



Dhaka in bloom as BOUGAINVILLEA TAKES OVER

JAWWAD SAMI NEOGI

Dhaka often feels like a city suffocating in its own chaos. I see it every day – the heavy dust, the sky dulled by smoke, the endless traffic, the honking that never stops. It all makes the city seem tired, almost desaturated. Sometimes, I wonder how we manage to live in this endless traffic and concrete surrounding us. I often find myself exhausted by it, filled with a desire for something that heals our souls.

But then comes Baishakh, bringing bougainvillea with it. As summer covers Dhaka in heat and dust, vibrant bougainvillea begins to bloom – I suddenly notice splashes of colour breaking through the grey. Bougainvillea, or as we call it by its beautiful Bengali name, Baganbilash, begins to take over.

It's a surprising contrast. This city of endless grey suddenly coming to life with bursts of pink, magenta, purple, red or orange bracts. The bougainvillea doesn't ask for permission, it just spills over balconies,



PHOTOS: JAWWAD SAMI NEOGI

climbs up rusty gates and wraps itself around old brick walls. It doesn't demand any attention, it simply blooms, wild and free. Once known as Kagaj Ful or Kagaji Ful (Paper Flower) in our mother tongue, is now known by the name gifted by Rabindranath Tagore. He first saw it in the garden

of an Englishman and found its name "Bougainvillea" too formal, so he renamed it 'Baganbilash.' The flower that transforms a regular building or a paint faded wall into something truly bilashi (luxurious) – no wonder it deserves to be named so beautifully!

As I walk under the bougainvillea's shade, they make me pause and appreciate the beauty around. Surrounded by the chaos, I see rickshaw

pullers resting under the bougainvillea tree, tired after working all day in the hot sun. For a moment, Dhaka feels lighter, brighter and vibrant. I breathe relaxed, overwhelmed by the simple yet stubborn beauty of a plant that refuses to fade.

Does it understand the sorrow of the city? I think not. It just quietly soothes the sorrows around.

I love the fact that bougainvillea grows wherever it chooses, refusing to be within limits. There is something deeply meaningful about that – a reminder that beauty finds a way, even in the most unexpected places. And in a city like Dhaka, that reminder means everything to me.

I often wonder if those who planted them ever imagined the impact. Did they picture someone like me stopping for a moment, from my busy life just to admire a flower? Did they know that in a city often struggling to breathe, something as simple as bougainvillea could bring unexpected joy? Perhaps they did. Or perhaps the bougainvillea simply bloomed on its own, unaware of the blessings it brought.

Bougainvillea doesn't erase the pollution, the traffic jams or the daily frustrations we hold, but it offers a beautiful distraction. And for that, I am grateful. It reminds me that, despite everything, Dhaka is still alive.

Swechchhasebak Dal leader killed in Kishoreganj clash

A CORRESPONDENT, Kishoreganj

A man was killed and at least 20 were injured in a clash during an arbitration aimed at resolving a dispute over establishing supremacy in Bhairab upazila of Kishoreganj yesterday.

The deceased, Mizanur Rahman, 40, was the member secretary of Srinagar Union Swechchhasebak Dal.

The incident took place around 11:00am.

According to locals, a previous clash involving over 50 people took place between two groups in the neighbouring Moutupi village on Tuesday afternoon. Following the incident, Badsha Mia, the leader of a group from Bhabanipur village had an argument with Mizanur's group on Wednesday night.

An arbitration meeting was held in the morning to settle the dispute. During the meeting, supporters of Badsha Mia allegedly attacked Mizanur, a businessman by profession. The altercation quickly escalated into a violent clash, with both sides using locally-made weapons.

Mizanur was declared dead at the upazila health complex. At least 20 people from both sides were injured in the clash.

4 killed in truck-pickup collision

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

At least four people were killed in a head-on collision between a truck and a pickup van in the Bakhranagar area of Habiganj on the Dhaka-Sylhet highway early yesterday.

Madhabpur Police Station Officer-in-Charge Abdullah Al Mamun said their identities were yet to be confirmed.

He said five others sustained critical injuries and were taken to Habiganj District Sadar Hospital for treatment.

Quoting injured passengers, the OC said the Dhaka-bound truck collided head-on with a Sylhet-bound pickup carrying 17 passengers along with household furniture.

Police seized both the vehicles. He said they are working to identify the deceased.

BNP eyes joint movement with allies, Jamaat

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During that meeting, BNP leaders demanded a clear election roadmap. However, the chief adviser reiterated that polls would be held between December and June next year, a response that did not sit well with the party.

"We are not satisfied at all," said Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir after the meeting.

As per the committee's decision, BNP will begin today's meetings at the party's Gulshan office with the leaders of the 12-party alliance at 3:00pm, followed by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in the evening. BNP Standing Committee Member Nazrul Islam Khan will lead the discussions.

