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JULY UPRISING CASES Police extorting bribes from their own

SHAIHEEN MOLLAH and
MUNTAKIM SAAD

Sub-Inspector Anup Biswas was hospitalised for nearly two weeks after being hit in the head by a chunk of brick during the quota reforms protests in the capital's Rampura on July 18.

Around one and a half months after the August 5 political changeover, Anup learnt that he was named in an attempted murder case filed on October 17 over the injury of a man during protests at Khilgaon on July 19, although the incident occurred when he was still incapacitated in hospital.

A colleague later informed him that he would have to pay Tk 1 lakh or face the risk of being implicated in a murder case.

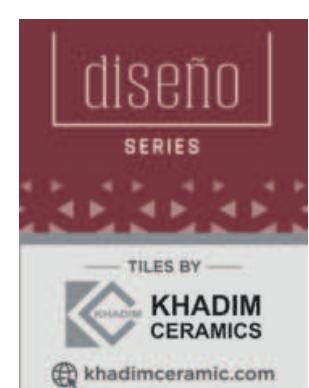
Confident that he would be able to prove his innocence in any such cases, Anup decided not to pay.

"I was fighting for my life in the hospital, and then I found I was being accused of attempted murder," Anup said. "How could I commit a crime when I was lying unconscious?"

He also said the first extortion attempt was only a "warning". "This was only to show that they meant business."

Anup says he was threatened with several murder cases after he refused to pay.

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SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

- Bribes were demanded from 16 officers named in a single case
- Extortions typically happen before filing of cases
- DMP vows action if someone brings specific allegations



What once was a lush green hill in Companiganj upazila of Sylhet is now a barren land with water-filled craters, due to illegal stone extraction. Locals say the extraction goes on every day, with authorities turning a blind eye.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

16 PAGES: TK 15.00

JULY ATROCITIES Trial of top brass to be completed within a year

Say law adviser, ICT
chief prosecutor

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The top leaders of the ousted Awami League regime who stand accused of commanding the crimes against humanity during the July uprising will be brought to book within a year, speakers said at a dialogue yesterday.

Law Adviser Asif Nazrul said, "Next year, we aim to celebrate the Victory Day by meting out justice to mass murderers."

He added that while amending the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) law, the government intentionally refrained from including any provisions to try the AL as a political party.

"We want this trial process to be internationally accepted. We don't want to give anybody the scope to say this court

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

STUDENTS AGAINST DISCRIMINATION 'Proclamation of July revolution' set for Dec 31

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Students Against Discrimination is set to proclaim on December 31 the July mass uprising as a revolution.

The Proclamation of July Revolution is likely to include what student leaders say is a framework for a country free of discrimination.

Leaders of the platform, which spearheaded the uprising that toppled the Awami League government, made the announcement on Facebook yesterday evening.

Hasnat Abdullah, convener of

Students Against Discrimination, shared on Facebook a status about the proclamation late last night.

"Why do we need a Proclamation of Revolution? To save my existence, your existence, and to transform our movement into a true revolution, this proclamation is essential. This should have been done on August 5. Even though it's late, it's still reassuring news," reads the status written by Fardeen Hasan, editor of The Inquest, a bite-sized news aggregator platform.

"You may be wondering what

SEE PAGE 7 COL 5

Dhaka has to
balance ties
with, India,
China, US

Says Adviser Touhid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka needs to strike a balance in its perusal of relations with India, China, and the US, because Bangladesh has interests to protect and is not a major player in the global arena, Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain said yesterday.

Despite tensions India

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

People believe govt delaying polls on purpose

Says Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

There is a public perception that the interim government is intentionally delaying the election process, said BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir.

Speaking at an event in the capital yesterday, he said an unelected government should not remain in power for long.

"Reform is an ongoing process and it will continue. However, we can't delay the election for the sake of

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



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Swechchhasebak Dal man hacked to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogura

An activist of Swechchhasebak Dal was hacked to death in Bogura early yesterday.

The deceased, identified as local sand trader Abu Sayeed, 33, came under attack at Paschim Para Nishindhara area of the town after 12:00am, according to the police.

Locals rescued and rushed him to Bogura Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital where he died during treatment, said police.

Sayeed's brother Md Ripon said unknown people called Sayeed over the phone after midnight and later hacked him with sharp weapons.

His father Yusuf Ali filed a case against unidentified people over the incident later in the day, said SM Mouin Uddin, officer-in-charge of Bogura Sadar Police Station.

"We have not found any motive behind the murderer yet," said the police officer. "No one has been arrested, but police are working to identify those involved in the murder."

Hossain Ali, member secretary of Bogura Town Swechchhasebak Dal, confirmed that Sayeed was an activist of the BNP-affiliated organisation.

Police extorting bribes from their own

FROM PAGE 1

The Daily Star has learnt seven such incidents where policemen and others were extorted allegedly by police and local leaders of BNP.

Along with 179 other people, including 36 other police officers, Anup is accused of attempted murder of Ahdul Islam, 25, who was shot and injured during the protests.

Prominent Supreme Court lawyer ZI Khan Panna was also accused in the case, but his name was later dropped in the face of intense criticism.

Complainant Mohammad Baker, 52, father of victim Ahdul, used to sell vegetables in Banasree. When the controversy over Panna's name in the case arose, Baker had told this newspaper over the phone that he did not know any of the accused.

"A lawyer named Jashim and some other people drafted the list. I just signed the first information report [FIR]. I wanted justice for my son. So, I sought their help to file the case," he had said.

Baker had added he had no details of lawyer Jashim. Several attempts by this newspaper to reach the lawyer failed at that time.

Several other police officers accused in the case alleged that a section of their colleagues, in collusion with local BNP men, were running rackets to extort vulnerable policemen.

Requesting anonymity, the officers said their colleagues involved in these rackets had been very active in subduing the student-led mass uprising. Now these rogue officers have ganged up with local BNP men only to cover up their misdeeds during the Awami League regime.

With the tables turned, explained police officers, a section of their colleagues have also seized the opportunity for retribution and personal gain.

They explained that these rackets are threatening them with more murder cases if they do not comply and pay.

Speaking to The Daily Star, the accused police officers alleged that these extortions were demanding Tk 2 lakh from inspectors, Tk 1 lakh from sub-inspectors and Tk 50,000 from assistant sub-inspectors.

Some officers who had actually fired



Touhid Hossain, adviser to the foreign ministry, addresses a session on the second day of the two-day National Dialogue 2024 titled "Unity, Reform, and Elections" organised by the Forum for Bangladesh Studies at the Krishibid Institution Auditorium in the capital's Khamarbari area yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

weapons during the incident on July 19, as documented in a previous case, were not named in the attempted murder case, raising concerns about selective accusations. The Daily Star has copies of both the initial FIR and the revised one over the July 19 incident.

Along with Anup, Sub-Inspector Rashedur Rahman also stands accused in the case. According to the case document, Rashedur allegedly fired at protesters.

However, records of Bhashanteek Police Station show he was transferred from Rampura to Bhasanteek on July 8, 11 days before the incident.

Speaking to this newspaper, Rashedur also pointed out that Bhasanteek is nearly 12 km away from Rampura and it was simply not possible that he could fire upon protesters in Rampura and be on duty on Bhashanteek at the same time.

SI Rashedur has decided not to pay either. "Why would I pay for dropping my name from a case over a crime which I did not commit?"

Similarly, Inspector Partha Pratim Brahmachari, who served in the Ramna Division's Detective Branch until his transfer on July 23, is implicated in the same case. He refused to pay.

Several key officials of the government and police have publicly acknowledged such extortions are taking place.

Law Adviser Asif Nazrul said that since August 5, many cases have been being filed against political rivals and victims, causing embarrassment for the government. "During the fascist regime, ghost cases were common, and the government itself filed such cases. Our government does not do this," he said.

Home Affairs Adviser Jahangir Alam Chowdhury said that action would be taken against those filing cases to harass others.

Currently, many cases are being filed, and many innocent people are being dragged into these. I am instructing the heads of law enforcement agencies to take action against those who are filing such cases," he said.

DMP Commissioner SM Sazzat Ali recently vowed action against such complainants and police personnel, saying he had already ordered officers-in-charge to sue complainants for extortions to avoid being named as accused in cases.

Fakhruddin

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Some officers who had actually fired

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Talking about six reform commissions, Fakhruddin urged them to engage more with the ordinary people.

"Who are these commissions working with? They have consulted a few intellectuals, whom we know well, respect. But you should also engage with the people and listen to what they want."

Fakhruddin criticised some advisers of the interim government for failing to address the price spirals of essentials and getting involved in politics.

"This means a new voter list will have to be prepared. People will now fear that more time will be wasted, and further delays will occur due to this [preparation of voter list]."

He criticised Yunus for making such a statement without consulting the stakeholders.

"You are the chief executive, and you suggested that 17 years is a more suitable age. When you say this, it becomes binding on the Election Commission."

The BNP leader said the government should allow the EC to make this decision independently.

Fakhruddin emphasised that the current minimum voter age of 18 is widely accepted.

He said the BNP has no objection to reform initiatives. However, when an elected government takes office through a national election, the country's instability is reduced.

Refuting claims that the BNP seeks early elections to go to power, he said, "There is a misconception that the BNP

wants elections to be held soon just to return to power. The BNP had been in power two to three times before. If Allah wills, we will return to power again. But we have never pursued politics merely for power."

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Speakers at a discussion, titled "Mothers' Role in the Liberation War," held at the Daily Star Centre yesterday. The event was organised by women freedom fighters to commemorate the selfless sacrifices and unwavering support provided by the mothers during the country's Liberation War in 1971.

PHOTO: STAR

Complaints against embassy officials to be investigated

Asif Nazrul assures expatriates

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Written complaints will be investigated thoroughly, and if proven, legal consequences will follow.



yesterday. the remarks distribution Wage Earners' auditorium at Expatriates Welfare and the Ministry of Overseas Employment.

Addressing complaints from expatriates about hostile behaviour from some diplomatic staff, he stressed that verbal accusations were insufficient for action against government officials. "Written complaints will be investigated thoroughly, and if proven, legal consequences will follow," he assured.

The event aimed to honour 186 repatriated workers who were detained in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for participating in unauthorised protests. Each worker received a cheque worth Tk 50,000 as a gesture of solidarity with the July-August uprising.

After the adviser's speech, chaos erupted as the

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TRAGEDY AT TOLL PLAZA

I have no one left to live for'

Says Iqbal who lost his wife, 2 daughters and grandson in expressway accident

TANJIL HASAN, Munshiganj

"I have lost everything... I don't want to live anymore," cried Jobeda Khatun, the mother of Amena Akhter, who died in an accident at the Dhaleshwari toll plaza on the Dhaka-Mawa Expressway on Friday.

Near 70 years old, Jobeda struggled to express her grief, tears streaming down her face as she kept uttering -- "I have lost everything".

When this correspondent visited her place in Nandankona village in Sirajdikan, Munshiganj yesterday afternoon, Jobeda, the widow of late Suman Khan, sat outside her home, wailing in despair.

Surrounded by relatives who attempted to console her, she mourned the loss of her daughter Amena, 45, along with two



granddaughters: Ishrat Jahan Imi, 26, and Riha Moni, 11. Another granddaughter, Anamika, had also lost her 2-year-old son, Ayan, in the same incident.

Jobeda's grandson-in-law Sohag and granddaughter Anamika are still hospitalised, receiving treatment.

In addition to Jobeda's family, motorcycle rider Reshma Akhtar, 26, and her 7-year-old son, Md Abdullah, also lost their lives in the tragic accident.

As relatives gathered at Jobeda's home in the village, they shared their sorrow and expressed their outrage to journalists regarding the circumstances of the accident. They demanded justice and accountability for those responsible.

Md Iqbal, Amena's husband, said,

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A woman tries to navigate a dug-up section of a road in Lalmatia C Block. The ongoing development work by the Dhaka Power Distribution Company (DPDC) in Lalmatia C Block, which includes the installation of underground electricity cables, has made the area hazardous for pedestrians, complicating their efforts to move safely through the construction zone. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

One held over deaths on Ijtema ground

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Gazipur

Police early yesterday arrested an accused in a case filed over the killings of three devotees at the Biswa Ijtema ground in Tongi on December 18.

Zia Bin Kashem, 45, was arrested in Chattogram, said Iskander Habibur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Tongi West Police Station with which the case was filed.

The accused is now with the Tongi West Police Station.

He will be sent to Gazipur court today, said police.

Kashem is known as a supporter of the Tabligh Jamaat faction aligned with Maulana Saad Kandhalvi, claimed the OC.

Earlier, police arrested Muaz bin Nur, spokesperson of the faction, in the case on December 19.

Mothers, the unsung heroes of Liberation War

Speakers commemorate their selfless sacrifices at event

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The success of the Liberation War was deeply rooted in the selfless sacrifices and unwavering support provided by the mothers, said speakers at an event yesterday.

While it is often assumed that mothers sent their sons to join the war, many also sent their daughters to fight, the speakers said.

Their involvement extended far beyond providing food and shelter; many stood bravely against the Pakistani forces and even participated in combat.

The discussion, titled "Mothers' Role in the Liberation War," was held at the Daily Star Centre. The event was organised by women freedom fighters.

