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SHILPAKALA ACADEMY Cultural affairs ministry refutes Jamil's claims

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The cultural affairs ministry yesterday refuted many of the allegations brought forth by Syed Jamil Ahmed while he stepped down from the post of director general of the Shilpakala Academy.

"The ministry deems it necessary to refute and clarify the untruthful, fictional and personally motivated slander made by the eminent cultural personality," said a press release.

The claim that the cultural ministry pressured Shilpakala authorities to release funds without a formal letter for a 15 minute video on International Mother Language Day is untrue, it said.

The ministry had sent two letters to the Shilpakala authorities: first on February 2 and again on February 10. And yet Ahmed refused to provide the money to the video's director and 'misbehaved' with him, the press release added.

Ahmed insisted that the ministry allocates the respective budget to Shilpakala first although the second paragraph of the letter mentioned that the RELATED STORY ON PAGE 6 SEE PAGE II COL 1



An elephant grazing freely in the eco-friendly KEPZ in Chattogram's Anowara, where human-elephant conflict issues have lessened recently. Without further conservation efforts, Bangladesh may no longer be one of the 13 Asian countries with wild elephants within the next decade, experts warn.

PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

Our gentle giants in peril

PINAKI ROY WITH SIFAYET ULLAH, Ctg; AMINUL ISLAM, Mymensingh

Over the past decade, nearly half of the country's wild elephant population has been wiped out.

These gentle giants, which once roamed freely across Bangladesh's lush forests, have been falling victim to human-elephant conflict, driven by relentless deforestation and habitat loss.

WORLD WILDLIFE DAY

In the last 10 years, at least 124 wild elephants were killed across Cox's Bazar, Chattogram, the Chittagong Hill Tracts, and Mymensingh regions. Many fell prey to retaliatory killings, electrocution, poaching, and train accidents.

Conversely, 83 people have also been killed in elephant encounters during this period. Yet, the government's response has been limited, with few visible actions to prevent further losses.

According to a 2016 survey by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), there were only 457 elephants in the country, including 268 wild elephants, 93 migratory elephants, and 96 in captivity. The study found that from 2003 to 2015 (13 years),

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TCB outlets in all dists from Wednesday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Commerce Adviser Sk Bashir Uddin directed DCs to monitor and prevent hoarding of goods by traders in an attempt to create an artificial shortage of commodities.

The state-owned Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) will begin selling essential commodities to low-income people in all 64 districts starting Wednesday, Commerce Adviser Sk Bashir Uddin said.

He announced this in a virtual meeting with deputy commissioners (DCs) yesterday.

Currently, the TCB is selling essentials in six districts, according to the commerce ministry.

In the meeting, the adviser said the government is aiming to expand the TCB services to one crore people at the grassroots level. He instructed the DCs to ensure the preparation of an accurate list of beneficiaries.

Currently, 57 lakh smart card holders purchase essential items through TCB's truck sales programme.

The adviser further directed the DCs to

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A mixed bag in NCP convening committee

ASHIK ABDULLAH APU

The recently formed National Citizen Party (NCP) has announced a 217-member convening committee, incorporating individuals from diverse backgrounds.

The committee disclosed early yesterday includes 24 women, two representatives from the Dalit and Harijan communities, an injured protester from the July uprising, and the mother of a martyred protester.

The committee includes 24 women, two representatives from the Dalit and Harijan communities, an injured protester from the July uprising, and the mother of a martyred protester.

The "partial" committee will serve for one year, according to a press release signed by NCP Member Secretary Akhter Hossen.

However, LGBTQ activist Muntasir Rahman, included in the initial 151-member committee, was removed from the expanded 217-member body following objections from key NCP leaders Hasnat Abdullah and Sarjis Alam.

The committee features 24 women in various roles, including Senior Joint Convener Samanta Shermeen and senior joint member secretaries Dr Tasnim Zara and Nahida Sarwer Niva.

Representing marginalised communities, Kailash Chandra Rabi Das and Vimpalli David Raju from the Dalit and Harijan communities were made joint chief coordinators.

Other significant appointees include Abu Sayeed Leon, former Jatiya Chhatra Samaj leader from Dhaka

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SAGAR-RUNI MURDER PBI quizzes five, including Justice Manik

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) has interrogated five people, including a retired judge of the Supreme Court who is now in jail, in the case filed over the murders of journalist couple Sagar Sarwar and Meherun Runi.

The five people are sacked army official Ziaul Ahsan, former Additional Deputy Inspector General of Police Mashhur Rahman, former justice AHM Shamsuddin Chowdhury Manik, former Navy officer Mohammad Sohail, and Humayun Kabir, an accused of the double murder case.

