



Country belongs to people of all religions, ethnicities

Says army chief

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The army is committed to maintaining peace and harmony in Chattogram Hill Tracts and the rest of the country, Chief of Army Staff General Waker-Uz-Zaman said yesterday.

Bangladesh belongs to people of all religions and ethnicities, he said.

"We want a peaceful and orderly country. We do not want conflict or hatred here. Whatever it takes to uphold peace in the Chattogram Hill Tracts, we are ready to do

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Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus laid the foundation stone of the Sampriti Bhavan at International Buddhist Monastery in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: CA PRESS WING

BRICK KILNS

Toxic smoke damages crops in Chattogram

SIFAYET ULLAH, Ctg

Hundreds of farmers in Chattogram's Fatikhhari and Hathazari upazilas are facing losses due to toxic smoke from nearby brick kilns, which has been damaging their crops.

This has left many local farmers concerned about their livelihoods. Md Harun, 55, a farmer from Paindong union in Fatikhhari upazila, said, "Crops grown near brick kilns do not grow as expected, and are often covered in dust from the smoke emitted by the chimneys. As a result, these crops must be washed before being sold."

Harun, who cultivated tomatoes, brinjals, cucumbers, and sweet pumpkins on 80 decimals of land, said his crops were severely affected by dust from nearby kilns, preventing him from even recovering his production costs.

During a recent visit to several areas in the upazila, this correspondent observed that croplands near brick kilns were covered in dust particles from toxic fumes released by the chimneys.

Abdus Salam, 48, a farmer from Fakira Chan area in Fatikhhari upazila, was seen cleaning tomatoes in his field near the MA brick kiln.

"Since the brick kiln started operating, my crop yields have dropped by more than half. If this continues, we may have no choice but to abandon farming and find



alternative livelihoods," he said.

Didarul Alam, a farmer from Mirzapur union in Hathazari upazila, who grows mangoes and betel nuts, said, "The trees have been severely affected. Most of the kiln owners are financially and politically influential, so we are afraid to speak out against them, fearing possible retaliation."

According to data from the Department of Environment (DoE), over 90 brick kilns are operating across the two upazilas.

Under the Brick Production and Kiln Installation (Regulation) Act, establishing brick kilns on or

within a one-kilometre radius of agricultural land is prohibited.

However, many kilns in these areas have been set up in direct violation of the law, often with the knowledge of the local administration.

Most of the brick kilns use firewood as fuel, which not only breaches existing regulations but also contributes significantly to harmful emissions, exacerbating the damage to nearby croplands.

A brick kiln owner in Hathazari upazila, who wished to remain anonymous, said, "Smoke

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'We seek balance in ties with China, India'

Khalilur Rahman tells seminar

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

National Security Adviser Dr Khalilur Rahman yesterday said Bangladesh does not consider its relationships with China and India as a zero-sum game but aims to maintain meaningful and balanced ties with both.

Speaking at a seminar titled "Reassessing Sino-Bangla Relations: Chief Adviser's Landmark Visit," organised by the South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance (SIPG) at North South University (NSU), he said Bangladesh's foreign policy is now entirely its own, no longer reliant on any external power, according to an NSU press statement.

He described Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus's recent visit to China as a historic milestone.

Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Yao Wen said the visit was both symbolic and substantive. He reaffirmed China's commitment to deepening ties beyond politics, including cooperation in education, healthcare and people-to-people contact.

Dr Liu Zongyi, senior

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JULY UPRISING

60 more injured to go abroad for treatment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government will send an additional 60 individuals injured during the July-August mass uprising abroad for advanced medical treatment, Health Adviser Nurjahan Begum said yesterday.

Speaking at a press conference at the Foreign Service Academy in the capital, she also revealed plans to establish a 1,000-bed hospital in Rangpur to improve healthcare access in the region.

"So far, we have sent 40 people abroad for advanced treatment based on recommendations from a board of specialist doctors," she said. "They receive free services at all hospitals across the country by showing their health cards. The government has spared no expense in covering treatment costs."

Of the Tk 25.37 crore allocated from the Chief Adviser's Relief Fund for overseas treatment, Tk 19.5 crore has already been spent, she added.

The new batch of patients includes eight to be sent to Bangkok and Singapore, 21 to Turkey, and 31 to Pakistan.

Nurjahan said there is an urgent need for a national air ambulance service, adding that four critically injured individuals had to be flown abroad in rented Thai air ambulances.

From August 9 to April 13, a total of 40 patients have been treated overseas—26 in Bangkok, 13 in Singapore, and one in Russia.

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Journalist Shehabuddin Ahmed Nafa passes away

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Shehabuddin Ahmed Nafa, former chief reporter of The Daily Star, passed away at a hospital in Dhaka yesterday. He was 76.

He left behind his only son to mourn his death.

He will be buried at Azimpur Graveyard after a namaz-e-janaza at a mosque on Elephant Road after the Asr prayers today.

Nafa served at various English newspapers in Bangladesh, including The Independent, New Age, and the now-defunct Bangladesh Times.

He started his journalism career as the editor of a weekly magazine published from Chowmuhani in Noakhali.

He was also press minister in the UK.

Nafa also played a role as a managing committee leader of Jatiya Press Club.

Jatiya Press Club President Hasan Hafiz and General Secretary Ayub Bhuiyan expressed deep shock at his demise and extended their sympathy to the bereaved family.

CAMERA AT MADRASA DORM MJF concerned over safety of female students

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) yesterday expressed outrage and deep concern over the violation of privacy and safety of female students at a madrasa in Jashore.

Sixteen CCTV cameras — some equipped with night vision — were reportedly installed inside the girls' dormitories at Fatimatuzohra Qawmi Female Madrasa in Navaron, Sharsha upazila, Jashore.

The discovery came to light after a parent filed a complaint and alerted the authorities.

MJF described the incident as a flagrant act of surveillance, constituting a serious breach of trust, dignity, and human rights — particularly of minors — within an educational institution where families rightfully expect safety and security for their children.

"This is not merely a violation of privacy — it is a criminal breach of their sanctity and safety in a place of learning," said Shaheen Anam, executive director of MJF.

"That such equipment was installed in dormitories where girls reside and sleep is utterly shocking. We demand an immediate, impartial, and transparent investigation, along with the swift arrest and prosecution of all those responsible," she added.

MJF also voiced concern that the incident may not

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Ex-JCD leader Jakir walks free after acquittal in 32 cases

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) leader Jakir Khan, who had been accused in 33 criminal cases including murder, walked out of jail yesterday morning.

He was released after being acquitted in 32 of the cases, having already served time for the remaining one.

Mohammad Forkan Wahid, superintendent of Narayanganj District Jail, said Jakir was released around 10:15am after all necessary legal procedures were completed.

Supporters gathered outside the district jail early in the morning with floral garlands and a motorcade to welcome Jakir.

Following his release, he led a procession through the city, causing a two-hour traffic jam on the Dhaka-Narayanganj link

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A woman browses pottery items at a stall on the first day of a two-day fair organised by the Gulshan Society at Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed Park in Gulshan-2 yesterday, marking the start of Bangla New Year celebrations. The event, titled "Oligoli Halkhata," aims to bring together residents through cultural festivities to celebrate Pehela Baishakh.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON