

## ACC seeks info on 13 Purbachal plots from Rajuk

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission has sent a letter to the Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha seeking information on plots allocated to 13 individuals, including former lawmaker Sheikh Helal Uddin, and former Jubo League chairman Fazle Shams Parash, both cousins of ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina.

The list also includes: former civil aviation and tourism minister Rashed Khan Menon; former lawmakers Sadek Khan (Dhaka-13), Abdur Rouf (Kushtia-4), MM Shahin (Moulvibazar-2), Aslam Hossain Soudagar (Kurigram-1), and actress Suborna Mustafa (reserved parliamentary seat for women); Supreme Court judges Naima Haider and Jafar Ahmed; former SC judge MA Shahidul Haque; and journalists Zillur Rahman (Channel i) and Shakil Ahmed (7i Television).

The letter, signed by ACC Deputy Director Md Salahuddin was sent to Rajuk on January 19. According to Rajuk sources, the letter has already been received, but senior Rajuk officials have declined to comment on the matter.

According to ACC sources, an ongoing investigation is examining allegations against Hasina of abusing power and engaging in irregularities and corruption,

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Golden marigolds adorn the fields of Char Khagria village, where commercial flower cultivation flourishes along the Shankha river in southern Chattogram. Covering an area of 100 hectares, the vibrant landscape bursts with marigolds, roses, gladiolus, and chrysanthemums, offering new employment opportunities. This photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

## WOMEN'S FOOTBALL MATCHES

# Rights orgs, BFF condemn attacks

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rights organisations strongly condemned the recent disruptions and violence targeting women's football matches in Joypurhat and Dinajpur.

Quoting news reports, they mentioned that in Joypurhat, a girls' football match at Tilakpur High School field was disrupted when vandals damaged the venue.

Similarly, in Dinajpur's Hakimpur upazila, a women's football match ended in clashes that injured at least 20 people.

Both incidents were reportedly fueled by groups opposing women's participation in sports, undermining their right to recreation and empowerment.

"We believe sports is a powerful tool for the empowerment of women and girls, fostering confidence, leadership, and social inclusion," said MJF Executive Director Shaheen Anam.

She described the disruptions as unacceptable in a country committed to gender equality and women's empowerment as constitutional and policy imperatives. Bangladesh Mahila Parishad echoed similar concerns, emphasising the alarming nature of such misogynistic and fundamentalist attacks at a time when Bangladeshi women are excelling in sports both nationally and internationally.

"It is particularly concerning that, despite bringing glory to the country by winning international titles, women's sports face such regressive attacks in a sovereign and independent nation," the organisation said in a press release signed by President Fauzia Moslem and General Secretary Maleka Banu.

Both organisations urged local administrations and law enforcement agencies to ensure the safety of women in sports and take strict action against those responsible for inciting violence.

BLAST in another statement mentioned that this type of anarchy surrounding women's football matches is truly deplorable and entirely contradictory to Articles 19 (equality of opportunity), 27 (equality before the law), and 28 (prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, etc.) of the Constitution.

"Additionally, it is a punishable offence under the country's existing criminal laws and goes completely

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## FIRE SERVICE AND CIVIL DEFENCE

# Proposal for 73 units stuck in red tape

SHARIFUL ISLAM

To address growing risks from urbanisation and industrial expansion, the Department of Fire Service and Civil Defense submitted a project proposal to the home ministry in 2023 to establish 73 specialised firefighting and rescue units.

However, the department officials said there has been no progress on the Tk 4,137 crore "Fire and Rescue Special Operation Wing (FARSOW)" project over the past year due to a bureaucratic tangle.

The proposed units aim to handle emergencies such as chemical hazards, road and rail accidents, and disasters requiring heavy equipment and K-9 (dog) search teams.

If implemented, the project would set up units in 13 key locations – Dhaka, Narayanganj, Munshiganj, Gazipur, Mymensingh, Chattogram, Cumilla, Rajshahi, Khulna, Barishal, Sylhet, and Rangpur.

These locations were chosen for their strategic importance in disaster management, including potential earthquakes and risks posed by critical installations like the Rooppur power plant, officials said.

