof Nurul Islam, who is the general secretary of the same committee, has been appointed Pro-VC of the National University.

Rashedul Islam, general secretary of the pro-BNP teachers' forum at Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, has been appointed VC of Kurigram Agricultural University.

M Yeaqub Ali, member of the pro-BNP teachers' forum, has been appointed as the pro-VC of Islamic University.

Leaders of the DU pro-BNP teachers' panel have been awarded top positions in several other universities.

For example, DU Professor ABM Obaidul Islam, former convener of the BNP backed teachers' panel, has been appointed VC of Bangladesh Open University. The current convener of the forum, Professor Lutfor Rahman, was appointed Pro-VC of the National University.

The newly appointed VC of Rajshahi University, Prof Saleh Hasan Naqib, had ties to the pro-BNP teachers' forum. He used to attend programmes arranged by the forum before resigning in August.

Naqib said, "I was barely a member. They [the forum members] forcibly enlisted me as a member, but I was not actively involved in any of their meetings."

"Besides, university teachers may have political ideologies. My work primarily focuses on students. I prefer to stay out of political involvement. As I consider myself somewhat independent-minded, political influence won't affect my work at all."

At Khulna University, the new VC Rezaul Karim is a former president of a pro-BNP organisation.

Prof Rezaul said he had resigned from the association. "Even if I were involved with such an association, it wouldn't affect any of my administrative activities because the affiliation was solely for managing teachers' elections. Everything else we do is for the benefit of students and teachers on the campus. It won't influence any appointments or other activities."

At Bangladesh Agricultural University, AK Fazlul Haque Bhuiyan, the new VC, is the president of the pro-BNP Teachers Forum.

MANY FROM DU
Several DU faculty members with ties to pro-BNP and pro-Jamaat bodies have secured the top positions at other universities.

For instance, Prof ASM Amanullah, who has ties to the pro-BNP "white panel", is the new VC of the National University.

Professor Haidar Ali, also from the same panel, has been appointed VC of Comilla University.

Islamic University VC Prof Nakib M Nasrullah, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman University VC Prof Dilip Kumar Barua, and DU Pro-VC Prof Mamun Ahmed participated in the 2022 DU senate election from the "white panel".

Of the eight newly appointed treasurers, seven have links to the pro-BNP or pro-Jamaat bodies. For example, Prof M Abdur Rab,

JU treasurer, is known as a "white panel" member.

Some appointments also appear to have been influenced by personal recommendations.

In August, JU Professor Ismot Ara, a relative of Education Adviser Wahiduddin Mahmud, recommended four teachers for VC positions at JU. Although none of them were chosen, two were given key roles at Sheikh Hasina University in Netrokona: Prof Khandaker M Ashraf Munnim became the VC and Prof Anichha Parvin the treasurer.

Professor Ismot Ara is also a syndicate member at Sheikh Hasina University.

REACTION FROM EDUCATIONISTS

Samina expressed concerns that such practices would not bring any meaningful improvement to universities.

"It does not reflect the expectations of the July-August uprising either," she said.

Teachers who are not involved in politics, lack the time or connections to lobby, are often excluded from key positions.

"Considering these, the government appears very fragile. This fragility is evident in its tendency to sway under pressure or demands, shifting from one side to the other."

Prominent intellectual and writer Abul Kashem Fazlul Haq said, "Given the overall situation, I don't think that this interim government solely relies on or bends to any political party so far."

He said, "It's not that those appointed are less qualified. It could be that the government did not find better professionals for the posts."

"Every administration has limitations and makes mistakes, but they must ensure that their actions reflect the expectations of the citizens."

As an interim government, it might not be able to complete all tasks in a short period, but it can set positive examples for future governments, he added.

Education Adviser Wahiduddin Mahmud, his special assistant Prof Aminul Islam, and Senior Secretary of the Secondary and Higher Education Division, Siddique Zohair, did not respond to repeated calls made by this correspondent.

Special Assistant to the Education Adviser, Professor M Aminul Islam, told The Daily Star that the government has appointed teachers with excellent academic qualifications, and they are widely acceptable among the students, teachers, and staff.

He added, "It doesn't matter which political party they support or don't support. What matters most is their academic qualifications and their acceptance among students."

"I held a meeting with the new vice-chancellors, where they expressed their commitment to fulfilling their responsibilities."

He added that under past administrations, there were gross violations in appointments. "We have not received any complaints or allegations against the new VCs so far."

These teachers are determined not to repeat the mistakes of the past, he added.

[RU Correspondent Nurhasan Mridul, JU Correspondent Sakib Ahmed, JnU Correspondent Rakib Madber Contributed to this report.]

Misri's visit

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Randhir Jaiswal said, "It is our understanding that the foreign secretary's visit will help in sustaining the bilateral engagement between India and Bangladesh to address concerns as well as advance the substantive issues in the relationship."

Jaiswal said the readout issued by the MEA on Misri's statement to the media in Dhaka, which emphasised continuing the mutually beneficial cooperation between India and Bangladesh. The MEA also emphasised India's desire to work closely with the interim government and relayed New Delhi's concerns, including those related to the safety and welfare of minorities.

Jaiswal said that while in Dhaka, Misri took up the issue of what India said were attacks on minorities in Bangladesh with the leaders of that country and stressed that it was in Bangladesh's own interest to protect the minorities.

Highlighting the impact of the visit, Jaiswal said, a day after Misri's Dhaka visit, Press Secretary to the Chief Adviser of Bangladesh Shaful Alam issued a statement mentioning that 88 incidents of attacks on minorities had taken place and 70 people had been arrested in connection with them.

The MEA spokesman said, "It is our expectation from the Bangladesh government that it will do the needful [to protect minorities]."

Asked about Indian newspapers' reports that the foreign secretary conveyed to a parliamentary standing committee on December 11 that New Delhi does not endorse ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina's comments while staying in India, Jaiswal said, "It is not our practice to comment on speculative and selective reports about privileged matters."

He said the parliamentary standing committee on the Ministry of External Affairs is a privileged forum.

League following the 2008 election when AL assumed power.

Since 2009, Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique, Prof Md Akhtaruzzaman and Prof ASM Maksud Kamal, were appointed DU VCs by the AL government. All of them are from the blue panel.

The Daily Star in January 2022 found that at least 39 out of 48 VCs of public universities have held posts in different pro-government teachers' bodies during their career.

Academics say the "political appointments" exacerbate corruption, nepotism and anomalies in teacher and staff recruitments.

EXAMPLES FROM OTHER COUNTRIES

Prof Nazrul said many countries have committees to appoint VCs.

In India and Pakistan, the state governments form the committees.

In Sri Lanka, VCs are

appointed by the president for a three-year term, from a panel of three names recommended by a council of that university. An individual cannot be the VC of the same university more than twice.

There should be a uniform policy for appointing VCs, Anu Muhammad said, adding that academic excellence, administrative qualification and acceptability among teachers should be core requirements.

Siddique Zohair, senior secretary at the Secondary and Higher Education Division, said, "We have a plan to make a policy for this. We will decide whether there will be a search committee or something else."

Setting minimum requirements will be in consideration, he added.