Shaheen Anam, daughter of freedom fighter Musleha Islam, shared her mother's inspiring story. Musleha not only sheltered freedom fighters in her Dhamondi home but also donated funds to support them.

"I get very emotional when I remember the heroism of our mothers during the Liberation War. Their contributions must be documented and widely shared. These

stories, though crucial to our history, are not well known and must come to the forefront," said Shaheen Anam.

Rizwan Faruk, son of Musleha Islam, recalled how their Dhamondi home became a hub for freedom fighters, where Molotov cocktails were made by his elder brother Wasif Islam and his friends.

Despite the risks, his mother, a widow at 29, provided support and courage.

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'Senior cops complicit in extortion'

Speakers tell seminar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The superintendents of police are directly or indirectly involved with extortion in connivance with sub-inspectors or the officer-in-charges of police stations, said Barrister Zillur Rahman, deputy inspector general (DIG) of the Dhaka Traffic and Driving School yesterday.

He made this statement at a seminar on "Prevention of Extortion in Bangladesh," organised by the Bangladesh Institute of Social Research Trust.

Zillur said if SPs and DIGs are not complicit, extortion could be reduced by 50 percent. He said the focus has mainly been on blaming SIs and OCs for extortion.

The police's image is not improving because of senior officers, he said.

He further explained that responsibility for the issue is split: 49 percent lie with senior officers, 50 percent with political leaders, and 1 percent with other internal problems.

"If senior officers are at least 25 percent effective, the police's image would improve," he said.

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IF SPs AND DIGS
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DIG ZILLUR RAHMAN

Pedestrian killed after being hit by motorbike

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Gazipur

A pedestrian was killed when a motorcycle hit him in Sreepur upazila of Gazipur on Friday night.

The deceased was identified as Abul Mia, 45, of Kanshijuli village.

The incident took place around 10:00pm yesterday in Notun Bazar area of Kanshijuli village, Sreepur Police Station Sub-inspector Matiur Rahman said yesterday.

Motorcycle rider Shahadat Hossain, 30, of Mymensingh, received injuries during the incident, he said.

Citing locals, the official also said that Shahadat along with his two friends was heading to Galargaon upazila when he lost control over the steering and the bike hit the pedestrian.

The victim died on the spot, the official said.

Sreepur Police Station SI Sujan Kumar Pandit said, "No arrests have been made in this connection."

One more dies of dengue

UNB, Dhaka

One more death was reported from dengue in 24 hours till yesterday morning, raising the number of fatalities from the mosquito-borne disease in Bangladesh to 570 this year.

The death was reported in the Barishal division, outside the city corporations, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

During the period, 104 more patients were hospitalised with the viral fever.

Of them, 19 dengue patients were admitted to hospitals under Dhaka North City Corporation while 23 were hospitalised in Dhaka South City Corporation.

Currently, 720 patients are receiving treatment in hospitals across the country.

Since January 1, 2024, a total of 100,868 dengue cases have been reported.



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

The Dhaka-Sylhet highway in Rupganj upazila of Narayanganj has turned into dust bowl due to construction work and road digging. Road dust has become a major source of air pollution in dry season in the capital and neighbouring districts. The photo was taken recently.

Mothers, the unsung heroes of Liberation War

FROM PAGE 3

Following the military crackdown on March 26, 1971, arms were smuggled into their house for safekeeping.

Rizwan shared the fear of military raids and how his mother comforted them through constant danger.

The tension reached its peak on August 30, 1971, when the military raided their home, arresting freedom fighters and searching for arms. During the raid, his mother was interrogated. She pleaded with the soldiers to spare him, using her fluent Urdu. Miraculously, the major released him, Rizwan recounted.

Cultural activist Lubna Marium referred to her father, Quazi Nooruzzaman, Sector Commander of Sector 7, who documented mothers' contributions in his book.

He wrote about how teenage boys joined the war with dry food, including puffed rice packed by their mothers.

When asked who sent them, they would always say, "Our mothers," she said.

Lubna also shared how her mother, Professor Sultana Zaman, sent her 15-year-old brother Nadeem to join the war.

Despite the challenges, as Nadeem lived in a bunker with insufficient food, her mother never complained about the hardships.

Prothom Alo Associate Editor Shumona Sharmin highlighted her mother Maleka Khan's vital role in rehabilitating women, under the leadership of Sufia Kamal, tortured by Pakistani soldiers.

"My mother worked as a director and handled the survivors' stories with great sensitivity to prevent retraumatising them. She documented their accounts and worked to make them financially independent," Shumona shared.

She added, "These women would come to our house with their sewing and stitching skills. However, my mother always warned us not to ask them about their past, fearing it might reopen their wounds."

Naripokkho founding member Shireen Hug recalled how their home

became a sanctuary for freedom fighters.

"My mother always said that if someone sought shelter, we must provide it. I remember our drawing room being packed with people, and everyone managed to coexist despite the challenges. Many non-Bangalee families also sought refuge at our house. At one point, I had to move to my aunt's home because so many people had come seeking shelter," Shireen recounted.

Cultural activist Minu Haque shared how her mother bid her farewell during the war with the words, "We will meet again in Maidan-e-Hashar," praising the bravery of mothers who sent their daughters to join the fight for liberation.

Sufia Kamal's daughters, Sultana Kamal and Syeda Kamal, shared the inspiring story of their mother's unwavering contributions to the movement.

"My mother never feared anything. She always inspired us, saying that we were fighting for our country. With that spirit, she sent us into an unknown future

and taught us to protect ourselves if captured," said Syeda Kamal.

Sultana Kamal elaborated on how her mother's involvement in the liberation movement began in 1969 when she started organising neighbourhood women to join the cause.

"When it was decided that my sister and I would cross the border, my mother played a crucial role in encouraging us, even though we had never travelled outside Bangladesh before," Sultana Kamal shared.

Even after the war, Sufia Kamal continued her efforts, working tirelessly to rehabilitate tortured women and ensure they could rebuild their lives in safety and dignity.

Rumana Shafi, daughter of Begum Mushtari Shafi, shared her mother's inspiring story of her involvement in the war and the devastating loss of her husband, Dr Mohammad Shafi, and younger brother, Ehsanul Haque Ansari, who were killed by the Pakistani military.

Despite her immense grief, Begum Mushtari

continued her work at Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra until Bangladesh achieved victory on December 16, 1971.

She documented her memories and experiences by writing books about the Liberation War, preserving the stories of sacrifice and resilience for future generations, Rumana said.

Among others, freedom fighter Habibul Alam; social worker Reshma Alam; Prof Tazeen Murshid, daughter of Nurjehan Murshid; Shahana Huda, head of pre-primary section of Panjrejee Publications; Shaveena Anam, manager, new content and audience research, The Daily Star; writer Tahmina Anam; Banasree Mitro Niyoji of Manusher Jonno Foundation; freedom fighter and Editor of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam; Liberation War Researcher Rita Bhowmik; Prothom Alo journalist Naznin Akhter Tonni; Kaler Kantha journalist Nikhil Bhadra; and Italy-based Bangladeshi writer, poet and columnist Neeman Sobhan were present at the event.

Revive Khulna

FROM PAGE 5

impact of the Padma Bridge, Khulna has seen little progress over the past years. No new industries or garment factories have been established in the district, while employment opportunities remain alarmingly scarce.

The speakers also called for accelerating land acquisition process for the Khulna Medical University, approving the Khulna Agricultural University project through the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council, establishing a deep-sea port at Akram Point to boost Mongla Port's operations while safeguarding the Sundarbans, and reopening of all state-owned industrial factories, jute mills, newsprint and hardboard mills in Khulna.

They further demanded improvement in railway services, including increasing the number of trains on the Khulna-Dhaka-Khulna route from one to three pairs daily, and prompt completion of the existing development works of RCC, cleaning of 22 canals, eviction of all illegal

encroachments, mitigating waterlogging, expediting the construction of Gallamari Bridge, and reclaiming unused railway land for planned urban development.

Their other demands include establishing a Marine Academy and Cadet College in Khulna, constructing an airport, ensuring gas supply via pipelines, and developing an economic zone to attract investment and create jobs.

I have no one

FROM PAGE 3

"My wife, two daughters, and grandson are gone. They left home at 10:30am for Gopalganj to attend a Milad. Just last week, my sister in-law lost her husband."

"I have no one left to live for..." he said.

Struggling to contain his grief, he voiced his anger: "The country has developed roads, but drivers have not improved. Hundreds die on the roads every day, and no government has ensured safety. We need to raise awareness about road safety."

Corruption behind

FROM PAGE 3

Additionally, migration to Italy and Serbia was halted due to the use of fake documents.

The report further pointed out that while migration slowed during the mass uprisings and economic instability, it has regained momentum in recent months.

In

response

to the

challenges, Prof Tasneem recommended that the interim government prioritise good governance in the migration sector.

She called for the establishment of a

dedicated migration commission, an increase in budget allocations, and the formulation of effective policies to address international migration challenges.

She also stressed the need for policy reforms, improved skills development for workers, and the creation of safe employment opportunities for women.

Transparency in the recruitment process and the strengthening of training centres were also emphasised as key to improving the migration system.

Senior cops complicit

FROM PAGE 3

He

also pointed out that political leaders are equally responsible for not addressing the issue.

Zillur referenced ex DB chief Harun Or Rashid, who received awards despite allegations of killing, due to recommendations from senior officers.

M Khurshed Alam, chairman of BISR Trust, who chaired the seminar, revealed that only 25 percent of victims of petty crimes such as mugging or theft in Dhaka report them to the police.

"Over the past decade and a half, the nation's Islamic scholars have been subjected to unprecedented levels of injustice and vendetta," he said.

The

conference

was

attended

by leaders and activists from various Islamic political organisations.

He said they had successfully identified crime hotspots and times, and increased patrolling to bring the situation under control.

Nazmul Haque, former additional inspector general of police, claimed that police officers are encouraged to use force for the chance to win awards like the Bangladesh Police Medal. He also said corrupt officers are often given the best postings, while honest officers are sidelined.

"We have a good system, but it must be followed," he added.

PRAYER TIMING DECEMBER 29

Faz	Zohr	Asr	Magrib	Esha
AZAN 5-30	12-45	4-00	5-27	7-00
JAMIAAT 6-05	1-15	4-15	5-30	7-30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

Stern action against forest land occupiers

Warns Rizwana

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Gazipur

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, adviser to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, yesterday announced that strict actions will be taken, regardless of the power and influence of illegal occupiers, to protect forests and the environment.

"Sixteen acres, out of total 90 acres of illegally occupied forest land in Gazipur, have been recovered since August 5," the adviser said at a discussion on forest and environmental conservation at the Gazipur Deputy Commissioner's office.

"The government knows

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3



PHOTO: TITU DAS

Sikha Rani Pal carefully lays traditional clay pots on the ground to dry under the warm sun. Once dried, she sells these handcrafted items to traders in local markets, providing essential support for her family. The photo was taken in Barishal's Bakerganj upazila yesterday.

CTG-SYLHET ROUTE Local train service remains suspended since 2020

SIFAYET ULLAH, Ctg

The only local train on the Chattogram-Sylhet route, Jalalabad Express, has remained suspended for nearly five years since February 2020.

According to Bangladesh Railway officials, the suspension followed an acute shortage of locomotives and coaches. The suspension has adversely affected the state agency's revenue generation, they said.

Meanwhile, it has forced low-income passengers to spend more on commuting.

Currently, two intercity trains -- Paharika Express and Udayan Express -- serve the route, with around 2,500 passengers commuting daily. A Shobhan Chair ticket on these trains costs at least Tk 375, double the fare of the local train.



"The suspension of Jalalabad Express has increased my travel expenses, as I either have to commute through a bus or intercity train," said Abdul Aziz, an office assistant at a company in the port city and a resident of Moulvibazar.

Hiron Miah, a farm labourer from Habiganj district working in Chattogram, said they used to travel on this route with the local train as the ticket price was cheap.

"We work in paddy and vegetable fields in Chattogram seasonally. For this, we travel on this route around eight times every year. We could travel at a low cost before, but that opportunity is no longer available," he said.

As per 2019 data, the local train used to generate Tk 3 lakh in revenue from up-down trips daily.

Passengers of the route demanded BR to resume the service soon.

Abdul Malek, a fish trader from Habiganj district who regularly comes to the port city to buy dry fish and sea fish varieties, said, "The local train enabled me to transport my goods at a low cost. I urge the BR authorities to resume the local train service on this route."

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

Anti-fascist forces must unite

Says Jamaat amer

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman today called for unity among all anti-fascist political parties to build a "new Bangladesh" inspired by the aspirations of the youth.

Speaking at the 12th General Council of Khelafat Majlis at Dhaka's Suhrawardy Udyan this morning, Shafiqur emphasised the need for collective action to establish a democratic future for the nation.

"... In the new Bangladesh, all anti-fascist political parties will stand united," he said.

The Jamaat chief also expressed concern over

12 GOVT PRIMARY SCHOOLS Expansion work stalled for 3 years

MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

The expansion work of 12 government primary schools in Madhabpur upazila in Habiganj, under the Fourth Primary Education Development Project (PEDP 4), has been stalled for over three years now.

People have alleged that the delays have happened due to the contractor's negligence and lack of adequate supervision from the authorities. The project completion timeline also remains uncertain.

