

MY DHAKA

THE YEAR OF THE SNAKE

Dhaka’s inaugural Chinese New Year festivities

RBR

I had nothing significant planned for last Friday, and was absent-mindedly saying yes to all sorts of plans my friends were making; completely forgetting an important wedding reception I had to attend that very day.

I don't know how it slipped my mind, other than blaming the "brain-fog" syndrome Dhakaites are experiencing (but never addressing their addiction to watching non-sensical social media videos).

Coming back to the topic of Friday, I was all elated when a friend sent me a video message about the Chinese New Year celebration being held at Gulshan Lake Park. The first of its kind in Dhaka, I jumped at the offer and dressed like a Christmas tree, and went to the beautiful park to join in the festivities, and promised to sneak into the wedding reception later.

It was dusk, the sky was an orange marmalade shade, and the old, tall trees of the park were lit up with fairy lights. Red traditional Chinese lanterns swung in the cool evening breeze, and the conventional colourful paper hangings swayed, ushering in the year of the wood snake. All this added up to a magical ambience.

The event was joyful, with traditional dragon and lion dances gliding and cruising away in vibrant yellow colours. Huge traditional drums, gongs, and cymbals were present. The beating of the drums in a loud tempo signified warding off the 'bad luck monster' and ringing in the good luck.

The display of martial arts,



instrumental music, and traditional Chinese dances performed by teachers and students of the Confucius Institute of Shanto Mariam, North South University, and Dhaka University (CI at DU) was spectacular. For those not in the know, Confucius Classrooms are hubs that serve the local community and promote joint planning of cultural activities and sharing of ideas and resources.

An interesting DIY booth had hand-crafted white paper fans on a stick, and visitors could paint the face of the fan



with either calligraphy or scenery or write Spring Festival couplets.

The fair-like atmosphere was taken up a notch with New Year goods markets, delicious barbeque booths that had live grilling stations, where satay sticks of chicken liver, giblets, skin, offal of cattle, and sprigs of Chinese chives were lightly sprinkled with salt and some secret ingredient that had visitors standing in long queues.

"The Chinese New Year Festival is the most important traditional festival in China and has been included in the

Unesco Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity list.

The date of the Chinese New Year 2025 is January 29.

On the eve of the Chinese New Year festival, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China, the Chinese Embassy in Bangladesh, and all sectors of Chinese and Bangladeshi society have jointly planned to hold a series of "Happy Chinese New Year Festival" celebrations in Dhaka and Chattogram, including two temple fairs, a nine-day Chinese Film Week and live performances by the Zhejiang Wu Opera Troupe of China," says Vivian Huang, secretary general of Overseas Chinese Association in Bangladesh.

This celebration will allow people to experience the rich and colourful Chinese culture and strengthen China-Bangladesh bilateral relations.

According to old texts, the Chinese New Year marks the beginning and end of each Chinese zodiac year. The Chinese zodiac is a 12-year cycle of animal signs.

For 2025, the Chinese New Year begins on January 29, marking the start of the Year of the Snake, specifically the Wood Snake, and ending on February 16, 2026.

The snake, known for its wisdom and transformative energy, is coupled with the wood element, embodying growth, stability, and creativity.

My Chinese sign is a monkey. As astrologers say, monkeys have a history of bitter compatibility with snakes, I hope to be cordial to my "snake" friends, because I love reading astrology mumbo-jumbo and believing it too.

Fencing necessary to ensure a crime-free border with Bangladesh

Says India’s ministry of external affairs

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

India yesterday reiterated that fencing is one of the necessary measures to ensure a crime-free border with Bangladesh.

Randhir Jaiswal, the spokesperson for the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, also stated that India expects Bangladesh to honour the protocols and agreements established between the two countries in this regard.

His remarks were made at the weekly press briefing in New Delhi in response to a question about increasing tensions along the India-Bangladesh border over the issue of fencing. The question also highlighted a comment by Bangladesh's Home Adviser, Jahangir Alam Chowdhury, indicating that Dhaka wants to review past agreements on the issue.

