

## VANDALISM AT VENUE Girls' football match to be rescheduled soon

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinaipur

The Joypurhat district administration has announced to reschedule a women's football match, which was previously cancelled after being disrupted following vandalism of the tin fence surrounding the playing field.

The decision was conveyed on Friday after a meeting between an investigation committee, the organisers, and local religious leaders, said Anisur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Akkelpur Police Station.

Members of the investigation committee, accompanied by an army team, visited the playing field and spoke with local residents. Law and order in the area remained stable, he added.

Akkelpur upazila nirbahi officer Manzurul Alam, a member of the probe body, said that the incident resulted from a "misunderstanding", as acknowledged by local religious leaders.

He assured that there were no longer any obstacles to women's football being played on the field, adding that arrangements for the match would be made soon.

Some individuals involved in the vandalism were also present and attributed the incident to "miscommunication".

Mostakim Hossain, a teacher of the local Bacha SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



A group of women drying paddy on a field in Bathin village of Thakurgaon's Sadar upazila yesterday. The northern region saw bumper yields of Aman paddy, leaving local mills busy preparing the crop for consumption.

PHOTO: MD QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT

## Arakan Army releases cargo vessel after 16 days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

A cargo vessel carrying 1,600 sacks of dried fish reached Teknaf Land Port yesterday after it was released by Arakan Army.

The Myanmar-based rebel group had seized the vessel 16 days back on its way to Teknaf from Yangon.

The vessel arrived at the Teknaf Land Port jetty at 12:45pm yesterday, said port officials.

Syed Mohammad Anwar Hossain, manager of United SEE PAGE 4 COL 5



## ARIAL BEEL High pumpkin yield, low profit for farmers

TANJIL HASAN, Munshiganj

Despite a bumper harvest of pumpkins in the Arial Beel area of Munshiganj, farmers are struggling financially due to a steep decline in market prices.

By the end of January, the water in Arial Beel had dried up, allowing farmers to harvest the pumpkins they had cultivated along the banks of the waterbodies in the area.

Farmers typically grow two varieties of pumpkins: a larger, colourful local variety and a pest-resistant hybrid variety, which has gained popularity in recent years. While this year's harvest was abundant, market prices have fallen

sharply, leaving farmers struggling to cover their production costs.

"Last year, I sold pumpkins for Tk 30-32 per kilogramme, but this



year I'm getting only Tk 8-10 per kg. The situation is the same for all the 3-4 thousand farmers here. How can we survive like this?" said Abul Kashem, a farmer from Gadighat in

Shyamsiddhi union.

The cost of production has also increased significantly. Fertiliser prices have risen by Tk 500-700 per bag compared to last year, and labour costs are adding to the financial strain, said farmers.

Nurul Haque, another local farmer, said, "It costs about Tk 15,000 to grow pumpkins, with additional costs for transporting the produce to the city. With the current market prices, we are barely covering our costs, let alone making any profit."

Contacted, Bipul Kumar Mohanta, deputy director of the DAE in Munshiganj, said farmers are currently selling pumpkins SEE PAGE 4 COL 5



## 1,800 people get free health check-ups

### Faraaz Hossain Foundation holds medical camp

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

A daylong free health check-up camp for underprivileged people was organised in Narail Sadar upazila on Friday.

Faraaz Hossain Foundation in collaboration with Sharif Atiar Rahman Smriti Parishad organised the camp at RBFM Bhabanipur Secondary School ground.

Since morning till evening, there were long queues of people at the camp where a team of 21 SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

## DHAKA-RANGPUR HIGHWAY 25 hurt as six vehicles crash amid dense fog

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinaipur

At least 25 people were injured in a road accident involving six vehicles on Dhaka-Rangpur highway amid dense fog yesterday morning.

The vehicles, including two passenger buses, a truck, a pick up, and a covered van, collided at Garer Matha Mor (intersection) in Mithapukur area around 7:30am.