The project, which began in 2021, aimed to build additional floors in 14 government primary schools across Madhabpur upazila. While the work at Sakushail and Mantala Government Primary Schools was completed, the 12 other schools are still facing an uncertain situation.

Each school was allocated a budget of Tk 60 lakh, with the total budget amounting to Tk 8.4 crore for all 14 schools.

The project was awarded to two contracting firms -- Bengal Traders and M/s Golam Faruk, both owned by Abdul Kalam.

Despite starting the work in 2021, the progress has been slow. In some schools, only one or two floors were completed, with roof installations. On the other hand, in

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



The expansion work of at least 12 government primary schools in Madhabpur upazila of Habiganj has been stalled for over three years now. Despite starting the work in 2021, the progress has been slow. In some schools, only one or two floors were completed, with roof installations. On the other hand, in several cases, the contractors abandoned the sites entirely.

PHOTO: STAR

Rizvi alleges conspiracy behind Secretariat fire

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi yesterday alleged that the recent fire at the Secretariat was a deliberate act orchestrated to destroy evidence of corruption and money laundering by the former Awami League government and its allies.

Speaking to journalists in Mithapukur upazila of Rangpur district, Rizvi claimed the fire was part of a broader conspiracy to cover up critical documents related to large-scale corruption and financial mismanagement during AL's tenure.

"The fire that engulfed the Secretariat is not an isolated incident," he said, adding that it was a well-planned act to erase traces of massive corruption, including files linked to a key principal secretary accused of siphoning off significant sums of money.

Rizvi alleged that the fire destroyed vital documents of five ministries, including evidence of corruption involving billions of takas, money laundering, and irregularities by high-ranking government officials.

"Among the files that burned were those tied to allegations of financial crimes by a principal secretary," he alleged. "This is a part of a deeper conspiracy by the former Sheikh Hasina government to ensure that information about their misdeeds never comes to light," he said.

Rizvi emphasised the importance of uncovering the



SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

'Revive Khulna's industry, economy' Speakers urge govt

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Speakers at a human chain yesterday called upon the authorities concerned of the government for prompt and planned measures to revive industrial infrastructures and economy in Khulna.

Khulna, the third-largest city in Bangladesh, was once a thriving industrial hub in the country, with seven state-owned jute mills, one of Asia's largest newsprint mill, and hardboard mills, among other industries operating there, they said.

Over time, all these mills were closed down, leaving thousands of workers unemployed, and deepening the economic stagnation in the region, they added.

The Greater Khulna Development Struggle Coordination Committee organised the event at Picture Palace Intersection in Khulna city.

Sheikh Ashraf Uz Zaman, president of the

platform, presided over the event.

The speakers said despite significant nationwide development and the transformative

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

6 fishermen return from Indian jail after 9 months

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Six Bangladeshi fishermen returned home through the Benapole check post on Friday night after spending nine months in an Indian jail.

The Petrapole Immigration Police of India handed them over to the Benapole Immigration Police at 10:00pm, under a special travel permit issued by the Indian government.

Sharsha Upazila Assistant Commissioner (Land) and Magistrate Nusrat Jahan, along with the members of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), Border Security Force (BSF) of India, customs, police, and intelligence agencies from both the countries were present at that time.

The fishermen were handed over to the Benapole Port Police Station yesterday morning.

They were handed over to the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association (BNWLA), a private NGO, said Md Russel Mia, officer-in-charge of Benapole Port Police Station.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

Islamist parties to field single candidate in every constituency Says IAB amer

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Islami Andolon Bangladesh (IAB) Ameer Syed Md Rezaul Karim yesterday said Islamist parties will present unified candidates in all constituencies during the upcoming national elections.

Addressing the party's central executive committee meeting at the IAB headquarters in Purana Paltan, Rezaul Karim emphasised that Islamist parties aim to ensure a single candidate for each seat in the parliamentary polls.

He said, "In the upcoming elections, Islamist parties will ensure a single, unified candidate for each constituency. We will field candidates in all seats unitedly, giving meaningful purpose to the revolution achieved through the sacrifices and blood of the people."

Rezaul said Bangladesh stands at a historically significant crossroads, presenting both great promise and critical challenges. He cautioned that

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3



Hassan Abidur Reja Jewel



Moni Kishore



Abu Zafar



Jahidul Haque



Waliul Haq Rumi



Ahmed Rubel



Rishtha Laboni Shimana



Khalid

A YEAR OF FAREWELLS

Those we lost in 2024

ZAHID AKBAR

In 2024, we lost several prominent figures from the entertainment world. Though they have departed, their contributions to film, television, music, and dance will remain etched in our memories. Here are some of the individuals we lost this year:

Ahmed Rubel

On February 7, actor Ahmed Rubel passed away. He was supposed to attend the premiere of his film *Peyarar Subash* but collapsed after stepping out of his car.

Rubel gained recognition for his role in the popular TV drama *Pret* on Ekushey Television and appeared in Humayun Ahmed's *Shyamol Chhaya*. His performance in shows like *Ronger Manush*, and films like *Guerrilla*, *Meghla Akash*, and *Laal Moroger Jhuti*, among others, received widespread acclaim.

Jahidul Haque

Lyricist Jahidul Haque, who passed away on January 15 at the age of 75, penned many memorable songs, including *Amar E Duti Chokh* sung by Subir Nandi.

Sadi Mohammad

Renowned Rabindra Sangeet exponent Sadi Mohammad passed away on March 13. Known for his deep devotion to music, Sadi was a respected teacher and composer.

He studied Rabindra Sangeet at Visva Bharati, Santiniketan, and received numerous awards, including Channel i's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2012 and the Rabindra Puraskar from the Bangla Academy

in 2015.

Khalid

Khalid, a pioneering Bangladeshi pop singer from the 1980s and 1990s, was born in Gopalganj and passed away from a heart attack in Dhaka on March 18, at the age of 60. He gained fame as the lead vocalist of the band Chime and also enjoyed success as a solo artiste.

Khalid's soulful voice defined hits like *Shorolotar Protima*, *Himaloy*, and *Kono Karonei*, as well as beloved tracks such as *Hoyni Jabar Bela*

Waliul Haq Rumi

Actor Waliul Haq Rumi, who passed away from cancer on April 22, began his acting career in 1988 with the play *Krektodashi* and quickly made a name for himself with his debut in the television drama *Kon Kanoner Phool*. Despite his battle with illness, he had hoped to return to acting.

Rumi's notable works include popular dramas like *Suggestion Selim*, *Bokashoka Tinjon*, *Makeup Man*, *Dhaka Metro Love*, *Bap Beta Dourer Upor*, and the iconic *Jamoj*

Prothom Premier Moto, have left an enduring legacy in the country's music scene.

Hassan Abidur Reja Jewel

On July 30, singer and director Hassan Abidur Reja Jewel passed away battling with cancer for 11 years. His album *Ek Bikel* became a fan favourite following its release in 1993.

His notable productions include *Amar Ache Ondhokar* (1995), *Ektak Manush* (1996), *Beshi Kichu Noy* (1998), *Bedona Shudhui Bedona* (1999), *Firtee Pothe* (2003), *Dorja*

recognition as a pioneering filmmaker.

Moni Kishore

Moni Kishore, a prominent singer from the '90s, was found dead in his home on October 19. Known for timeless hits like *Ki Chile Amar Bolo Na* and *Phul Jhore Tara Jhore*, Kishore lent his voice to over 500 songs and composed around 20.

Despite being a registered artiste with radio and television, he recorded only a few songs and largely focused on audio releases. His other popular songs include *Sei Duti Chokh*, *Tumi*

Lifetime Achievement Award.

Jamal Uddin Hossain

Television and stage actor Jamal Uddin Hossain, who was awarded the Ekushey Padak, passed away on October 12 in Calgary, Canada, at the age of 81. He founded the Nagorik Natya Sampradaya.

Shujeo Shyam

Music director Shujeo Shyam, a key figure of the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra, died on October 18. He was honoured with the Ekushey Padak



Shafin Ahmed



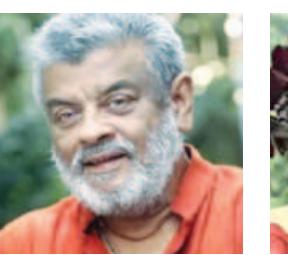
Jamal Uddin Hossain



Shilpi Chakraborty



Masud Ali Khan



Shujeo Shyam



Sadi Mohammad



Papia Sarwar

and *Jotota Megh Hole*. His music continues to resonate with fans, cementing his legacy in Bangladeshi pop.

Rishtha Laboni Shimana
Actress Shimana passed away on June 4 at the age of 39. She started her career in 2006 with the *Lux-Channel i Superstar* competition and appeared in numerous dramas, films, and advertisements. She notably appeared in Tauquir Ahmed's directorial *Daruchini Dwip*, which also featured her other contestants from that competition, and gained critical acclaim for her acting.

sequels, leaving a lasting legacy in the Bangladeshi entertainment industry.

Shafin Ahmed

Shafin Ahmed, the iconic Bangladeshi rock bassist, singer-songwriter, and record producer, passed away on July 25 at the age of 63 while receiving treatment in Virginia, USA. As the lead vocalist and bassist for the legendary band Miles, which he joined with his brother Hamin Ahmed in 1979, Shafin became a defining figure in Bangladeshi rock music.

His timeless hits, including *Chand Tara Surjo*, *Phiriyi Dao* and

Khola Bari (2009), and *Emon Keno Holo* (2017).

Shilpi Chakraborty

Filmmaker Shilpi Chakraborty, best known for his directorial film *Ujan Vati*, passed away on March 7 at the age of 71 due to excessive bleeding at the National Hospital in Old Dhaka.

Throughout his illustrious career, Chakraborty directed several notable films, including *Bini Shutar Mala*, *Amar Adalot*, *Tomar Jonno Pagol*, *Shobor Ojante*, *Chorompotro*, and *Mimangsha*. His contributions to Bangladeshi cinema left a lasting mark on the industry, earning him

Sudhu Amari Jonno, *Mukhe Bolo Bhalobaso*, and *Ami More Gele*.

Masud Ali Khan

Ekushey Padak winning actor Masud Ali Khan passed away on October 31 at 95, leaving behind a distinguished career across stage, television, film, and radio. A founding member of Drama Circle, he gained national fame for his roles in films like *Dui Duari*, *Dipu Number 2*, *Matir Moyna* and the BTV drama *Kul Nai Kinar Nai*.

Known for his iconic performances in series like *Kothao Keu Nei* and *Ei Sob Din Ratri*, Khan's contributions earned him the Meril-Prothom Alo

in 2018 and the Shilpkala Padak in 2015 for his contributions to music.

Abu Zafar

Celebrated lyricist, composer, and musician, Abu Zafar, passed away on December 5. Among his notable works is the song *Ei Padma Ei Meghna*, which ranked in BBC's top 20 Bangla songs of all time.

Papia Sarwar

Renowned Rabindra Sangeet singer Papia Sarwar (died December 12) was another invaluable loss to the cultural community this year.

PHOTOS: STAR AND COLLECTED

COUNTRYWIDE

Polythene bag use in Moulvibazar rampant

MINTU DESHWARA

Despite a nationwide ban, use of polythene bags continues to increase in all over Moulvibazar including in rural areas.

During a visit to several markets and bazars in different upazilas of the district, it was seen that grocers, vegetable vendors, sweetmeat shops, fish traders and even restaurants are using such bags freely.

Although the country has banned its use nearly two months ago, its widespread use continues in the absence of any alternative to polythene bags as packing material and lax monitoring as well.

Meanwhile, price of polythene bags has gone up to Tk 550 per kilogram from



Use of polythene bag continues at different markets in Moulvibazar due to lack of monitoring and affordable alternatives.

PHOTO: STAR

Tk 350 only a few months ago, while large polythene bag is selling for Tk 2 per piece.

Nurul Muhammin Milton, general secretary of Bangladesh Environmental Journalists' Association, Moulvibazar unit, emphasized that polythene not only clogging the town drains, but polluting the Monu river as well.

Experts said polythene damages soil fertility and causes harm to human health as it takes nearly 400 years to decompose.

A number of local environmental activists, like Ahad Mia, general secretary of Kamalganj Biodiversity Protection Committee, and social activist Fatiqu Islam have urged for urgent action to address the risks posed by polythene.

Some shopkeepers, seeking anonymity, admitted to secretly selling polythene bags in order to meet customer's demand.

Many local wholesalers are still selling polythene bags openly in Moulvibazar town and its other seven upazilas due to lack of monitoring by the authorities concerned, they added.

Suspect held over murder

FROM PAGE 12

She died at Jashore General Hospital while undergoing treatment on Thursday night.

Dr Bazlur Rashid, resident medical officer at Jashore General Hospital, said initial examinations on the victim's body revealed signs of rape and poisoning.

The victim's body bore injuries indicating sexual assault. The presence of poison was also detected in her stomach. An autopsy has been conducted, and further details will be

available after we receive the viscera report."

According to the case statement, Rinku Mallik, the incident occurred on Tuesday.

Basana was returning home after distributing TCB goods when a local man named Rajibul called her and offered to return some money he had earlier borrowed from her.