Meanwhile, Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate MA Azharul Islam yesterday allowed the PBI, which took charge of the investigation in November last year, to interrogate the accused Palash Rudra Paul, who was a security guard at the house where the couple was murdered.

In another development, the investigators have spoken to more than 50 people regarding the case where there was no need to get permission from the

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ROOPPUR POWER PLANT Incomplete power line delays test run

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, Pabna

The test run of the Rooppur nuclear power plant may start by the end of 2025 after a year's delay as the gridline on the Padma river is taking longer than anticipated to materialise.

Initially, the Awami League-led government had planned to conduct the test run of the 1,200 MW unit-1 by December last year.

Earlier in January, Finance and Science and Technology Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed told The Daily Star that ROSATOM had conveyed to the government that they were trying to conduct the test run by April.

When Alexey Likhachev, the director general of ROSATOM last week paid a visit to Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, he could not say anything specific about the test run.

"The dry run of the project is going on while the test run will commence soon," Likhachev said. While 85 percent of the construction work for unit-1 has already been completed, the subsidiary projects, which included developing a high-frequency telecommunications system and setting up gridlines over the Padma and the Jamuna rivers, are taking longer than expected, Ahmed said.

While completion of the gridline over the Jamuna river will take time, the government was trying to complete the gridline over the

Padma river soon. The test run will commence once the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which is the global watchdog for any atomic energy-related power plant, visits the project site and certifies it, Ahmed added.

The gridline on the Padma river will take some time, said Md Delwar Hossain, the chief engineer of the Rooppur power plant project.

As of January, the physical progress of the gridline on Padma river is 85 percent, according to Hossain.



However, apart from those under construction, there are two completed gridlines that could be used for the test run.

One is from Rooppur to Baghabari and the other is from Rooppur to Bogura.

However, Russia emphasised using the Padma river gridline for the test run, Hossain added.

The project for the gridlines on the Padma and Jamuna rivers was approved in 2018 by the Executive

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Tk 2.42 crore seized from former DGFI chief's home

ACC raided the cantonment house on February 28

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission has recently raided the cantonment residence of Lieutenant General Saiful Alam, former director general of the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence.

The raid, during which the commission seized Tk 2.425 crore in cash, took place on February 28 as part of an ongoing probe into alleged corruption and irregularities, the ACC said.

Earlier on January 6, the International Crimes Tribunal issued an arrest warrant against Saiful on allegations of involvement in enforced disappearances.

During the raid, Saiful was not found at home, according to ACC sources.

ACC Director General (Prevention) Md Akhtar Hossain confirmed the development to the media yesterday when the recovered money was deposited in court. The joint forces were involved in

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Election rigging never ends well

Says CEC Nasir Uddin

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin has urged political parties to refrain from attempting election engineering and ballot stuffing to win polls.

"Winning elections through engineering or vote rigging does not end well for the party in the long run. This is not only true for Bangladesh, but this is what we learn from world history."

He made the remarks while speaking at a discussion meeting marking National Voters' Day at the Election Commission headquarters in the capital's Agargaon yesterday.

For a long time, the country's citizens have been denied the right to vote freely, the CEC said, adding that the time has now come to restore that right.

"I want to say that the National Consensus Commission can take written promises from political parties that they will follow the electoral code of conduct and take internal action if any party candidate causes trouble during polls."

The CEC believes such written statements will exert pressure on political parties to adhere to the electoral code of conduct, making the EC's job easier.

"People are dreaming of a new Bangladesh. If this dream is not realised, the sacrifices of the injured and martyred of the July uprising will have been in vain. Voting is no



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Mystery spinner Varun Chakravarthy stamped his authority yesterday, claiming his maiden five-wicket haul in ODIs to help India clinch a 44-run victory against New Zealand in the Champions Trophy in Dubai. Defending a 250-run target, India bundled out the Black Caps for 205 runs in 45.3 overs to seal the top spot in Group A. New Zealand made it through to the semifinals as group runners-up.

PHOTO: AFP

Chawkbazar comes alive with iftar delicacies

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PRAYER TIMING MARCH 3

	Fajr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN	5:03	12:45	4:30	6:03	7:30
JAMAAT	5:13	1:15	4:45	6:18	8:00

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

SEHRI, IFTAR TIMING

	RAMADAN	APRIL	SEHRI	IFTAR
2	3			6:03
3	4	5:02		6:03
4	5	5:01		6:04