



DHAKA THROUGH THE LENS

Beauty in unexpected places

RBR

The first week of January passed quickly, as we sorted through pictures of Dhaka submitted for our My Dhaka Lens competition.

For those who are unaware, we have been running a photography contest during the last weeks of December. We wanted our contestants to focus on Dhaka's appeal — meaning what they think is the true essence of Dhaka; not categorising, just Dhaka as a theme projected by a singular photo, a photo documentary, drone shot, heritage, street photography, etc.

The response was overwhelming! So much so, that shortlisting the entries has become a challenge. We were



PHOTO: STAR

I will not get into the formalities of the contest; instead, I will just talk about how this sorting in progress gave me a new perspective on Dhaka.

Truly, it is a magical place, where even a dumpster invokes hope. The landscape is littered with garbage and trash in an unproportioned way, and amid this filth, sleeps two young souls not more than five or six years old. A big bag full of their treasure, plastic trash held tightly in their fist, the tired kids drop off to sleep, working relentlessly to earn a few takas for a rice meal.

I found pictures of adolescents like this pop up quite frequently, either

frolicking in the rain, posing a thumbs up for the camera, or working in garages or metal factories. Even though the deep underlying explanation of these street children working will be filled with human rights, activism, and other illegal actions, I just saw their resilience.

I am not feeding them, clothing them, or sheltering them, neither am I helping educate them; these angels are living life the hard way, fending for themselves in whatever manner they can.

If Dhaka is under the spell of Maleficent, the dark witch, then

they are Dhaka's spirits and fireflies, lighting the way in the dark. It is said that the Latin root of the word fairy is fay, which means fate. As irony would have it, the street children of Dhaka are our magical children of the lesser gods, with supernatural qualities to endure hardship and live through it.

Yes, I feel heartbroken seeing their state of living, and yes, I have done nothing to contribute to their wellbeing, but at the same time, I salute their fight for survival to keep Dhaka ticking.

Besides these disheartening shots, pointing towards thousands of shortcomings of the state, the pictures of old beggars and the toiling mass showed that when you actually want to portray Dhaka, it is never the posh, upscale Dhaka. It always means the people on the street, at ground zero, where the true colours of fast change and intense activities are revealed.

Green parks, flowers, festivals, events, street food, and shopping malls somehow entail the ritzy Dhaka; at least, this is the idea I got while sorting the entries of My Dhaka Lens. I am eager to see how the contest shapes up.

In the meantime, the street children of Dhaka, famously named by our artist Rafiqun Nabi, as Tokais, are Dhaka's superheroes, their smiling faces and happy selves gives me the courage to go through another day.



supposed to select 100 good entries, and trust me, just going through three days' worth of content, we selected 308 shots! It was that brilliant a contest.

Cancer patients

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fifth scheduled therapy, only to find the machines were non-operational.

"My family had to borrow money for my treatment. Yet, I missed my therapy today [yesterday]. I don't know how I'll manage the rest of my five therapy sessions."

Speaking to The Daily Star on the condition of anonymity, a doctor of the NICRH, said, "Patients of this hospital have been facing difficulties, either

due to faulty machines or delays in getting appointment, for the past five years. The hospital authorities have done nothing in this regard. We had even gone to the higher authorities for help, and they too have done nothing yet.

"We're tired of constantly turning patients away. It's extremely frustrating for a medical team to not be able to provide proper treatment to the patients."

বিশেষ বিজ্ঞপ্তি

যান্ত্রিক ত্রুটির কারণে, Linac-3 & Linac-4 মেশিনে রেডিওথেরাপী চিকিৎসা সেবা প্রদান করা সম্ভব হইতেছে না। মেশিন মেরামত হয়ে গেলে আমরা কার্ডে দেওয়া নাম্বারে ফোন করে জানিয়ে দেব, ইনশাআল্লাহ।

কর্তৃপক্ষ

Cold snap

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across 11 districts.

The temperature marked a sharp drop from 9.5 degrees Celsius recorded the previous day in Panchagarh, said Jitendranath Ray, assistant officer at the local weather observatory.

"The icy winds from the Himalayas, coupled with clear skies, have intensified the cold in the northern districts," he added. The weather is expected to remain similar over the next few days.

According to the meteorological department, temperatures between 8-10 degrees Celsius indicate a mild cold wave, 6-8 degrees Celsius

a moderate cold wave, and below 6 degrees Celsius a severe cold wave.

To address the situation, district administrations in some northern districts, including Panchagarh, have begun distributing warm clothing to affected individuals. Local authorities have also urged affluent residents to step up and assist the cold-stricken population alongside government efforts.

The lowest temperature was recorded at 14.5°C in Dhaka.