The man asked her to meet him and she complied and went to Daulatpur village, Rajibul along with other local

men named Faruk, Chanchal, and Shafiqul raped her at the house owned by one Moktar Molla, said Rinku.

The perpetrators filmed

the act and demanded a ransom of Tk 2 lakh to keep the footage a secret.

When Basana threatened to file complaints, the perpetrators forced her to ingest poison before letting her go.

She then returned home, but didn't tell anyone what had happened before it was too late.

Suddenly she got severely sick and was admitted to the Jashore hospital on Wednesday.

While being admitted there, she told her family members what happened, naming the perpetrators and detailing the assault.

She died of her injuries on Thursday night.

"My mother died in my arms, recounting the horrific events. I demand justice. Those who did this must be executed. I want nothing else but justice for

my mother," Rinku Mallik told this newspaper.

Following Basana's death, the police visited the alleged crime scene and began their investigation.

The arrest has brought some hope to the grieving family and community, who have demanded swift justice for Basana.

Locals and her colleagues have expressed outrage over the incident, urging authorities to ensure that all perpetrators face exemplary punishment.

Police have no wand to stop crime overnight

FROM PAGE 12

robbery case, while the incident in Narayanganj was related to mobile phone snatching.

Besides, there are two other incidents of threats: one in Mymensingh and another involving a Brac University student.

The incident in Mymensingh was perpetrated by a class-X student, who was arrested and returned to his parents as he claimed "it was a prank".

In connection with the threat to the Brac University student, the detective branch of Dhaka Metropolitan Police arrested a person named

Jahid Hasan from Sirajganj. "We are working to resolve every incident, but not all of them are connected."

The Bangladesh Police is going through a critical period.

"Never before in its history has the police faced such a predicament. There is a significant difference between the pre- and post-August revolution police."

Before the revolution, the police had become an instrument of a "fascist government", leading to widespread public anger against them.

"We want them to put in extra effort to connect us with the community. I believe that without this, the police alone cannot fight crime. But we are trying."

The

INTERNATIONAL

DHAKA SUNDAY DECEMBER 29, 2024

POUSH 14, 1431 BS

The Daily Star

7



The bodies of people killed in an Israeli strike on the al-Maghazi refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip are placed at the Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir el-Balah yesterday. At least 48 more Palestinians were killed across the Palestinian territory in the last 24 hours, according to Gaza's health ministry.

PHOTO: AFP

Brazil bridge collapse kills 10 people

AFP, Brasilia

The death toll after a bridge collapse in northern Brazil increased to 10 on Friday, authorities said.

The Juscelino Kubitschek de Oliveira bridge, which connects the states of Maranhao and Tocantins, collapsed on Sunday, sending vehicles and their occupants plunging into the water below.

The Brazilian Navy had been conducting rescues in the area, finding an additional body Thursday six kilometers (3.7 miles) from the accident site and a second victim Friday in the Tocantins River.

"As such, there are 10 dead and seven missing victims so far," the Navy said in a statement.

More than 70 rescuers continued the search nearly a week after the collapse, using a hyperbaric chamber to allow divers to search depths of more than 30 meters (100 feet).

On Tuesday, Brazilian authorities had warned the Tocantins River could have been contaminated with sulfuric acid being transported by two trucks that tumbled into the water. A third truck involved in the accident was carrying pesticides.

CROSS-BORDER ATTACK ON AFGHANISTAN

One killed in Pakistan as Kabul retaliates

AFP, Peshawar

A Pakistani paramilitary soldier was killed and seven others wounded in cross-border exchanges of fire with Afghanistan's forces, a security source said yesterday, while hundreds of Afghans protested against the deadly air strikes that sparked the clashes.

Sporadic fighting, including with heavy weaponry, erupted overnight between border forces on the frontier between Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in Pakistan and Khost province in Afghanistan, officials from both countries said.

The exchanges of fire come after Afghanistan's Taliban authorities accused Pakistan of killing 46 people, mainly women and children, in air strikes near the border in the southeastern province of Paktika this week.

A Pakistan senior security source said they targeted "terrorist hideouts", though Islamabad has not officially confirmed carrying out the bombardment.

"One frontier corps (FC) soldier has been reported dead, and seven others have been injured," a senior security source at the border told AFP, adding clashes took place in at least two locations in Pakistan's



border district of Kurram.

The Afghan defence ministry said on X that "several points" across the border with Pakistan "where the attacks in Afghanistan were organised... were targeted in retaliation".

A provincial official in Khost told AFP the clashes forced residents to flee border areas, but that there were no reports of casualties among Afghan forces.

In Khost city, the provincial capital, hundreds of Afghans demonstrated against Pakistan yesterday, calling for accountability for civilian deaths.

The strikes were the latest

spike in hostilities on the frontier between Afghanistan and Pakistan, with border tensions between the two countries escalating since the Taliban seized power in 2021.

Islamabad has accused Kabul's authorities of harbouring militant fighters, allowing them to strike on Pakistani soil with impunity -- allegations the Taliban government denies.

Skirmishes along the frontier escalated after Pakistan's military conducted deadly air strikes in Afghanistan's border regions in March, which Taliban authorities claimed killed eight civilians.

Everything was wrong with the bus

FROM PAGE 12

A video of the incident showed that the speedy bus, instead of stopping at the toll plaza, hit a car from behind, then a microbus, and a motorcycle.

Rab arrested the bus driver Nuruddin on Friday night.

Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) cancelled the registration of the bus yesterday. Later in the night, police arrested bus company owner Dablu Bepari in Shibchar upazila of Madaripur.

A case has been filed with South Keraniganj Police Station by a family member of one of the victims.

FAILURE OF AUTHORITIES

The operation of buses and trucks without route permits and fitness certificates is nothing new in Bangladesh.

After many major road crashes, it was found that the vehicles were operating without valid documents, road safety campaigners said.

Speaking on the matter, Abdur Rahman, sub-inspector of Hashab Highway Police Station, said the documents of vehicles using the expressway were checked as much as possible.

"Whenever we find vehicles without proper documents, we file cases against them. Yet, somehow, they managed to operate on the roads," he told this newspaper yesterday.

On the other hand, BRTA can do

very little to take action against unfit vehicles due to a lack of manpower.

While it can conduct mobile court drives in some major cities, including Dhaka and Chattogram, the BRTA has to depend on local administration to carry out drives in the districts, sources said.

In April this year, 6,17 lakh vehicles did not go through the mandatory annual fitness test, according to BRTA.

NO ROUTE PERMIT, FITNESS

The bus involved in the collision (Dhaka Metro Ba 14 5170) was registered under Dhaka Metro Circle 2 (Ekuria) in July 2010.

According to BRTA officials, its fitness clearance expired in October last year.

On Friday, the bus was heading for Kuakata in Patuakhali, violating its approved route. The bus was approved for the Dhaka (Sayedabad)-Padma Bridge-Bhanga Khulna route. However, even that route permit expired in March of this year.

The bus was also operating without updated tax documents. The deadline for updating the bus's tax token had expired in July last year.

'GP MONEY'

The owner of the bus was mentioned as Nitol Motors, a major importer of commercial vehicles, when it was registered with BRTA 14 years ago.

A BRTA official said the bus appears to have been procured under

a loan, and that's why Nitol Motors' name was mentioned as its owner.

The official explained that the original owner might not have changed the ownership formally. As a result, Nitol Motors still appears as the bus owner on the BRTA database, he said, wishing not to be named.

A source in the road transport sector said a man named Md Mostafa of Bholia was operating the bus under Bepari Paribahan by paying the company Tk 800 daily.

Speaking to this newspaper around 6:40pm, Bepari Paribahan owner Dablu admitted that the bus was in operation under his company in exchange for "GP money" or "Gate Pass money". He, however, claimed he was not aware that the bus had no valid documents.

As per the rules of the Road Transport Act 2018, if a bus has to be operated under a company, that bus has to be registered under the specific company, a BRTA director said.

"So, operation of this particular bus under Bepari Paribahan is illegal," he said, wishing anonymity.

Currently, 10 buses are now being operated under Bepari Paribahan, and only three of these are owned by him, according to Dablu.

When this correspondent called Md Mostafa, the original owner of the bus, his daughter picked up the phone.

"My father fell ill after learning

about the crash. He is not in a position to talk right now," his daughter said.

INVALID DRIVING LICENCE

After arresting driver Nuruddin from Narayanganj's Siddhiganj, Rab said he had not renewed his driving license.

During the primary interrogation, Nuruddin claimed that the bus, which was put into service Friday after repairs, had brake issues, said Senior Assistant Superintendent of Police Taposh Karmakar, also media officer of the Rab-10.

The bus was sitting idle for a long time before repairs, Taposh said, quoting the driver.

However, the driver realised from the beginning that the vehicle's braking system was not working properly. When the bus owner was informed about it, he asked the driver to drive slowly, the Rab official said.

The bus driver claimed that the bus could not be stopped despite engaging the brakes several times before the crash, Taposh added.

While a probe committee is investigating Friday's crash, BRTA officials said that the driver seemed inexperienced after observing his manoeuvres moments before the crash.

They said even in the event of brake failure, skilled drivers, with control over the steering, are able to stop a vehicle and minimise damage by carefully contacting a sturdy structure.

Proclamation

FROM PAGE 1

this proclamation means. It is the formal declaration of a new political framework."

"The current government is illegal as per the constitution. But a proclamation directly challenges the constitution... the constitution needs to be interpreted and amended in light of the proclamation. It [proclamation] rejects the state system that has, until now, treated me, you, or anyone else as a mere pawn in a broken system..."

"The proclamation is vital to overhaul this outdated state machinery. It will discard the obsolete rules of the state apparatus and lay the foundation for a new state structure illuminated by the ideals of July. The dreams of a new Bangladesh that people have cherished will be realised through this..."

The proclamation will feature a timeline of events, from the quota reform movement to the departure of Sheikh Hasina. It will also address critical incidents from the past 15 years, including the BDR mutiny, the Shapla Chattar crackdown, enforced disappearances, and extrajudicial killings.

A member of the platform drew parallels with other historical documents, such as the "Tin Jotter Ruprekha" from the 1990 anti-Ershad movement and the Proclamation of Independence from 1971.

It will critically evaluate key historical events, including 1947 and 1971, and examine why the aspirations

of various movements failed.

"The proclamation will serve as a documentary testament to the mass uprising," said Umama Fatima, spokesperson for the platform. "It will highlight how the quota reform movement evolved into a revolution and why people laid down their lives."

According to sources, the proclamation will explain the failures of past leadership and movements.

"The declaration will critique the proclamation of independence and the 1/11 caretaker government," said a member of the Jatiya Nagorik Committee, who along with others, drafted the proclamation.

Leaders of the Jatiya Nagorik Committee will be with the students at the Central Shaheed Minar at 3:00pm. Families of those martyred in the uprising will join the event.

Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuiyan, adviser to the ministry of local government, wrote on Facebook, "Comrades Now or Never".

"This is the declaration of the burial of Mujibbad", wrote Hasnat Abdullah.

The students and Jatiya Nagorik Committee, formed in September, plan to launch a political party by

Tuhin Khan, a member of the Jatiya Nagorik Committee, told The Daily Star, "This proclamation will serve as both a written acknowledgment of the revolution and its manifesto, embedding the public aspirations of the movement into its framework."

Mideast 'not a battleground for big powers'

China, Iran FMs agree in Beijing

AFP, Beijing

The top diplomats of China and Iran agreed Saturday that the Middle East is "not a battleground for the big powers" and should not be an arena of geopolitical competition between countries outside the region.

Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi agreed that "the international community should respect the sovereignty, security, stability, unity and territorial integrity of Middle East countries," according to a readout from Beijing's foreign ministry.

Araghchi is on his first visit to China since being appointed foreign minister of Iran.

The two major trading partners reiterated calls for a ceasefire in Gaza, the proper implementation of the ceasefire in Lebanon, and the "integrated promotion of counter-terrorism, reconciliation and humanitarian processes in Syria", according to the readout.

"The two sides agreed that the Middle East belongs to the people of the Middle East, and is not a battleground for the big powers, and should not be a victim of geopolitical competition and conflicts between countries from outside the region," the ministry said.

China and Iran were both supporters of ousted Syrian president Bashar al-Assad. Syria's new leader, Ahmed al-Sharaa, is an ardent opponent of Tehran.

Araghchi and Wang also discussed Iran's nuclear programme, which West say could be on its way to building weapons. China is Iran's largest trading partner and a top buyer of its sanctioned oil.

Unicef: One in six children live in conflict zones

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

About 473 million, or more than one in six children, are estimated to live in conflict areas worldwide, according to the United Nations children's agency.

Unicef's statement came yesterday as conflicts continue to rage around the world, including in Gaza, Sudan and Ukraine, among other places.

In Israel's devastating war on Gaza in particular, at least 17,492 children have reportedly been killed in nearly 15 months of conflict that has reduced much of the enclave to rubble.

"By almost every measure, 2024 has been one of the worst years on record for children in conflict in Unicef's history – both in terms of the number of children affected and the level of impact on their lives," said Unicef Executive Director Catherine Russell.

According to Russell, a child growing up in a conflict zone is far more likely to be out of school, malnourished, or forced from their home compared with a child living in places with no conflict.

"This must not be the new normal. We cannot allow a generation of children to become collateral damage to the world's unchecked wars," the director said.