The specialised units would include – 10 K-9 Search Units for rapid victim detection; 13 Hazardous Material (HazMat) Teams for chemical emergencies; 10 Heavy Equipment Units with advanced tools like turntable ladders, HazMat tenders, breathing

apparatus tenders, and chemical tenders; 10 Road and Rail Rescue Teams with vehicles operable on both roads and railway tracks; five Communication Units to ensure uninterrupted connectivity during crises; and five Special Multi-Action Response Teams (SMART) for VVIP security, according to documents.

Despite its importance, the project has been excluded from the Annual Development Plan for two consecutive fiscal years, an official involved with the project said.

"We submitted the DPP along with a feasibility study on October 31, 2023, as per the government's decision," the official said. "Since then, there has been no movement on the project," he added.

Officials also claimed whenever they tried to move forward with the project, it got stuck in paperwork and multiple layers of approval.

The project also proposes recruiting 2,972 additional personnel and acquiring essential equipment to strengthen the FSCD. Scheduled for completion by June 2027, it will be implemented on FSCD-owned land, according to official documents

Currently, fire service operates with 14,570 personnel and 537 fire stations nationwide. However, staff are frequently reassigned for major events and VVIP duties, weakening station capacities.

A separate proposal to acquire 34 new types of essential equipment, submitted last year, also remains pending.

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## Biman's

# advance seat booking now zero

Says its MD

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ticket blocking and advance seat booking without passenger names or passports in Biman Bangladesh Airlines is now nearly zero, said Biman MD and CEO Shafiqur Rahman yesterday.

He said this while talking to the executive committee of the Aviation and Tourism Journalist's Forum of Bangladesh (ATJFB) at Biman headquarters in the capital's Kurmitola.

Regarding concerns over ticket blocking and artificial seat crisis on flights to Saudi Arabia and the Middle East, he said, "Currently, there is no advance seat booking without passenger details or ticket blocking at Biman. I personally monitor the situation. Those previously found guilty were reassigned to other departments, away from ticketing."

Regarding baggage management issues at the Dhaka airport, he said, "If we receive complaints, we take immediate action. We hope that once the airport's third terminal becomes operational, baggage handling will improve significantly."



Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus at a meeting with Open Society Foundations Chairman Alex Soros at the state guest house Jamuna yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

## ‘Help us bring back stolen money’

# Yunus tells Open Society Foundations chief Alex Soros

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The Open Society Foundations Chairman, Alex Soros, has said they will explore ways to support the interim government's reform initiatives.

He said the student-led mass uprising has given "great opportunities" to set a new course for the country. He made the remarks when the foundation headed by Alex Soros and president Binaifer Nowrojee called on Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus yesterday.

The foundation is active around the world, using grant giving, research, advocacy, impact investment, and strategic litigation, said a press release. The foundation leadership discussed Bangladesh's efforts to rebuild the economy, trace siphoned-off assets, combat misinformation, and carry out vital economic reforms, according to a press release of the chief adviser's press wing.

They also discussed issues ranging from economic reforms, media, recovery of stolen assets, the new cybersecurity laws and how to improve them and the Rohingya crisis.

The chief adviser asked the foundation to help the country in "asset tracing" to bring back some 234 billion dollars siphoned off during Sheikh Hasina's 16-year-long rule.

## New accreditation policy for journos in a week

# Says CA's deputy press secy

BSS, Dhaka

A new policy on accreditation cards for journalists will be published within a week, said Chief Adviser's Deputy Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad Majumder yesterday.

Speaking at a media briefing at the Foreign Service Academy in the capital, Azad said a committee has been formed to formulate the policy.

The committee will recommend necessary measures to ensure free journalism.

Once the recommendations are made, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, along with journalist representatives, will finalise the policy.

Azad said several provisions in the 2022 accreditation policy are considered objectionable. The committee will recommend removing those, including the requirement to promote government development projects, which contradicts the principles of independent journalism.

He also criticised a provision requiring journalists to notify government agencies before traveling abroad. "There will be a recommendation to cancel it," he said.

In addition, the existing practice of issuing accreditation cards based on circulars will be discontinued. Under the new policy, a maximum of 15 journalists or 30 percent of a news outlet's staff will be eligible for accreditation.

Regarding freelance journalists, Azad said only those with at least 20 years of experience in journalism or individuals working for press freedom will qualify for freelancer cards.