According to the Met office, light to moderate fog may occur at places over the country during midnight to morning in 24 hours, starting 9:00am yesterday.

Trump spared jail

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while he is serving a four-year term as president.

Trump fought tooth and nail to avoid the spectacle of being compelled to appear before a state-level judge so close to when he is due to be sworn into office. The US Supreme Court on Thursday rejected a last-minute bid by Trump to halt it.

year played out against the extraordinary backdrop of Trump's successful campaign to retake the White House. The sentencing marks the culmination of the first-ever criminal case brought against a US president, past or present.

Trump will be the first president to take office with a criminal conviction.

No local polls before general election

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another meeting participant said, requesting anonymity.

During Thursday's meeting, LDP Secretary General Redwan Ahmed criticised the government for what he said was an attempt to shift focus from the national election.

"There was no prior discussion about local government elections. Now, they are suddenly bringing up this issue again, causing confusion with their inconsistent statements," he said.

On Wednesday, Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus said that the interim government is simultaneously preparing for national and local body elections.

Asked about the next national election at a press briefing on Thursday, Adviser Mahfuj Alam said the matter depended on the political parties; how much reform they want. This will be discussed during consultation on the reports of the reform commissions.

He added a decision on local government polls would also be taken following consultation with the political parties.

The parties agreed that national elections should be conducted this year. They expressed concerns that unnecessary delays or distractions, such as local government polls, could derail the process.

Jatiya Ganotantrik Party

President Khandaker Lutfar Rahman, who attended the meeting, told this newspaper that they would conduct a campaign to gain public support for a national election.

Leaders in the meeting accused the government of failing to address critical issues like deteriorating law and order and the rising cost of essential commodities. They vowed to make these concerns a central focus of their campaigns.

Sources said they also criticised student leaders for undermining the role of political parties in the anti-fascist movement and questioned the funding source for student leaders' activities like private vehicles

used during public events.

Speaking to this correspondent, BNP Standing Committee member Iqbal Hasan Mahmud Tuku said the interim government was supposed to hold a national election, but it was making noise about local polls.

As far as he knows, Tuku said, local government elections have never been held under an interim government except during the Ayub Khan regime before independence.

Questioning the intention behind bringing up the local election issue at this time, Tuku accused the government of focusing on reforms instead of election, law and order, and rising prices of daily necessities, which he said is worsening public suffering.

Police launch hunt for ex-OC

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from leaving the country through airports and land ports, Abu Sayeed Mia, inspector (investigation) of Uttara East Police Station, told The Daily Star.

Over escaping the OC, Md Mohibullah, OC of Uttara East Police Station, was withdrawn yesterday, he added.

Earlier, ASI Sajjad Hossain of the police station was suspended. A case has been

filed against Shah Alam over his escape from police custody.

Police are searching for him. An investigation has also been initiated to find how he managed to escape, the officer added.

Shah Alam, who was sued over a murder that took place during the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, was held in Kushtia on Wednesday. He was brought to Uttara East Police Station and

supposed to be produced before a Dhaka court on Thursday. But before that, he escaped from the police station around noon.

Officials warned of strict disciplinary action if anybody is found negligent in performing their duties.

Meanwhile, students and locals of Uttara yesterday brought out a protest procession, demanding the arrest of OC Shah Alam.

Rawnaq Jahan, deputy

commissioner of Uttara Division, visited the spot and assured the protesters of arresting him.

She told them that a probe committee has been formed to take action against those involved in the incident, and a report will be submitted within three working days.

The protesters also issued an ultimatum that they would launch a tougher programme if the OC is not arrested within 24 hours.

MRT-1 unlikely to be ready before 2030

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and parts of Narayanganj under the metro network.

Of the 31.24km line, a 19.87km section from airport to Kamalapur will be underground. The part from Notun Bazar to Purbachal, an 11.36km stretch, will be elevated. There will be a total of 19 stations.

Once done, trains will be able to carry eight lakh passengers a day.

As the largest transport-sector initiative in Bangladesh's history, the project aims to significantly reduce Dhaka's notorious traffic congestion and pollution.

The MRT Line-1 is part of a broader plan, conceived by the previous government, to establish a 140-km metro rail network across Dhaka and adjacent areas by 2030.

RUNNING BEHIND SCHEDULE

After the MRT Line-1 project was approved in October 2019, it took three years to hire the first contractor mainly due to delays in drawing the

detailed designs during the coronavirus pandemic.

In October 2022, the authority signed a contract with a Japan-Bangladesh joint-venture firm to develop the land for a depot in Pitalganj of Ruppaganj, Narayanganj.

Sheikh Hasina, then prime minister, inaugurated the physical work in February 2023. Japan's Tokyu Construction Co Ltd and Bangladesh's Max Infrastructure Ltd started depot development work under package-1 the following month. The work saw 87 percent progress as of December last year.