Consensus key to achieving reforms

The reform vs election debate is unfortunate

The enormous sacrifices made during the July-August uprising have created a historic opportunity for Bangladesh to reshape its political landscape, strengthen institutions, and ensure accountable governance. However, as the months pass and the interim government faces various challenges, a critical question has emerged recently: should the desired reforms precede elections, or should an elected government take the reins of reform implementation? Recent statements by government officials and political leaders show a divide that must be bridged for the sake of the nation.

At a two-day event in Dhaka recently, several government advisers weighed in on the issue, emphasising the need for reforms as well as consensus. In his address, Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus affirmed that preparations for reforms and elections would proceed simultaneously, warning that reforms without consensus and elections without reforms would be counterproductive. Currently, 15 reform commissions are working on proposals expected to be ready by January. In his address, Adviser Mahfuz Alam stated that consultation with all stakeholders, including political parties, would determine the nature and extent of reforms. "We need agreement on how much reform is possible and whether a legal framework can ensure that future governments continue these initiatives," he said.

Meanwhile, BNP has insisted that elections and reforms should progress in tandem. Senior leaders, including Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alangir and Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, have expressed concerns that prioritising reforms over elections could stall the democratic process. Rizvi was particularly critical, claiming that proponents of a reform-first approach harbour "evil intentions" by suggesting that political parties' push for a democratic transition equates to opposing reforms. He underscored the urgency of restoring power to elected representatives who could then implement reforms with a popular mandate.

We must say both sides have valid points. The government's emphasis on implementing some reforms before elections reflects the understanding that a broken system cannot deliver on people's aspirations. Without addressing systemic flaws—such as the politicisation of state institutions, the erosion of rule of law, economic disparities, etc.—elections, no matter how well-conducted, risk perpetuating entrenched power structures. On the other hand, delaying elections excessively risks creating a perception of authoritarian drift as well as alienating those eager to exercise their voting rights.

So, how can we bridge this gap? Through dialogue and compromise, of course. Both camps must find common ground in their positions, tempering their adversarial tones to prevent the reform drive from being questioned or derailed. That said, the sacrifices of July-August demand more than short-term fixes or partisan posturing. Reforms are crucial not just for safeguarding the democratic gains of the uprising but also for ensuring that future governments operate within the desired framework of accountability.

We urge political parties to engage in the reform process in good faith, ensuring that their push for elections aligns with the broader goal of strengthening democracy. At the same time, the interim government must address any scepticism about its reform agenda, demonstrating its commitment to meaningful and inclusive change. Only through a collaborative approach can the reform vs election debate be resolved.

Risks of automation should be addressed

News of RMG workers being laid off is concerning

A recent study has revealed that automation in the apparel sector has reduced the demand for human labour in the production process by nearly 31 percent. Specifically, automation in the cutting process resulted in a 48 percent reduction in workforce needs, while sewing saw a decrease of 26.57 percent. Sweater factories saw the sharpest decline at 37 percent, followed by woven factories at 27 percent per production line. This presents a new reality for RMG workers, many of whom find their skills increasingly irrelevant. The situation is particularly alarming given the already high unemployment rate among our youth.

There is no denying the importance of automation for modernisation and improved efficiency in factories. However, it also comes with the challenge of ensuring job security for the workforce. It is thus crucial to find ways to help our workers adapt to this technological transition rather than leaving them behind.

The RMG sector has long been a cornerstone of our economy, creating jobs and advancing female labour participation, but the advent of semi- and fully-automated machinery is now causing disturbances. While skilled workers are being reassigned to new roles, those with limited skills, primarily helpers, face the greatest risk of unemployment. Small factories, unlike their larger counterparts, often lack the resources to train or reassign workers, further exacerbating the issue. Women, older workers, and those with low literacy levels are particularly vulnerable in this transition.

The problem is compounded by the broader economic challenges facing the RMG sector at present. Many factories have already laid off workers due to financial constraints and political disturbances in recent months. For instance, the Beximco Group recently let go of nearly 40,000 workers across its 15 apparel units, citing a lack of export orders. This points to an urgent need for stability in the sector.

We need proper research and planning to address these emerging challenges. To address the risks of automation, upskilling and reskilling initiatives must be prioritised. Additionally, the government and industry stakeholders should work together to diversify the economy by establishing new industries and work fronts that can absorb displaced workers. Most importantly, the industry must focus on leveraging the potential of our existing workforce rather than presuming they cannot adapt to new technologies. Navigating this transition while safeguarding livelihoods and ensuring sustainable growth is possible.

EDITORIAL

Can we save our republic?



STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

Brig Gen Shahedul Anam Khan
ndc, psc (retd) is a former associate
editor of The Daily Star.

SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN

We can pat ourselves on the back for having been selected the "Country of the Year" by the *Economist* for overthrowing an autocrat. But for the role of the students and the youth, we might well not have been able to assert ourselves. Thus, the acknowledgement of the *Economist* is actually an acknowledgement of the power of the young generation, or Gen Z, to provide leadership in reverting the regression of the country, reclaiming its sovereignty and bringing it back to the path of prosperity.

However, the magazine ends on a cautionary note mentioning the bumpy road ahead, economically, politically, and indeed diplomatically. The British weekly commented that in 2025, "Bangladesh would need to repair ties with India and decide when to hold elections—first ensuring that the courts are neutral and the opposition has time to organise." A tall order indeed.

Not unsurprisingly, our achievement has been taken with derision from certain quarters across the border, in the land of our big neighbour, where the media have gone on overdrive in manufacturing, distorting and concocting news. They manufacture chaos, concoct stories of minority repression, and exaggerate stray incidents to inflate the matter. Admittedly, there have been incidents, albeit isolated, of harassment of minorities in Bangladesh. The difference between what happens in Bangladesh and the persecution of minorities in India is that while in Bangladesh it is done by individuals, the persecution of Indian Muslims is state-sponsored.

We have said many times that while it is one thing to see through a successful revolution, it is another thing to see that the ultimate goal, for which thousands were killed, maimed and disappeared, is achieved. And very few would disagree that the ultimate aim is to achieve an egalitarian society where everyone would be free to follow his or her own goals in a free atmosphere, and would be governed by the rule of law and not by that of men—where s/he can pursue the calling of their own choice and the people's representatives serve the people and not command them. We want a country with a true republican character, in short.

However, regaining our republic



VISUAL: REHNUMA PROSHOON

will not be an easy task. The path forward appears to be extremely fraught as one would have noticed from the seminal stages of the post-revolution period. We are still in the throes of the initial stage, trying to find our feet. It is the muck that we are struggling to remove, the muck that has accrued over the last 15 years in every sector. Reportedly, the economic highway that was flaunted by the Hasina regime was really a dirt road. The story of economic miracle was a myth. Data was manufactured by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics to present a rosy economic picture. These are not my words but the words of the economic task force appearing in their *White Paper on Bangladesh* economy.

But there are inimical forces both within and outside the country who are hard at work to reinstate the fallen tyrant by indulging in choreographed movements in some sectors. Various cadres of the civil service are agitating for their own "cause." It seems that suddenly August 5 has generated the rise of a plethora of demands from various sectors, which had not been seen in the last 15 years.

It also seems that there still are a significant number of sympathisers within the administration who are lying in wait for the opportune

moment to create chaos and numb the administration. One suspects that the deep state is at work, backseat driving the government. Otherwise, how does one explain such a large number of Awami Leaguers finding their way out of the country? And we saw another physical manifestation of this in the fire incident at the Secretariat. Everything points to a well-planned

And human rights are violated in more ways than one. Can those who have siphoned off billions of dollars of the country's wealth be allowed to go free? And those people include Hasina, her family members, and her cronies in the business world. Who will answer for the extrajudicial killings and the killing of the students in the recent uprising?

sabotage work. And this is not the last of such acts of sabotage. The warnings are clear that hostile forces are at work.

The question is, how do we safeguard our revolution, the first being frittered away by a despot who had no love lost for the people of Bangladesh and felt little obligation for the country?

The only way to preserve our newly acquired freedom is to put power where it belongs—to the people. And that brings us to the crux of the issue, that of reforms and election. So far, our base has been weakened. The civil administration and the judiciary, not to speak of the security sector, have been affected by the blatant regime of politicisation by Hasina. Can we proceed with business as usual with a rickety base to build on? The character of the state institutions would have to be restored before the next move in this respect. And that can be possible if we have people with impeccable antecedents and strong moral fibre to run these institutions. But by the same token, laws must be enacted to ensure that state institutions cannot be influenced by the government of the day.

Can we also proceed without holding to account people responsible for gross violations of human rights?

Can those who destroyed democracy, deprived the people of their right to choose their representatives, and made a mockery of parliament and the system be allowed to participate in future democratic exercises without paying for their misdeeds?

We would like to end with a brief comment on the said report of the *Economist*. Bangladesh would need to repair ties with India, it says. Let me stress that it is not for Bangladesh to repair ties with India; rather the opposite is true. Bangladesh has done nothing to impair the bilateral relationship. India has, on the other hand, not only given shelter to a person who stands accused of gross violation of human rights, corruption and other misdeeds in the country's court of law; she is using the soil of India to conspire against Bangladesh.

Since the fall and fleeing away of the autocrat, Indian political leaders have made threatening comments about Bangladesh. Our folly has been that we did not register our protests except for one instance. It is a pity that India has failed to see the reality and to honour the wish of the people of Bangladesh.

The most important thing that is the call of the hour is national unity—this is the first safeguard for our Second Victory.

Air pollution menace needs effective dust and waste management



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S M MUHAMMINUL ISLAM

Air pollution in Dhaka has been a growing concern for both residents and authorities, with the city consistently ranking among the most polluted in the world. One of the leading contributors to air pollution is the massive amount of dust and waste generated by roadworks, construction projects, and uncoordinated urban development. Experts stress that coordinating government bodies, private stakeholders, and using better technology can reduce dust pollution and improve air quality.

A major source of dust pollution in Dhaka is the frequent road digging for utility work. These frequent disruptions contribute to dust pollution and cause significant traffic jams, leading to further emission of harmful gases from vehicles. According to a report from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2023), these ongoing disruptions contribute significantly to the declining air quality in the city.

Many roadworks use low-quality materials, improper waste disposal, and unregulated practices, worsening the problem. The lack of permanent utility infrastructure leads to repeated work, increasing dust and debris. A 2022 study by Chowdhury and Khan found that substandard construction

practices in Dhaka contribute significantly to air pollution due to poor site waste management.

Experts argue that the solution to this issue lies in the coordination between local and national government bodies, private construction companies, and utility providers. The lack of coordination among involved parties causes inefficiency, with multiple agencies digging up the same roads. The government should enforce a collaborative planning system for coordinated utility work. The World Bank (2020) highlights that coordinated urban planning reduces disruptions, improving resource management and urban environments. Besides the private sector should also be encouraged to adopt best practices, including using modern equipment to minimise dust and waste. For instance, using advanced vacuum trucks to remove debris and dust from construction sites can be a game changer. The World Bank (2020) suggests that such innovations could reduce the burden of air pollution in cities like Dhaka, offering a sustainable way to handle urban infrastructure.

A permanent solution to reducing dust and waste from roadworks is

implementing a comprehensive underground utility system. By installing a unified network for water, gas, and electricity, the city can reduce frequent excavations and minimise dust. The World Bank (2020) notes that cities with integrated underground utilities experience fewer disruptions and lower air pollution from roadworks.

A permanent solution to reducing dust and waste from roadworks is implementing a comprehensive underground utility system. By installing a unified network for water, gas, and electricity, the city can reduce frequent excavations and minimise dust. The World Bank (2020) notes that cities with integrated underground utilities experience fewer disruptions and lower air pollution from roadworks.

Besides, dust control measures, like water spraying systems, can reduce airborne particles during roadworks. Digital mapping tools can track utility installations, minimising future digging and ensuring timely roadworks. This is supported by the 2022 Chowdhury and Khan research.

Another crucial factor in managing dust and waste is ensuring

high-quality construction. Low-quality work often leads to cracks and rework, which not only wastes time and resources but also contributes to the continuous disruption of urban areas. The government should impose strict quality standards for all construction and roadworks to prevent the need for repeated repairs. The World Bank (2020) suggests that investment in high-quality infrastructure reduces long-term maintenance costs and improves the city's sustainability.

Private companies should be incentivised to invest in durable, sustainable materials that require fewer interventions. "Green" construction practices, focusing on sustainable materials and waste reduction, should be prioritised in both public and private projects. Research by Chowdhury and Khan (2022) shows that cities with high construction standards experience fewer disruptions and less environmental degradation.

The role of local communities and citizens in reducing dust pollution should not be overlooked. Authorities should engage with residents through awareness programmes on the importance of waste management and reducing unnecessary burning of waste.

Dhaka's air pollution requires a coordinated approach from all stakeholders. By using advanced technology and investing in underground utilities, the city can reduce dust, waste, and create a more sustainable environment. The future of Dhaka lies in long-term planning, collaboration, and the adoption of innovative technologies.



FILE VISUAL: SHAIKH SULTANA JAHAN BADHON

Generation Z will be shaping the next few decades



T.I.M. Nurul Kabir
is a policy and technology analyst.