According to highway police and local sources, the vehicles, travelling from Dhaka, lost control due to poor visibility and crashed into each other at the intersection.

On information, officials from Barodorga Highway Police Outpost reached the spot, rescued the injured, and arranged for their treatment. They also initiated the process of clearing the damaged vehicles from the highway. Those with serious injuries were rushed to nearby hospitals. SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

## Transition to stability biggest achievement

FROM PAGE 1

been navigating a kind of revolutionary phase. It was an unprecedented situation for Bangladesh. Naturally, there was tension and uncertainty. However, over the past six months, the situation has further stabilised. Despite slow progress, things are improving. People might have expected quicker actions, but various limitations prevented us. The government is doing its best.

**TDS: What were the main challenges during this time?**

**Nahid:** The biggest challenges were maintaining law and order and controlling prices of essentials. Ensuring national unity while meeting people's expectations has always been a challenge. As you can see, the government's structure is small, but it's work scope is quite extensive. We've to move forwards by maintaining a balance among political parties while keeping national unity intact. Meanwhile, the reform commissions are submitting their reports. The trial proceedings for the crimes against humanity committed during the July uprising have already begun and the accused are being arrested. So, I believe we're making progress. If the political parties show more goodwill, we can advance at a faster pace.

**TDS: What were the things you wanted to achieve during this period but couldn't?**

**Nahid:** There are some regrets. If we could take some stricter measures from the very beginning, changes could have come sooner.

Over these six months, we haven't been able to improve the administrative and law and order situations to the desired level. However, there've been some improvement. I believe our biggest achievement has been the transition from uncertainty to stability.

In the early days, there were speculations about whether the government would remain in power, or there would be a counter-revolution. There were conspiracies within the country, along with geopolitical pressures. There was an international

campaign against us. Tensions were created regarding the minority community in the country. However, those tensions have now been mostly resolved. I believe this is significant progress.

**TDS: As for the law and order situation, incidents like muggings are occurring daily, even in broad daylight, which is concerning.**

**Nahid:** Yes, that's true - some challenges still exist. Incidents of mugging and criminal activities are occurring in some areas. We're trying to restore the police's morale to its previous state. The police are currently undergoing a transformation. New training is being provided, but due to extensive changes, it's taking time to stabilise. For example, many members of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police have been transferred outside Dhaka, and new officers have been brought to the capital. Thus, it's taking some time for them to adjust to their new environments. There was criticism when the police were initially inactive (following the fall of the AL government). Then when they took strict measures, there was again criticism. This hinders the police from becoming stable. However, they will gradually resume full-scale operational activities.

**TDS: Why was the police uniform changed? Do you think it'll lead to any qualitative improvement in the force?**

**Nahid:** We don't think that changing the uniform will solve everything. However, there are symbolic and psychological aspects to it. A few days ago, I visited the graves of some martyrs. Relatives of one of the martyrs were infuriated upon seeing the policemen who were accompanying me, even though they have nothing to do with the deaths. The reactions might have been different if the officers were in plainclothes, as the primary identity of a force is represented through its uniform. This aspect is being taken into consideration. On one hand, we expect police to protect human rights, while on the other, they're tasked with controlling riots. The government is

working on providing advance training to police for qualitative improvement of the force.

**TDS: Various shrines have been attacked, while a girls' football match was disrupted. What're the reasons?**

**Nahid:** These incidents may have occurred due to the law-and-order situation. These are embarrassing for the government. It is taking these incidents seriously and trying to take appropriate action, while also considering compensation to the affected shrines.

**TDS: The students and youth are saying that the election should be held after reforms. On the other hand, the chief adviser has announced an election timeline. Is there a conflicting position between these two issues?**

**Nahid:** From the beginning, we've maintained there is no conflict between the election and reforms. In fact, while elections are crucial for democracy, reforms are equally necessary to ensure fair polls.

Over the past 15 years, elections haven't been conducted properly. The people have lost much of their faith in the electoral institutions. During the (July-August) movement, we said we wanted to create a new arrangement to prevent the return of fascism.