Jaiswal emphasised that India's position on these issues was clarified when the Acting High Commissioner of Bangladesh to India Md Nural Islam was summoned by the MEA to South Block on January 13.

"It was conveyed that, regarding security measures at the border, including fencing, India adheres to all protocols and agreements between the two governments as well as between the Border Security Force and Border Guard Bangladesh," Jaiswal said.

He further added, "Barbed wire fencing, border lighting, installation of technical devices, and cattle fences are measures implemented to secure the border."

India expects Bangladesh to honour all previous agreements, Jaiswal said, expressing hope for a cooperative approach in combating cross-border crimes.

Responding to a question about the growing calls within Bangladesh for early elections and a recent comment by the US ambassador to India, Eric Garcetti, on the subject, the MEA spokesperson said that India's stance on relations with Bangladesh has been communicated on multiple occasions.

Students suffer as NCTB fails to deliver books

FROM PAGE 1

Requesting anonymity, a teacher from Dinajpur Zilla School said a large number of students, particularly from class 6, have yet to receive their textbooks. "We have been in constant contact with the relevant department, but there is no clear timeline for when the books will be available."

In the absence of official textbooks, many students are resorting to alternatives. Shahriar, a ninth-grade student at Dinajpur Zilla School, said he started studying last year's textbooks. Many have downloaded the books from the NCTB website.

In Mymensingh, less than half of the required books have reached the secondary-level students.

Harichand Biswas, headteacher of Rangpur Kalibati Secondary School in Khulna's Dumuria upazila, told The

Daily Star that they received Bangla first paper, English first paper and mathematics for classes 6, 7 and 8, but no textbooks for classes 9 and 10.

English version textbooks also remain undelivered in the division, where overall 70 percent textbooks have been delivered.

Some guardians downloaded and printed PDF copies of the books to cover learning losses, Harichand said.

At the primary level, the books for classes 4 and 5 have not yet reached the schools.

In Chattogram, 50.23 percent of the required primary textbooks have been delivered. Mahbubur Rahman, acting headteacher of a government primary school, said students were relying on old books.

The rate of delivery to the primary schools of Mymensingh is 44 percent,

Barishal 49 percent and Khulna 54 percent.

Kaberi Hossain, a teacher at Kabirpur Model Primary School in Jhenaidah's Shailkupa upazila, said, "It's difficult for us to give lessons for the lack of books."

Students are also anxious about the delay. "I have to take exams in a few months, but with no materials to study, it's overwhelming," said Hasan Ali, a class five student in Rangpur.

Speaking to this newspaper, a leader of the Printing Industries Association of Bangladesh, said, "We are under extreme pressure... The cost of paper has increased, and banks are not giving us enough support to meet the deadlines. It's becoming harder to maintain quality and complete orders on time with the limited resources available."

Contacted, NCTB member (textbook) Prof Riad Chaudhury said, "The situation has reached this point due to several challenges. However, we have been relentlessly working to deliver the textbooks to the students."

He said the NCTB was prioritising textbooks for class 10, as they have to take public exams. "We are hopeful that we can deliver all the primary and class 10 textbooks by this month," Prof Riad said.

"The entire printing process is under extensive monitoring so that we can ensure quality this year. We have already rejected over 3 lakh textbooks for substandard materials," he added.

Education Adviser Wahiduddin Mahmud recently said all the textbooks would be distributed within February. [Correspondents from respective districts contributed to this report]

AFP, Paris

Carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere in 2024 grew at the fastest annual rate on record, exceeding their own projections by some margin, according to the UK weather service.

The sharp rise in planet-warming

2024 saw fastest-ever annual rise in CO2 levels

Says UK weather service

CO2 was driven by fossil fuel burning, devastating wildfires and a weakening of Earth's natural carbon stores, the Met Office said yesterday.