T.I.M. NURUL KABIR

The young generation of today, around the age of 14-29 years, is the first social generation born in the digital era. The cohort born roughly between 1995 and 2010 is bracketed as Generation Z, or in short Gen Z. Because these young people have grown up with access to the Internet and digital mobile technology, and since they have very little or no memory at all of a world without touchscreens and social media, members of Generation Z have also been dubbed "Digital Natives."

According to the Global Youth Development Index Update Report 2023, published by the Commonwealth Secretariat, almost half of the global population, and 60 percent of the Commonwealth population, are under 30 years old. The number of 15-to-29-year-olds was 1.8 billion in 2022, or around 23 percent of the total world population.

At the global level, there has been much discussion in recent years emphasising the need for stronger and more prominent inclusion of young people in decision-making spaces. In Bangladesh, two key coordinators of the Anti-discrimination Students' Movement have been appointed advisers (equivalent to minister) of the interim government formed in August after the previous oppressive government was ousted following a major student-mass uprising. Inclusion of students in top decision-making positions of the government is unprecedented in the world, which carries deep-seated implications and speaks of the expectations of the young generation.

Bangladesh is going through a demographic transition, changing the age structure of the population. According to the Population and Housing Census 2022, young people between 15-29 years of age make up 27.82 percent of the total population.

This change in population occurred due to the gradual shift from high fertility and mortality to low fertility and mortality. According to the 2022 census, the proportion of the working-age population (aged between 15 and 64) is 65.63 percent of the total population, which was 60.62 percent in the 2011 census and 57.01 percent in the 2011 census.

The high ratio of the working-age population in comparison with the dependent population, aged between 0 and 14 years plus 65 years-old and above, offers a demographic window of opportunity for Bangladesh. If utilised properly, this ratio can be transformed into a demographic dividend of economic growth.

adapt to the changing age structure increases the risk of missing the opportunity to achieve higher economic growth. In case of failure to act promptly and effectively, there even remains the likelihood of facing worse penalties such as rising unemployment, higher rates of crime and drug addiction, mass unrest, and political instability.

As half of the world's population is under 30, it is now more important to change the way decisions are made because the lives of young people are affected the most by the decisions we make today. The Be Seen Be Heard Global Youth Survey conducted in December 2021, indicated that 76 percent of people aged under 30 believe politicians simply don't listen to young people. This large-scale qualitative and quantitative research was commissioned by

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The Body Shop in collaboration with the United Nations Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth.

The research found that across the board, 75 percent of people surveyed think politicians are "untrustworthy" and 84 percent of people described politicians as "self-interested." The majority of the people in the survey also agree that the age balance in politics is wrong.

Our general conception of young people is broadly the primary barrier to giving more weight to young voices in public decision-making spaces. We should rather ask ourselves, are young people really irresponsible and disengaged and do they actually lack the will and aptitude to create real impact?

Back in 2017, a not-for-profit organisation Varkey Foundation commissioned a research on a global scale into the attitudes of 15- to 21-year-olds on a variety of ethical, personal, community and political issues. The Generation

Z: Global Citizenship Survey 2017 polled more than 20,000 respondents in 20 countries across North and South America, Europe, Africa, Australia and Asia, including India from South Asia. The survey found that the majority of the Gen Z respondents considered making a wider contribution to society to be important to them.

The Deloitte Global 2024 Gen Z and Millennial Survey connected with 22,841 respondents in 44 countries to explore their attitudes about work and the world around them. The Survey recorded the responses of 14,468 Gen Zs and 8,373 millennials from countries across North America, Latin America, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia-Pacific.

The survey found that nearly all Gen Zs and millennials want purpose-driven work, and they're not afraid to turn down work that doesn't align with their values. Roughly nine in 10 Gen Zs (86 percent) and millennials (89 percent) said having a sense of purpose in their work is very or somewhat important to their overall job satisfaction and well-being.

Teenagers and young adults of today are the people who will shape the next few decades. In a time when the world is infested with conflicts and terrorism, climate change, rising inequality and economic instability, we shall need a balanced generational mix in the public decision-making space to find solutions to problems that have so far been unresolved. If generations of all ages come together, we can view things from the fresh perspective of young people and include their voices in politics and civic engagements.

By investing in young people Bangladesh can transform its one-time demographic window of opportunity into a demographic dividend. Investment to create an environment of high-quality health and education is necessary to make the most of our demographic opportunities. Reforms are necessary to ensure transparency, accountability and good governance for the attainment of the demographic dividend.

Public-private partnerships are imperative in many areas of social policy to come up with innovative ways for both public and private sectors to share costs and administrative duties associated with the provision of social services. The government, on the one hand, must become more efficient trustees of taxpayers' money. On the other hand, businesses need to explore the effects of a whole range of factors from better-educated workers to improved environmental performance.

The degree to which young people successfully engage with their respective work and civic engagement at large will positively play a key role in determining the future progress of Bangladesh. If the young people are given the support they rightly deserve to keep up their spirit and motivation, Bangladesh can positively achieve inclusive growth. The coordinators of the Anti-discrimination Students' Movement have laid the first stepping stones towards a more inclusive and justified future.

Elegy on Andrew Eagle



Rebecca Haque
is professor of English at the University of Dhaka.

REBECCA HAQUE

Death, be not proud...
My dear friend, Andrew Eagle, passed away at the age of fifty, peacefully in his sleep in December 2024. Sleep on, Andrew, with your soul embraced by the bright, fragrant blooms of the eternal heavenly bower.

For me, now old and grey, with my seventieth birthday having passed in the first week of December, the news was a shock—like a blow to the head. Days of silent mourning followed. No tears. Only the endless reel of my mind playing scenes from decades of close connection with a gifted writer and a wonderful human being.

I first met Andrew in the mid-1990s at an International Conference on War, organised by the University of Dhaka's Department of English. The conference was held in the new auditorium of the under-

clumps to resume our beloved *adda*. Most befitting pastime for wordsmiths.

I am on a sofa with two others, seated directly opposite the open front door. I see Andrew lingering on the threshold, a bit nervous, hesitant to encroach into our hallowed space. I jumped up and quickly walked towards him, right hand held forth to shake his, smiled and said, "Please come in. Do sit and have tea with us. And...you are..."

His reply, "I am Andrew Eagle" made me hoot with delight.

We next met on a coffee date at the Bangla Academy lawn one pleasant November evening during the Dhaka Literary Festival to chat and celebrate. I wanted to buy his co-authored book, *APRIL*. A true gentleman, Andrew paid for the coffee. However, to my chagrin, I did not have enough cash to pay the Tk

mugs—white with a dark blue rim and the University of Dhaka logo. I had the peon discreetly deliver one to Banerjee. After refreshments, I planned to give one to Andrew as well.

The actual purpose of Andrew's visit was to pay homage to the hundreds of martyred students, massacred by the Pakistani army in genocidal gunfire in their campus residential halls in 1971. I cherish the privilege of guiding him to the green lawn and the effulgent new tree planted by Senator Edward Kennedy to honour the dead. As we all know, the original iconic Banyan tree, symbol and semiotic of the violent Language Movement since the 1950's, was chopped down by the Pakistani soldiers.

Andrew walked on the green grass. He sat under the tree. Touched the fresh bright green leaves. He walked back to the pavement on the edge of the lawn and handed me his smartphone to capture the image for posterity: Andrew in the foreground, with the majestic tree filling the landscape. I think to myself, as I click away several times, "What wondrous *Inscape!*"

The final volume of the esteemed journal *SIX SEASONS*



Andrew Eagle (1975-2024).

PHOTO: COLLECTED

construction Social Science building, next to Modhur Canteen. Fakrul Alam was the chairperson, and I was an associate professor with some influence and, I believe, modest writerly recognition.

I, of course, knew Andrew's work well. Both of us were regular contributors to *The Daily Star*—the literary page and the Friday weekend magazine—along with a close-knit group of academics and writers from my department:

Niaz Zaman, Syed Manzoorul Islam, Kaiser Haq, and Fakrul Alam. But incredibly, I had never seen a photograph of Andrew.

This was my fault, as I had been

in Canada during the early '90s, often trapped in my own

gloom and disconnected from events back home. I missed the overthrow of General Ershad.

Incidentally, I was one of the first to hear the breaking news of Rajiv Gandhi's assassination by a Tamil suicide bomber. I was sitting in my apartment at Dalhousie University, writing a term paper late at night with the transistor radio on low, so as not to disturb my neighbours through the thin walls. Stunned, I paced the floor for a while before calling my Tamil friend, the wife of a Commonwealth scholar who lived upstairs. She had become like a sister to me, and sharing that sorrow together eased the ache in my heart.

But I digress. Let me take you back to the auditorium. During the inaugural session, I sat in the front row in a black-and-white cotton sari, while Andrew stood out, noticeably, three tiers up to my right at almost a 20-degree angle. I turned around to nod a greeting, and I remember he was dressed smartly in a white shirt and black trousers. We exchanged smiles. During the tea-break at 11 o'clock, some of us leisurely walked into the Teacher's Lounge and sat in

800 (only). I was so embarrassed. But being a quick-witted, pure-blood *Dhakkaiya* girl, I made a swap deal with my Hatiya younger brother: one medium-size jar of the notoriously famous Australian bread spread "Vegeteme" from Melbourne on my next trip back from Down Under.

We met again—for me to hand over the promised jar—at the Daily Star (DS) Centre. Syed Mansur Hashim was then working as assistant editor at *The Daily Star* and was a responsible and valuable asset in his capacity for soliciting original pieces for

Review (New Series, Vol. 6, No. 1, 201), edited by Fakrul Alam, contains just three non-fiction pieces. My memoir, "In My Place: Betwixt First Language and Mother Tongue" (pp. 87-92), appears at the top, followed by Somdatta Mondal's "American Individualism" (pp. 61-65), and Andrew Eagle's "Follow the Fish" (pp. 121-128) at the bottom. In his editor's note, Fakrul Alam writes, "Andrew Eagle's captivating account of his quest for a whale shark in the Maldives will certainly strike a familiar note for devotees of Melville's perennial classic *Moby Dick*.

We next met on a coffee date at the Bangla Academy lawn one pleasant November evening during the Dhaka Literary Festival to chat and celebrate. I wanted to buy his co-authored book, *APRIL*. A true gentleman, Andrew paid for the coffee.

the paper's special supplements. He also wrote occasional pieces for the newspaper. We three the DS nerds were very good friends. Mansur took us to the bustling staff cafeteria and treated us to wholesome snacks and hot beverages. An hour of fun and laughter, wit and banter. Swordplay with query and repartee.

However, what makes this farewell SSR issue unique, and a collector's item now is the concluding photography section, with Andrew's black and white photomontage of the "idyllic South Sea atoll in the Maldives." Five final photos are of Andrew chasing the whale.

On December 24, 2024, at 2:25

am my subdued heart throbbed with undying love for Andrew and I thought of lighting a candle on Xmas eve.

Let me end my elegy with Andrew's voice in "Follow the Fish":

"If I was a writer...

If I was a writer, with words would I scoop the hiss of Indian Ocean waves as they glide in and off the beach, beyond the balcony. ...the Maldivian sea is soul music.

"I'm still here", the island's ocean breathes..."

Smoke-free alternatives could save 4.6 million lives in Indonesia

More than 4.6 million lives could be saved if Indonesia embraces smoke free alternatives to traditional cigarettes, according to a sensational new report.

Indonesia has one of the highest smoking rates globally and records 300,000 deaths every year from tobacco-related diseases.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) predicts this woeful toll will increase even further next year when the smoking rate is forecast to rise to 37.5% of adults.

However, a groundbreaking report shows that this trend could be dramatically reversed if the country integrated tobacco harm reduction (THR) strategies into its public health policy.

Dr Delon Human, a co-author of the report Saving 4.6 million lives in Indonesia, said: "With over 65% of adult men in Indonesia smoking, and the country's high smoking-related death toll, it is clear that a new approach is urgently needed."

Switching to safer nicotine products is significantly more effective than traditional cessation tools, such as nicotine replacement therapy. Our analysis shows that if Indonesia embraced THR strategies, including smoke-free alternatives to cigarettes, it has the opportunity to save 4,616,000 lives by 2060 while leading the way in tobacco control reform."

The report calls for health professionals, especially physicians, to promote THR and counter nicotine misinformation to reduce smoking-related harm.

It also urges the Indonesian government to adopt risk proportionate regulations for safer alternatives, invest in local research to guide evidence-based policies, and strengthen consumer advocacy through independent, science-based groups.

Additionally, engaging religious leaders could help guide communities to quit smoking and support harm reduction efforts, reaching a broader audience across Indonesia.

Dr Human, leader of Smoke Free Sweden, said: "Public health can be radically improved if governments and health professionals work together to communicate the benefits of smoke-free alternatives.



Eating good food vs. eating nutritious food: What is the difference?

RAISA MEHZABEEN

What comes to mind when we think of 'good food'? For many, it is about flavour, indulgence, and satisfaction. 'Good food' is commonly associated with taste, presentation, and enjoyment—a feast for our senses. Whether it is a rich slice of cheesecake, a gourmet burger, or a well-spiced bowl of pasta. However, what is often labelled as 'good food' may lack the nutrients we need for overall health.