But the DMTC could not hire any contractor for the main work which includes tunnel boring, construction of viaducts and stations, installation of tracks and power lines, and procurement of trains.

The authority so far called for tenders for nine of the packages. Pre-contract negotiations with the contractors are going

on for package-5, under which the underground line from Nadda Station to Natun Bazar Station, an interchange, and two stations will be built, shows the project document.

The eight other packages are now at different stages of the tendering process. Draft documents for two other packages now pending with Jica for approval.

Meanwhile, the metro authority has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Bangladesh Army in June 2023 to relocate utility lines. The Army has started relocating service lines near five stations.

Besides, the authority so far acquired 93 out of 115 acres of land, documents show.

The project implementation committee held its 8th meeting on December 23 last year with Rouf, managing director of DMTC, in the chair.

According to the meeting minutes, the project authority could

spend only Tk 523.97 crore (14.57 percent) of Tk 3,594.37 crore allocated under the Annual Development Programme (ADP).

The project saw only 6 percent overall progress and 5.55 percent financial progress.

At the meeting, Project Director Abul Kashem Bhuiyansaid it is mandatory to take concurrence from Jica for all phases of the bidding process and Jica gives approval considering priority of the packages, reads the meeting minutes.

Besides, Covid-19 hit the country just six months after the approval of the project which delayed the drawing of detailed design, land acquisition and other works, he said.

Apart from accelerating the tendering process, the meeting decided to hold an inter-ministerial meeting to expedite land acquisition process, reads the minutes.

NOT BEFORE 2030? Officials say meeting the December 2026 deadline is

Gaza death toll 40% higher than recorded

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The study's best death toll estimate was 64,260, which would mean the health ministry had under-reported the number of deaths to that point by 41 percent.

That toll represented 2.9 percent of Gaza's pre-war population, "or approximately one in 35 inhabitants," the study said.

The UK-led group of researchers estimated that 59 percent of the deaths were women, children and the elderly.

The toll was only for deaths from traumatic injuries, so did not include deaths from a lack of health care or food, or the thousands of missing believed to be buried under rubble, reports AFP.

On Thursday, Gaza's health ministry said that 46,006 people had died over the full 15 months of offensive.

Israel has repeatedly questioned the credibility of the Gaza health ministry's figures, but the United Nations have said they are reliable.

The researchers used a

statistical method called "capture-recapture" that has previously been used to estimate the death toll in conflicts around the world.

The analysis used data from three different lists, the first provided by the Gaza health ministry of the bodies identified in hospitals or morgues.

The second list was from an online survey launched by the health ministry in which Palestinians reported the deaths of relatives.

The third was sourced from obituaries posted on social media platforms such as X, Instagram, Facebook and Whatsapp, when the identity of the deceased could be verified.

"We only kept in the analysis those who were confirmed dead by their relatives or confirmed dead by the morgues and the hospital," lead study author Zeina Jamaluddine, an epidemiologist at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, told AFP.

The researchers scoured the lists, searching for duplicates.

Statues, gold ornaments stolen from Kali temple

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Brass idols of Kali and Shiva were stolen from the Shri Shri Bhabotarini Kali Temple in Tushbhandar of Kaliganj upazila, Lalmonirhat, early yesterday.

Gold and silver ornaments, along with brass furniture worth over Tk 4 lakh, were also taken after thieves broke the locks of two gates of the temple.

The theft took place between 2:00am and 4:00am, police said.

A case has been filed with Kaliganj Police Station regarding the incident, Kaliganj Police Station Officer-in-Charge (OC) Selim Malik confirmed.

Arun Chandra Das, general secretary of the temple committee, told The Daily Star that the 150-year-old temple has never been looted before.

"Criminals group stole the idols, ornaments, and furniture. Police and upazila administration officials visited the spot. We hope the authorities will quickly identify and arrest the thieves and recover the stolen items."

Ashish Chandra Chakrabarty, the temple priest, said he discovered the theft when he arrived at the temple for morning prayers on Friday morning. "The lock was broken, and the idols, ornaments, and furniture were missing," he said. The matter was immediately reported to the temple committee and police.

Lalmonirhat Superintendent of Police (SP) Torikul Islam, Kaliganj Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Sifat Anwar Tumpa, and the Kaliganj Police Station OC visited the temple later in the day.

SP Torikul Islam told The Daily Star that it appears to be a planned theft.

"The temple was secure, but the organised thieves managed to break two locks and steal the items. Police are actively working to identify and arrest those involved and recover the stolen idols, ornaments, and furniture."

Gold and silver ornaments, along with brass furniture were taken after thieves broke the locks of two gates of the temple.