Scientists said at such rates, the world cannot hope to hold global warming to the 1.5C limit that nations have agreed would avert the worst consequences of climate change.

Rice imports to hit seven-year high

FROM PAGE 1

The government has finalised plans to import 100,000 tonnes of rice from Myanmar on a government-to-government arrangement.

The first consignment of 27,000 tonnes has already reached the country, and another shipment will arrive later this month, Majumder said.

From Pakistan, 50,000 tonnes of rice will be imported through the G2G method.

A decision has also been made to import 1 lakh tonnes of rice from Vietnam via the G2G method, with necessary arrangements nearing completion.

The private sector businesspeople have shown interest in importing rice due to the zero tariff on rice imports for the private sector, Majumder said.

The move comes at a time when the the price of fine rice has risen by 4.05 percent in the past month, medium-grain rice by 3.31 percent and coarse rice by 6.67 percent.

And in the past year, the price of fine rice has increased by 12.41 percent, medium-grain rice by 15.74 percent and coarse rice by 9.80 percent.

Fine rice is selling for Tk 70 to Tk 84 per kg, coarse rice for Tk 54-58 per kg, and medium-grain rice for Tk 60-65 per kg, according to data from the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh.

Two consecutive floods in August and October last year damaged about three lakh hectares of cropland, according to a US Department of Agriculture report published in the third week of December.

Rice production may fall in the current marketing year of 2024-25, which began in May last year, due to

the reduction in the acreage of Aman season paddy, the report added.

Currently, there is a satisfactory stock of rice in the country and necessary measures have been taken to prevent any future shortages, Majumder said.

On January 12, the public stock of food grains stood at 12.25 lakh tonnes, including 8.2 lakh tonnes of rice, down 25 percent year-on-year.

The government's initiative to import rice, both at the government and private levels, is a positive step towards bringing down the rice prices and alleviating people's suffering, said Mohammad Jahangir Alam, a professor in the Department of Agribusiness and Marketing at Bangladesh Agricultural University.

However, he emphasized the need for a comprehensive analysis to determine whether the price hike is solely due to a supply shortage or if there are other factors.

"Because, the upward trend in rice prices appears to be beyond control."

Alam also highlighted the importance of considering transportation costs when importing rice.

"If rice is sourced from distant countries, transportation costs will rise, which could lead to higher prices for consumers. Therefore, priority should be given to importing from countries that minimise transportation expenses."

He cautioned that excessive imports beyond the country's demand could adversely affect local farmers, urging the government to carefully balance imports with domestic production.

"The impact on farmers should not be overlooked," he added.

16 sued over attack on indigenous

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Mezbah Uddin, officer in charge of the station, told The Daily Star.

The accused who were named are Arif Al Khabir, 38; Md Abbas, 24; Ziaul Haque, 28, a former DU law student; Mohiuddin Rahat, 23, a student of DU's criminology department; Yakub Majumdar, 20, a student of DU's physics department and also the joint convener of "Students for Sovereignty"; Shahidur Rahman, 25, a student of DU's communication disorders department; Shahadat Farazi Sakib, 35, recently expelled member of Jatiya

Nagorik Committee's Dhanmondi unit; Shawkat, 21; Rajan Hossain, 20; Wafi, 20; Monowar, 24; Nuhan, 20; Jihad, 22; Sajib, 25; Abdul Malek, 28; and Golam Ali Naim, 24.

Of them, Khabir and Abbas were arrested and sent to jail on Thursday. On that day, Jatiya Nagorik Committee expelled its member Sakib over allegations of his involvement in the attack.

In a notice, it stated that Sakib's recent actions violated its code of conduct and core principles of the organisation.

Proposals seek to bring youths into JS

FROM PAGE 1

However, several political parties, including the BNP, expressed concerns over the recommendation to lower the minimum age for MP candidates. They claimed it could "favour" a potential political party to be formed by the Students Against Discrimination, which spearheaded the July uprising, and its platform for citizens the Jatiya Nagorik Committee.