Many of our favourite indulgences are high in sugars, unhealthy fats, or artificial additives, which contribute to weight gain, inflammation, and other health issues when consumed in excess. So, while good food has its place in life's enjoyment, it does not necessarily mean it is good for us nutritionally.

Nutritious food, on the other hand, prioritises health, longevity, and body function. It is defined by its nutrient density—the vitamins, minerals, fibre, and essential fats that our body needs to thrive.

When we think of nutritious food, we think of colourful vegetables, lean proteins, whole grains, nuts, seeds, and fruits. These foods not only support our body but also help reduce the risk of chronic diseases like diabetes, heart disease, and even some forms of cancer.

The benefits of nutritious foods go beyond just physical health. They also impact mental well-being. Studies consistently show that nutrient-rich diets improve mood, support cognitive function, and reduce the risk of mental health issues. This is not to say nutritious food is not enjoyable. A well-seasoned salad or a well-cooked lean protein can be incredibly delicious, proving that nutritious food can also be good food. The secret lies in preparation and mindful eating.

The balance between enjoyment and health: The real challenge lies in finding a balance. Rather than seeing 'good food' and 'nutritious food' as mutually exclusive, we can seek to merge the two. There is a middle ground where food can be both nourishing and delightful. For instance, a homemade smoothie with fruits, greens, and a dollop of yoghurt can be delicious and nutritious. Grilled salmon with a side of roasted vegetables or a bowl of spiced lentil soup can be both satisfying and packed with nutrients.

It is essential to remember that food does not have to be bland to be nutritious. Seasonings like herbs and spices, different cooking techniques, and even occasional indulgences can make nutritious foods taste amazing without compromising health.

Shifting the focus to a long-term vision: In a world where fast food and processed items are marketed as 'good food'—cheap, quick, and tasty—the importance of nutritious food is often overshadowed. But while good food may give us a moment of pleasure, nutritious food gives us a lifetime of wellness. Choosing nutritious foods most of the time provides long-term health benefits, while indulging in 'good food' occasionally satisfies our cravings and emotional connections to food.

Ultimately, the difference between good food and nutritious food is not about choice; it is about priority. Prioritising nutritious food as a daily staple and reserving good food as a treat can be a powerful approach. This does not mean deprivation; it means making conscious choices that support our health and happiness.

In the end, we do not have to choose between eating good food and eating nutritious food. We can aim to incorporate both into our lives in a way that supports our body and nourishes our soul. Finding the harmony between flavour and function is the key to a well-rounded, joyful, and healthy life.

*The writer is a student in the Department of Food and Nutrition at the Government College of Applied Human Science.
Email: raisameh20@gmail.com*

DIABETES MEDICATIONS Reducing asthma exacerbations

Emerging research suggests that certain diabetes medications could offer benefits beyond blood sugar control, potentially helping to reduce asthma symptoms and flare-ups. Diabetes and obesity are known to contribute to worsened asthma control, and managing both conditions effectively could lead to better overall health outcomes.

Recent studies have explored the effects of medications commonly used to treat type 2 diabetes on asthma. Notably, drugs like metformin and glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) receptor agonists have shown promise in reducing asthma exacerbations. These medications appear to work independently of the patient's asthma severity or metabolic factors, suggesting that their benefits may extend beyond just controlling blood sugar.



While metformin has long been a first-line treatment for type 2 diabetes, GLP-1 receptor agonists are newer medications that help regulate both blood sugar and appetite. The combination of these drugs may provide an added advantage for patients dealing with both asthma and diabetes, improving quality of life by reducing asthma flare-ups.

However, it is important to note that other diabetes medications did not show similar benefits in asthma control. As such, these findings highlight the potential for targeted therapies that address both conditions simultaneously, although further studies are needed to confirm these results and understand the mechanisms at play.

Overall, the growing evidence supports a more integrated approach to treating patients with both asthma and diabetes, potentially improving outcomes for individuals managing these chronic conditions.

Call to reassess e-cigarette import ban with four key demands

STAR HEALTH REPORT

Stakeholders and industry representatives submitted a memorandum to Chief Advisor Dr Muhammad Yunus, urging him to reconsider the government's decision to ban the import of e-cigarettes, says a press release. In the memorandum, they expressed a deep concern over the decision, which includes adding e-cigarettes and Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS) to the list of prohibited items in the Import Policy Order by the Ministry of Commerce. Stakeholders fear this decision will deprive adult smokers of a less harmful alternative to quit smoking, potentially causing significant negative impacts on public health and the economy.

The memorandum was submitted on December 28, 2024, at the official residence of the Chief Advisor, Jamuna, by organisations including Voice of Vapers, Consumer Rights of Sales Alternatives (CORS), and Bangladesh Electronic Nicotine Delivery System Traders Association (BENDSTA). Earlier in the day, the organisations held a human chain at Shahbagh, Dhaka, under the theme, "Reconsider the Import Ban on Harm Reduction Products to Prevent Smoking." The event was attended by representatives from these organisations, including Schumann Zaman, Anisuzzaman Khan, Rezwan Ahmed, Iftekharul Alam, Reaz Mahbub, and NurulAfshar, among others.

At the human chain, Bangladesh Electronic Nicotine Delivery System Traders Association (BENDSTA) President Schumann Zaman said, "Vaping or e-cigarettes are harm-reduction products, developed to minimise the risks associated with smoking. UK Health Security Agency research has shown that these are 95% less harmful than conventional cigarettes. Countries

like the UK, USA, Canada, New Zealand, and Sweden are promoting their use as part of their public health policies. A ban like this could push current e-cigarette users back to traditional smoking, creating an even greater public health risk."

He also added, "Global experiences show that banning e-cigarettes does not stop their use. Instead, it leads to the emergence of black markets. After India banned e-cigarettes in 2019, illegal sales surged significantly, compromising product quality and user safety while also causing the government to lose substantial revenue."

Consumer Rights of Sales Alternatives (CORS) Director

and logical regulatory framework. This approach would ensure the dual goals of public health improvement and providing safer alternatives for adult smokers.

They urged the government to work with stakeholders to develop a fair regulatory structure and called for the application of proven tobacco harm reduction strategies to safeguard public health.

The proposals of the Bangladesh Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems Traders Association (BENDSTA) are as follows:

1. Reconsider the ban on importing ENDS products and formulate regulatory policies for these products based on scientific research.

2. Develop an inclusive



policy framework by engaging stakeholders such as traders, importers, users, and health experts.

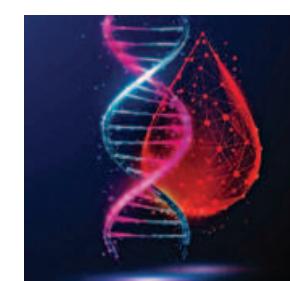
3. Establish specific regulations for product importation, quality control, and licensing to prevent the entry of substandard and illegal products into the market.

4. Enforce strict age restrictions to prevent access by minors, along with stringent laws to address violations of these age limits.

A new gene therapy could change the lives for people with haemophilia A

Imagine living with a condition where even a minor injury could lead to life-threatening bleeding. This is the reality for people with severe haemophilia A. But a groundbreaking study from India may offer a life-changing solution.

Researchers tested a new gene therapy on five men, aged 22 to 41, who had frequent bleeding episodes—more than 20 a year. This therapy used their own blood stem cells, modified to carry a special



gene that helps produce the clotting protein factor VIII, which people with haemophilia A lack. Unlike traditional treatments, they underwent a gentler pre-treatment with a drug called treosulfan, and some received a special "boost" called a transduction enhancer.

The outcomes were truly remarkable. Bleeding episodes stopped completely for all participants, and they showed stable levels of factor VIII. Those who got the "boost" had much higher levels of the clotting protein, reaching up to 40 times that of those who did not.

Even better, this treatment didn't seem to disrupt their overall health—most participants maintained normal sperm counts, an encouraging sign of safety.

For people with haemophilia A, this could mean freedom from constant bleeding and endless treatments. While the therapy is still in its early stages, it offers hope that life with haemophilia might soon look very different. Scientists are optimistic this innovation could lead to a brighter future for millions worldwide.



Managing diabetes during winter in Bangladesh

DR SHAHJADA SELIM

Winter in Bangladesh presents unique challenges for those living with diabetes. Naturally, during colds, patients with diabetes utilise more calories and remain in good glycaemia. But in Bangladesh, the picture is reversed; here, people consume huge carbohydrate-rich foods in winter time. There are several family festivals, seasonal festivals, and celebrations. All will end up with high blood sugar. On the other hand, many of our patients with diabetes refrain from physical exercise due to cold weather, again risking them to uncontrolled diabetes.

Adequate care and focus during this season are crucial for sustaining good health, avoiding complications, and considering some key points for reflection.

1. Monitor blood sugar regularly: Check your blood sugar levels frequently, as cold weather can affect glucose control.

Keep your glucometer in a warm, dry place to ensure accurate readings.

2. Stay warm and active: Engage in indoor exercises like yoga, light aerobics, or stretching if outdoor activities are less feasible.

Wear layered clothing to stay warm and avoid cold-related stress, which can impact blood sugar levels.

3. Make wise food choices: Incorporate seasonal vegetables like cauliflower, cabbage, spinach, radish, and carrots into your diet for balanced nutrition.

Limit sugary treats commonly enjoyed during winter festivals, and choose lower glycaemic alternatives.



feet: Reduced circulation in cold weather can increase the risk of foot complications.

Keep your feet warm and dry, and inspect them daily for cuts, sores, or signs of infection.

5. Store insulin and medications properly: Protect insulin from freezing by storing it in a temperature-controlled environment to maintain its effectiveness, though this is not a big issue in Bangladesh.

6. Prevent seasonal illness: Colds and flu can raise blood sugar levels. Stay vaccinated, practice good hygiene, and drink plenty of fluids to boost your immunity.

Elderly patients with diabetes are at high risk for pneumonia, stroke, and other cardiovascular diseases during this period.

7. Stay hydrated: Drink adequate water and warm, unsweetened beverages to avoid dehydration, which can impact blood sugar control.

8. Consult your endocrinologist: Winter may require adjustments to your diet, medication, or exercise routine. Regular check-ins with your doctor can help tailor a plan that works best for you.

By following these tips and making necessary lifestyle adjustments, you can effectively manage diabetes and enjoy a healthy winter season in Bangladesh.

Control your blood sugar and reduce the risk of chronic complications of diabetes.

The writer is the Associate Professor of Department of Endocrinology at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University. E-mail: selimshahjada@gmail.com

BPL CORNER

I am thrilled to be playing in the Bangladesh league. When Tamim bhai called me to play for this team, I was excited from the start. For me, it was Tamim Iqbal's phone call.

SHAHEEN SHAH AFRIDI

on what made him sign for Fortune Barishal.

He [Mashrafe Bin Mortaza] is still in our squad. Mashrafe is part and parcel of the team. It depends on the situation -- how he feels and his fitness condition [regarding playing in the tournament]. If he is okay to play or the situation is good, of course he will play.

AKM MAHMUD EMON
Sylhet Strikers head coach

BPL is one of the biggest franchise cricket tournaments. I will try to play good cricket. It's not pressure, I will try to focus on my game. I will try to play well match by match.

JISHAN ALAM
Durbar Rajshahi batter

I think the key is he [Nahid Rana] got that (accuracy) and I have been impressed with him over the last two days. What I need to see now is how he is reacting in match situations because the skills are all there.

MICKEY ARTHUR
Rangpur Riders head coach
on Bangladesh's latest pace sensation Nahid Rana



One of the star foreign recruits of the upcoming season of the Bangladesh Premier League, Pakistan's ace pacer Shaheen Shah Afridi shakes hands with premier Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal during a practice session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. Tamim, apparently, was the reason behind Shaheen's decision to agree for a maiden BPL stint, and the Pakistani pacer is set to feature for Tamim-led Fortune Barishal when they take on Durbar Rajshahi in the tournament opener in Mirpur tomorrow.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

'Accent may sound different, but I'm very much an English'

Dhaka Capitals' English wicketkeeper-batter Stephen Eskinazi has had a unique journey in cricket. Born to an English mother and a Zimbabwe-born father in Johannesburg, he was brought up in Australia and played for Western Australia Under-17s and U-19s before joining English county Middlesex. In an interview with The Daily Star's Samsul Arefin Khan, the 30-year-old opened up on his cricketing journey and revealed that his international cricket aspirations revolve solely around England. The excerpts are as follows:

The Daily Star (DS): This is your first time in BPL. But you were supposed to play in the last season as well, right?

Stephen Eskinazi (SE): I was really close. I was playing for Perth Scorchers and was signed to play for Chattogram Challengers after that. In a knockout game against Sydney Sixers, I got hit really badly on my index finger. I was out for three-and-a-half months. I was really disappointed I could not come. When the opportunity came again, I grabbed it with both hands.

DS: Before coming here, you played in the Nepal Premier League. How was the experience?

SE: It's insane over there. The support was something I knew little bit about. I

don't think anyone should underestimate Nepal. It was fantastic.

DS: You have played in franchise leagues in Australia and England. In comparison, how different is it to play in franchise leagues in the sub-continent?

SE: Firstly, it's such a great experience as a person to come here, to see the cultures of Bangladesh and Nepal. That's one of the beautiful things about playing cricket at the moment. Secondly, from a cricketer's perspective, it's so good for my development as a batter. There are so many experiences



that I will be able to take back and share with my teammates back home and share it with the people that I like to talk cricket about. I've been so excited to come over here and I expect a fantastic tournament on and off the field.