Previously, the principal information officer had the authority to issue accreditation cards.

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## BDR MUTINY

# ‘Execute sentences of those convicted’ Demand family members of slain army officers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Family members of army officers slain in the 2009 Pilkhana massacre have demanded the immediate execution of sentences for those convicted in the mutiny.

There is no scope to claim that the convicted soldiers of the then Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), now Border Guard Bangladesh, are innocent, they said at a press briefing at the RAWA Club in the capital yesterday.

They also said the demand for their release is completely illogical.

Saqui Rahman, son of slain Col Quadrat Elahi Rahman Shafique, said some BDR members had recently secured bail through legal processes.

"We have noticed that the Anti-discrimination Student Movement and some BDR members are demanding the release of all convicted personnel, including those sentenced to death or life imprisonment. We firmly state that these individuals were involved in the killings and torture of army officers and their families," he said.

He said an independent commission could help identify the masterminds behind the massacre. "We want a fair trial," he added.

Fabliha Bushra, daughter of slain Lt Col Lutfar Rahman Khan, shared her family's experience of being held captive for 36 hours during the mutiny.

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## COURT CORNER

## SC clears way for hiring 3,173 under technical edu board

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court yesterday cleared the way for 3,173 candidates to join as junior instructors (tech) or physical education instructors (10th grade) in various polytechnic institutes and technical schools and colleges.

The apex court stayed for four weeks a High Court order that on January 27 halted recruitment of the 3,173 candidates under the Technical Education Board.

The SC also asked the government to submit reports on police verifications about the candidates in three weeks.

A four-member bench of the Appellate Division headed by Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed passed the order

## AHSANULLAH MASTER SC sets Feb 26 to hear appeals against HC verdict

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court yesterday fixed February 26 to hear the appeals challenging the High Court verdict in the then Awami League lawmaker Ahsanullah Master murder case.

A bench of the Appellate Division headed by Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed set the date following a prayer moved by defence lawyer Md Ruhul Quddus Kazal.

Assailants killed freedom fighter Ahsanullah Master and student Omar Faruq Ratan and wounded 17 others as they fired at a rally of Swechhasebak League, a pro-AL body, at Noagaon near Ahsanullah's house in Tongi on May 7, 2004.

The next day, Ahsanullah's brother Motiur Rahman filed the case against 19 people, including Nurul Islam Sarkar, a Jubo Dal leader.

On April 16, 2005, a Dhaka court sentenced 22 people to death and gave life terms to six others over the murder.

## ILLEGAL BRICK KILNS HC summons 8, including DCs and UNOs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday summoned eight high officials – three divisional commissioners, three deputy commissioners and two upazila nirbahi officers – for allegedly their failure to comply with its directives for shutting down illegal brick kilns.

The divisional commissioners of Dhaka, Chattogram and Khulna; the deputy commissioners of Nilphamari, Lalmonirhat and Kurigram districts; and the upazila nirbahi officers of Dhaka's Savar and Dhamrai upazilas were asked to appear in person and place their explanations before the HC on that day.

On November 13, 2022 and November 28 last year, the HC issued directives to close illegal brick kilns across the country.

## 25pc adults suffer from hypertension Says govt data

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

One in four adults in Bangladesh has hypertension, but only 14 percent manage to keep their blood pressure under control, according to the Bangladesh Hypertension Control Initiative under the government's Non-Communicable Disease Control Program.

This information was shared at an event titled "Inauguration Program of Expansion of Bangladesh Hypertension Control Initiative" at the CIRDP auditorium in the capital yesterday.

The event was organised by the NCDC, National Heart Foundation, and Resolve to Save Lives, an organisation focused on heart disease prevention. The event emphasised strengthening hypertension detection, treatment, and follow-up at primary healthcare centres in the country.

NCDC launched the Bangladesh Hypertension Control Initiative in 2018 to enhance hypertension care at upazila health complexes and community clinics. The programme was piloted in four upazilas of Sylhet – Beanibazar, Bishwanath, Golapganj, and Fenchuganj. Following the pilot, it expanded to 54 facilities in 2021 and 182 facilities in 2022.

Speaking as chief guest, Health Adviser Nurjahan Begum questioned whether the country was providing healthcare or just medical care. "If we are providing healthcare, we must emphasise preventive measures," she said.