We want to ensure that no future government can use the electoral system for party or personal gains. This is a long term process, but we want start with creating the foundation. We want to take political (parties') commitment so that whoever comes to power will continue the reforms.

**TDS: Do you think the reforms can be completed within the timeframe set by the chief adviser?**

**Nahid:** If you notice, the first six reform commissions we formed are related to state structure and electoral reforms. Some of the commissions have already submitted their reports. We hope to discuss these issues with political parties this month. The parties were eager to know a specific timeframe. From that perspective, we believe the

timeframe given by the chief adviser is consistent with the reform initiatives.

**TDS: BNP previously suggested that the election could be held on August 5, terming it a historic date. What is your response to this?**

**Nahid:** August 5 will also be a historic date in 2026. If this date is chosen as a milestone for the democratic journey, I don't see an issue.

**TDS: There are discussions regarding a political party by the students and the youth, and the resignation of two advisers including yourself. Will you really be resigning?**

**Nahid:** As advisers, we're still focused on the government's work. Those who're involved in forming a new political party are discussing the formation. No decision has yet been made regarding our resignations.

**TDS: Since you were a key figure in the July uprising, many expect you to join a party. What's your personal view on this?**

**Nahid:** I haven't decided yet. I still need to think about where I can perform best or where my presence is most needed. I'll decide after further evaluating whether I should still be in government or work on the ground.

**TDS: BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul has raised questions about the government's neutrality. Do you think this is related to the formation of the students' party?**

**Nahid:** The students didn't form a party immediately after the uprising in order to gain the trust of the political parties. If they had, many other would have shown interest in being involved and they still might. So, you can understand the perspective of the youth.

The government prioritising the advice of political parties in making key decisions. When the issue of removing the president arose, we did the same.

Therefore, BNP's allegations of bias aren't justified. I don't know if they're considering any alternative plan or other options by removing Dr Yunus. If they are, it won't be beneficial for any of us. **TDS: Is there any crack**

developing in national unity?

**Nahid:** The uprising involved participation of various parties and opinions. There were differences, but during the movement, we took a united stance. So, differences will exist, but this does not mean it's a weakness.

We don't expect everyone to have the same stance over every issue. However, the main thing is how we can remain united on national challenges. I believe that national unity is still intact. If it weren't and political parties didn't cooperate, it would've been more difficult to run the government.

I hope this cooperation will continue in the future. Through our collective efforts, if we can maintain a consistent path towards reforms and embark on a proper democratic journey, it'll be an achievement for all, especially those in the upcoming government. Their task will be simplified.

**TDS: How much reform can realistically be accomplished? There isn't much time.**

**Nahid:** That's precisely why we weren't eager to announce an election timeline in haste. If even the minimal expectations of the people, which arose through the mass uprising and consequent bloodshed, are not met, they will lose faith in us and take to the streets in anger. Sheikh Hasina's government was elected democratically in 2008, but it committed misdeeds. This suggests that an elected government doesn't necessarily guarantee the country's safety. We're aware of the recommendations made by "Teen Joter Ruprekha (roughly translated to 'tri-aliance outline') in 1990, but those plans weren't implemented. This time, we aim to create a roadmap for the public through reforms in the state structure, which can continue no matter who comes to power next.

**TDS: Several journalists have been arrested and are in jail. Many were charged with murder, and some were laid off. Can these not be seen as a threat to freedom of press?**

**Nahid:** No one has been arrested for criticising the interim government. Many

of those who were closely involved with the previous regime and failed to uphold journalistic ethics, who were complicit with fascism, are accused of being involved in (the July) killings.

However, I believe the role of journalists and the media over the past 15 years should be discussed further. It isn't possible to judge everyone within the legal framework. There should be some measures for those who have committed moral or social crimes as collaborators of fascists. If the government takes such measures, it may be questioned. I think the initiative should come from within the media itself.