DS: Your journey in cricket has been

different to most cricketers. Personally, how do you feel about it?

SE: I've been fortunate to spend so much time with so many amazing people around the world with the sport. To be able to go back and play for Perth Scorchers which is my home town and play with the guys I grew up with was really amazing. I love playing at Lord's, Middlesex and also in the Hundred. I have got some fantastic mentors, coaches and leaders from whom I learnt a lot. This competition is no different. To be sharing a dressing room with players like Mustafizur [Rahman] and Liton [Das] and other guys who play at the highest level, I'm extremely grateful for it.

DS: You carry an Australian and an English passport. Who do you hope to represent in international cricket?

SE: My accent might sound slightly different, but I'm very much an English at the moment. I've been playing in England for 12 seasons now. I have represented England A, England Lions teams. Playing for England is still a massive goal of mine, particularly in the short formats.

DS: So, you don't see yourself playing for Australia?

SE: I don't think so. You never ever say never. But I think I'm English. I'm captain of Middlesex and I would love to represent Three Lions.

Joty extends hot streak

SPORTS REPORTER

Central Zone skipper Nigar Sultana Joty continued her remarkable form in the Women's Bangladesh Cricket League (WBCL) to help her side earn a draw against East Zone in Rajshahi yesterday.

After scoring an unbeaten 153 in her side's campaign opener, Joty smashed 171 off 322 balls at Shaheed Kamruzzaman Stadium. The national captain formed a massive 228-run partnership with overnight centurion Mursida Khatun, who also impressed with 170 off 286 balls, as Central reached 528-8 in reply to East's 354, leading to a draw.

Elsewhere in Rajshahi, South Zone tail held firm to secure a draw against North Zone. Chasing 276, South were reduced to 213-8 before Salma Khatun (24*) and Rupa Roy stayed unscathed at the Bangla Trac Cricket Academy Ground.

Earlier, North declared their second innings at 257 for five, with Sobhana Mostary making just once in the last 10 years (W8 D1).

The third-round fixtures are expected to take place after the Tigresses' West Indies tour in January.

Liverpool look to extend PL lead

AGENCIES

Liverpool will aim to go nine points clear at the Premier League summit in their final fixture of 2024 when they travel to London to take on West Ham on Sunday.

The Reds, currently on 42 points after their 3-1 comeback win over Leicester City, have a six-point advantage over second-placed Arsenal and lead third-placed Chelsea by seven points.

They have now come from behind to earn 12 points this season, with only struggling Manchester City (14) winning more points via that method, as they extended their unbeaten streak to 13 games in the Premier League.

And it would be a surprise if they did not continue that recent run, especially given they've lost their final league game of a calendar year just once in the last 10 years (W8 D1).

They are unbeaten in their last 10 Premier League away games (W6 D4).

However, West Ham may feel they have a reasonable chance, as

Slot's side have conceded 10 goals in their last four Premier League away matches.

Meanwhile, Manchester City's troubles continued over the festive period, but Pep Guardiola will be eyeing a positive finish to the year when they travel to Leicester City on Sunday.

It will be a landmark day for the Spaniard, who will be taking charge of City for the 500th time in all competitions, becoming just the second manager to hit that milestone.

He won his 100th, 200th and 300th matches in charge, and drew the 400th, but celebrations could be dampened given Man

City's recent slump. They have now won just one of their last 13 matches in all competitions, that run extending thanks to their 1-1 draw with Everton on Boxing Day.

City are just about clinging on to seventh place but perhaps 18th-placed Leicester are the perfect opponents for them to turn their fortunes around.



Reddy defiance in front of record crowd

Helping India fight back from 221 for seven, Nitish Kumar Reddy scored a defiant maiden century on Saturday as India reached 358-9 on a rain-hit third day of the fourth Test against Australia in Melbourne. Reddy, unbeaten on 105, starred in a 127-run eighth wicket stand with Washington Sundar to reduce the first-innings deficit to 116 runs on a day that saw record third day attendance in a Boxing Day Test.

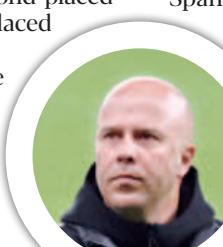
⚡ Aged 21 years and 216 days, Reddy became the third youngest Test centurion for India in Australia – behind Sachin Tendulkar (18y 256d in Sydney, 1992) and Rishabh Pant (21y 92d in Sydney, 2019).

⚡ It was only the second instance of India's number eight and nine batters hitting 50+ scores in the same innings of a Test in Australia. The first was in Adelaide in 2008 when Anil Kumble (87) and Harbhajan Singh (63) made 50+ scores.

⚡ Reddy's 105-run unbeaten knock is now the highest score by an Indian batting at eight or lower in Australia.

⚡ The crowd of 83,073 was a record for the third day of a Boxing Day Test, according to Cricket Australia, and the largest day three crowd at the Melbourne Cricket Ground since 1937.

⚡ The record total attendance for a Boxing Day Test is 271,865, which looks certain to be smashed on Sunday after 255,462 spectators came through the gates on the first three days.



**WITH MORE CAPACITY, WE ARE MORE READY
TO BUILD TOMORROW'S BANGLADESH**

BSRM
building a safer nation

SHAH CEMENT

**BANGLADESH'S
NO. 1 CEMENT BRAND**

SECRETARIAT FIRE

Restriction on
journo's entry
temporarySays home ministry after
journos express outrage

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

After journalists expressed outrage over the decision to curb their access to the hub of bureaucracy, the home ministry yesterday stated that restricting journalists' entry to the Secretariat was a temporary measure taken for the sake of ongoing investigations into Thursday's fire.

The journalists expressed their dismay on social media and a faction of Dhaka Union of Journalists termed the restriction "a threat to independent journalism".

A press release of the home ministry said a "positive decision" will be made in this regard upon discussions with the ministry of information.

Meanwhile, the chief adviser's press wing yesterday said access to the secretariat has been restricted "in view of the safety and security of the key point installation."

A devastating fire ravaged parts of

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3

PLANE CRASH

Putin says sorry to Baku for 'tragic event'
Demands proper probe as fingers point at Russia

AFP, Moscow

Vladimir Putin yesterday admitted Russian air defence was working when an Azerbaijani Airlines plane tried to land in Grozny before crashing, breaking the Kremlin's silence as speculation mounted Russia may have accidentally shot the plane.

The Russian leader called his Azerbaijani counterpart Ilham Aliyev, apologising that the incident took place in Russian airspace while stopping short of saying Russian air defence shot down the plane.

Baku, meanwhile, said Aliyev had "emphasised" to Putin that the plane was hit by outside interference over Russia, saying it wanted those responsible "held accountable."

The phone call between the allies came three days after the Embraer 190 plane flying from Baku to Grozny crashed in Kazakhstan,



Women workers harvesting onions from a farmland in Kushtia's Mirpur upazila. At the time of planting, farmers had to purchase the bulb for Tk 8,000 per maund and around Tk 1 lakh was spent on cultivation per bigha. However, the newly harvested onions are now being sold only for Tk 1,200-1,400 per maund, according to wholesale traders. The farmers have claimed incurring losses of around Tk 60,000-70,000 per bigha this season.

PHOTO: ANIS MONDOL

The youth have
right to form
political party

Says Adviser Sakhawat Hussain

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Mature political parties should encourage the new political parties formed by the youths, said M Sakhawat Hussain, the labour and employment adviser.

"I personally think that the young people have the right to participate in elections and to form a political party -- none should discourage them," he said yesterday at a session of the two-day-long national dialogue organised by Forum for Bangladesh Studies.

Mature political parties should encourage them.

"They are not your rivals. If you do not nurture them, we will see the same things. We need young blood flowing in politics," he said at the event held at the Krishibid Institution Bangladesh.

The Students Against Discrimination movement, which initiated the mass uprising that led to the fall of the Awami League government, and their sister platform Jatiya Nagarik Committee are planning to form a new political party within a month or two, their leaders said.

The interim government will not be in power for a long period, Sakhawat said.

If reforms do not take place now, then it will be difficult to have them in future, he said, while likening the current aids in the system to a cobra's venom.

"You cannot keep a cobra outside and work inside the house. Until you get rid of the venom of cobra you are not safe."

But the reforms will take time, he said.

"You cannot change anything overnight. We need to change the political system of the country. Changes only in the electoral law are not enough. Political culture must be changed."

He, however, acknowledged that Bangladesh needs stability at the moment.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

AGENCIES

Israeli raid shuts last
major health facility
in north Gaza

Reports say part of Kamal Adwan Hospital burnt

The WHO said 60 health workers and 25 patients in critical condition, including some on ventilators, reportedly remained in Kamal Adwan Hospital.

Patients in less severe condition were forced to evacuate to the destroyed, non-functioning Indonesian Hospital, the UN health agency said, adding it was "deeply concerned for their safety".

Hamas-run Gaza's health ministry reported that Israeli forces had detained Kamal Adwan's director, Hossam Abu Safiyeh, along with several medical staff.

Gaza's civil defence agency said Abu Safiyeh was held alongside its north Gaza chief, Ahmed Hassan al Kahlout.

The Israeli military did not comment on the detentions.

One of the Gazans evacuated from the hospital, who asked to be identified only as Mohammad for security reasons, told AFP some evacuees were interrogated about Hamas.

"As we began to exit, the army asked all young men to take off their clothes and walk outside the hospital," said Mohammad, whose brother was a patient there.

"They (soldiers) took tens of young men, as well as physicians and patients, to an unknown place... The young men were interrogated. They were asked about resistance fighters, Hamas and weapons."

Police have
no wand to
stop crime
overnight
Says IGP

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Inspector General of Police Baharul Alam yesterday said the police are taking steps to curb crimes, which have seen a rise after August 5.

"We do not have any magical solution because you know the circumstances and from where we have to come back -- we are taking measures to address these challenges," he told reporters yesterday after the annual general meeting of the Retired Police Officers' Welfare Association at the capital's Rajarbagh Police Lines.

Alam's response came when asked about the rising incidents of theft, robbery and murder in Dhaka and elsewhere since August 5.

"We are working to awaken the police force and regain their confidence. We want to get closer to people and seek their cooperation. We are also calling on representatives of the Anti Discrimination Student Movement to help us strengthen community engagement."

Regarding the attacks and threats to student coordinators in different districts, he said: "We have analysed and resolved each incident and those are not cases of targeted killings."

The incident in Kaliakoir was a

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3

Scientists measure
exact speed of
human thought

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Scientists have finally quantified the brain's speed limit in processing human thought, an advance that reveals why we are able to process only one thought at a time.

The human body's sensory systems, including the eyes, ears, skin, and nose, gather data about our environments at a rate of a billion bits per second.

However, researchers have found that the brain processes these signals at only about 10 bits per second -- a speed millions of times slower than the inputs.

The bit is the basic unit of information in computing with a typical Wi-Fi connection processing about 50 million bits per second.

The brain has over 85 billion neurons with a third of these involved in high-level thinking and located in the more developed cortex region of the outer brain.

Researchers assessed existing scientific literature on human behaviours like reading, writing, playing video games, and solving Rubik's Cubes, and calculated that humans think at a speed of 10 bits per second -- a number that they call "extremely low".



Ambulances transport wounded Palestinians from the Kamal Adwan Hospital to the Al-Shifa hospital in Gaza City yesterday after an Israeli raid put the hospital out of service.

MAWA EXPRESSWAY CRASH

Everything
was wrong
with the bus

It had no valid fitness certificate; detained driver's licence expired

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY and TANJIL HASAN

Friday's road crash on the Dhaka-Mawa Expressway that claimed the lives of six people and injured four others was inevitable.

The bus of Bepari Paribahan had been in operation without fitness clearance for over a year. The 26-year-old driver involved in the collision had no valid driving licence.

He had recently notified the bus owner about problems with the brakes. But the owner did not pay heed and asked him to "drive slowly".

Things don't end here. The bus, which hit the street Friday after repairs, had no valid route permit or updated tax documents.

In order to have the bus operate under the company, the bus owner "paid off" the owner of Bepari Paribahan, Dablu Bepari, a close associate of Shahjan Khan, a top transport leader and former Awami League lawmaker, now in jail.

Six people from two families were killed when the bus rammed into three other vehicles stationary at the expressway toll plaza in South Keraniganj on Friday morning.

SEE PAGE 7 COL 1

Suspect held
over murder,
rape of UP
member

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

Police early yesterday arrested a man in connection with the rape and murder of 50-year-old union parishad member Basana Mallik in Narail Sadar upazila.

The suspect, Faruk Molla, 50, of Daulatpur in Narail Sadar upazila, was arrested in Harishpur village of Magura's Shalikha upazila, said police.

The main accused, Rajibul, is yet to be arrested.

Narail Sadar Police Station Officer-in-Charge (OC) Sajedul Islam confirmed the matter to The Daily Star.

"We are treating the allegations with utmost seriousness. A case has been filed, and we are working to arrest all individuals involved. We are committed to uncovering the truth as quickly as possible."

Basana Mallik was a member of wards 1, 2, and 3 of Maijpara Union Parishad and a resident of Poradanga village.

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