On the other hand, leaders of the Nagorik Committee welcomed the proposal, emphasising the need to acknowledge the youth's contributions, particularly during the mass uprising that created an opportunity to reshape political culture.

"The reform commissions made these proposals to ensure greater participation of the youth and other marginalised groups in politics. The youth played a vital role in freeing the country from an autocratic rule," said the head of the Electoral Reform Commission, Badiul Alam Majumdar.

Professor Ali Riaz, head of the Constitution Reform Commission, said the recommendations were made considering the demographics of the country, where a significant portion of the population is young. He said the youth of Bangladesh have immense contributions and the recent student-led mass uprising was a prime example.

"Youths shape the future of the country, so we must expand opportunities for their participation in politics. Their involvement will bring new ideas and perspectives," he added.

The interim government formed 15 reform commissions to strengthen weakened democratic institutions, establish a state system rooted in public ownership, accountability and welfare, and lead the country toward genuine democracy.

Four commissions—on constitution, electoral system, police and anti-corruption—submitted their reports to Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus on Wednesday.

The constitution commission also

proposed a bicameral legislature—"National Assembly" as lower house with 400 members and "Senate" as upper house with 105 seats.

Of the senators, 100 will be elected through a proportional representation of the national election for the assembly. The remaining five will be nominated by the president from among people without any political affiliations.

The constitution commission suggested a lowering age floor for the lower house but did not mention anything about the upper house. The electoral commission, however, recommended a minimum age of 35 to be eligible for the upper house. It further stipulated that all senators have a bachelor's degree.

The electoral commission proposes to prohibit associate organisations of the main parties that only act as their extensions. In other words, none of the parties would be allowed to have separate student wings or youth fronts under any guise.

Another criteria to be eligible for an MP nomination is a minimum three years' membership in the party.

Currently, The Representation of the People Order clearly states that political parties are now allowed to have affiliated student, teacher and labour organisations. But most of the political parties bypass the provisions as they termed their student and labour bodies as "friendly" organisations.

BNP Standing Committee Member Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain said the party would make detailed comments after reviewing the proposals.

"But what I can say right now is that people are criticising the move to lower the age for lawmakers and reserving 10 percent nominations for youths," he said.

He said that the current minimum age is widely accepted. "So many are suspicious why this move is being taken now."

"The interim government is party neutral and if this government goes ahead with such proposals, it will seem to be supporting a specific group, and people will not accept it," he said.

He pointed out that there is contradiction between the proposals of the constitution commission and the electoral commission.

Typically, 21-year olds are still university students, but then the electoral reform commission prohibits parties to have student wings, he said.

Communist Party of Bangladesh General Secretary Rubin Hossain Prince said that the party will come out with its official reaction soon, after reviewing the recommendations. But lowering the age to 21 is "unnecessary".

"They can urge political parties to have 10 percent candidates from youth groups. Many political parties always try to have new and young faces but you cannot make it mandatory. And also, who will define youth?"

He said that such a sudden proposal to reduce the age for candidacy without properly evaluating the society or reality has given rise to "many questions among the countrymen".

"Many believe that this move was to serve the purposes of vested quarters, who are making questionable comments regarding the Liberation War and its spirit after the mass uprising," Prince said.

Saiful Huq, general secretary of the Biplobi Workers Party, expressed concerns about the proposal to lower the minimum age for becoming an MP, describing it as "suicidal".

He said many believe this provision is intended to benefit students involved with the Students Against Discrimination and the Jatiya Nagorik Committee.

His party believes 21-year-olds may lack the knowledge and experience necessary for such responsibilities, as many would still be completing their education at that age.

Samanta Sharmeen, spokesperson for the Jatiya Nagorik Committee, said youths have struggled for long, and made sacrifices and played pivotal roles in all kinds of turmoil and crisis.

"But their contribution was never acknowledged sufficiently. Different political parties turned youths into political cadres and instituted politics