**TDS: While there may be allegations of financial wrongdoings against some journalists, but many are charged with murder. Isn't this putting pressure on other journalists?**

**Nahid:** We've kept the scope for reconsideration if any case wasn't filed properly. We've communicated with the law ministry regarding those who have applied for a review (of the cases filed against them). Some have allegations of corruption against them, which are being investigated by the Anti-Corruption Commission and other relevant government agencies. The government isn't pressuring the media, but there is social pressure. There were protests in front of some media houses. Internationally, this is being portrayed as if there's no media freedom in Bangladesh, which I think is incorrect.

In the past, there's been a history of media houses being shut down with the change in government. But nothing of this sort happened after our government was formed, though there's resentment among the people over the role of some media outlets.

I won't take names, but certain media outlets directly supported the then government during the July uprising. Was that acceptable? Yet, they've given no statement as to why they did so and in what context. Neither did they say they wouldn't repeat such things. That's why people may have expressed their resentments in their own ways.

If the journalists, who

haven't worked ethically or couldn't over the past 15 years, realise and admit their mistakes, and commit to not doing so in the future, this pressure perhaps will also lessen.

**TDS: The recently approved draft of the Cyber Protection Ordinance 2024 contains several repressive provisions, as highlighted by civil society groups such as Transparency International Bangladesh. What are your thoughts?**

**Nahid:** The law is being revised to ensure journalists and all sectors of society have freedom of speech and expression. I admit our government rushed the drafting process. The intention was to pass it quickly so that the victims of false cases filed under the Cyber Security Act could get some relief. Now, we've decided to cancel cases related to speech and writing offenses.

**TDS: Will the government take into account the concerns raised by stakeholders?**

**Nahid:** Absolutely. Further discussions will take place. We aim to create the best possible law with input from all stakeholders. I believe we can do that if stakeholder meetings are held properly.

**TDS: In your opinion, what will be the future of Awami League politics? Will it be able to participate in the next polls? Will it be banned?**

**Nahid:** It can't be definitively said at this moment. Whether Awami League should be banned or allowed to contest polls is something that requires national consensus. It'll also depend on the decisions from the courts and the Election Commission. However, as those who led the uprising, we believe Awami League has no moral or legal ground to continue politics.

**TDS: But you have mentioned reconciliation...**

**Nahid:** Yes, but not under Awami League's banner. Those from the Sheikh family or individuals identified as corrupt or involved in mass killings have no right to continue politics.

**TDS: What about Awami League members who were not involved in corruption or violence?**

**Nahid:** There is no room for

politics under the name or ideology of Awami League. Their ideology is fascist, which led to 15 years of oppression and mass killings. Those who realise their mistakes must abandon that ideology. Their political and civil rights remain intact - they can join other parties or form a new one.

**TDS: If someone from the Awami League, who wants a clean image, wants to join the Anti-discrimination Students' Movement - would you accept them?**

**Nahid:** I am not currently involved with the platform, so I don't want to comment.

**TDS: You don't want Awami League to continue politics, but there's no provision for prosecuting a party in the amended ICT Act...**

**Nahid:** At that time, the decision was made based on consultations with national and international stakeholders. Legal experts and learned advisers of the advisory council gave their input.

Our main focus is to ensure that the judicial process is not questioned. However, there're other ways to ban a party outside courts as well.

**TDS: Is such an initiative being taken?**

**Nahid:** For now, we're focusing on the judicial process. Once progress is made in that regard, decisions on related matters will become easier.

**TDS: Critics say if the prosecution of a party was included in the law, Jamaat-e-Islami would have to be prosecuted for its 1971 crimes as well...**

**Nahid:** That's not the case at all. After discussing with experts, all necessary actions to maintain international standards have been taken.

**TDS: Could you share something about the progress of the judicial process in ICT?**

**Nahid:** We hope that the judicial proceedings of the important cases will begin before August.

**TDS: Will the election be held after that?**

**Nahid:** It'll depend on the judicial timeline. However, we want the people to witness that justice, and then a fair election.

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