A senior BNP leader said the party will announce peaceful programmes – rallies and public gatherings across the country – to press its demands following the talks.

Sources said the move is part of the BNP's broader strategy to maintain psychological and political pressure on the government.

Restoring voting rights and establishing an elected government will be the core issues, they added.

During Thursday's Standing Committee meeting, chaired by the party's acting chairman Tarique Rahman, Fakhrul briefed members on key points from talks with the chief adviser and the National Consensus Commission.

At the meeting, leaders agreed that maintaining continuous pressure on the government is the only way to ensure polls in December. Coordination with previous allies, including Jamaat, will resume. Although the format for talks with Jamaat is yet to be finalised, one leader said it might follow earlier formats.

Sources added that the BNP will monitor the government's actions over the coming months. If there is no progress, stronger programmes may follow.

The BNP argues that December is the only practical time to hold the election, considering the country's weather and logistical realities. The party believes the necessary reforms can be completed in time for a December vote, and any delay beyond that would be deliberate.

A senior BNP leader said the absence of a clear election roadmap suggests internal disagreements within the interim government, with some factions possibly aiming to delay the polls.

"If we don't keep up the pressure, the election might be pushed back to late 2025," he said.

The BNP has also welcomed Jamaat's call for elections before Ramadan. Sources said that while the BNP prefers polls in December, some leaders are open to a slight delay, as long as the election is not pushed to June.

While mass mobilisations will remain limited for now, the BNP aims to show both domestic and international audiences that democratic parties in Bangladesh are united in their demand for timely elections, sources said.

22 out of 35 parties want caretaker govt

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leaders, said the caretaker system would become redundant once "the state is freed from the interference of the executive branch". "However, the next two elections may be held under a caretaker government."

Bangladesh Jashod proposed a two-year tenure for the caretaker government.

Gono Odhikar Parishad (ex-Ducusu VP Nur faction) suggested capping the government's tenure at four months, saying it should be formed on the basis of consensus among the political parties in parliament. Bangladesh Jatiya Party (BJP) also came up with a similar proposal saying the president should form a caretaker government in consultation with major political parties.

Based on the experience of 12 previous national polls, Bashod proposed a "supervisory" entity or caretaker government that will hold a free, fair, acceptable and participatory election in three months.

Favouring the restoration of the caretaker system, Ganosamhati Andolon suggested forming an interim government comprising members of the upper house. JSD also floated a similar proposal, saying the caretaker government should be formed with independent or non-partisan members of the upper house.

RastroSangskarAndolon proposed that a caretaker government take charge within a week of declaring the election date and dissolution of parliament. However, the ruling party leader, the opposition leader and the chief justice should meet and select the chief adviser before the polls date is announced. If the three fail to reach a consensus, the last retired chief justice may be made the head of the caretaker government.

COMMISSION'S PROPOSALS

The Constitution Reform Commission has proposed an interim government system to oversee elections and outlined a method for appointing the chief adviser. It recommended a National Constitutional Council that includes the president, the prime minister, the leader of the opposition, speakers of both houses, the chief justice, one opposition deputy speaker from the lower house, deputy speaker of the upper house, and another member, elected by members of both houses, who don't belong to either the ruling party or the main opposition.

This council will remain in office even after the dissolution of parliament. In the absence of the legislature, the council will consist of the president, the chief adviser, the chief justice, and two members of the advisory council nominated by the chief adviser.

The reform commission has outlined provisions for appointing a chief adviser with seven options by order of priority.

The first option, requiring seven of the council's nine votes, is to

appoint any individual who is not on the council. If that is not possible, the council may resort to the second option, requiring six votes, to appoint a former chief justice or a former judge of the Appellate Division. If that fails, the council may, upon unanimous agreement, appoint the president as the chief adviser. Failing that, it may appoint the last retired chief justice as the head of the caretaker government.

However, if the last retired top judge declines to assume the role, the commission will have to approach the one who retired immediately before and work backwards. If all former chief justices are unavailable or if all of them refuse, the commission will consider the last retired appellate judge. Failing that, it will work backwards till it finds one willing to shoulder the responsibility.

PROPOSALS REGARDING PRESIDENT

Both factions of Gono Odhikar Parishad, Bhashani Anusari Parishad, and Jatiya Party (Kazi Zafar) proposed that the same person should not hold the posts of the head of the state, the head of government, and the chief of the party at the same time.

BNP and Gono Odhikar Parishad (Nur) proposed introducing the post of a vice president. JSD suggested that the vice president preside over the upper house.

Gono Odhikar Parishad (Nur) and JSD said a neutral and non-partisan person should hold the position of the president. Gono Odhikar Parishad (Nur) also suggested that members of both the houses and provincial assemblies vote to elect the president.

Jatiya Nagorik Committee and Islami Andolan Bangladesh suggested that the president be able to send proposals to parliament for discussions. Both parties proposed two-term limits for president with a stipulation that the person holding the post of president will be ineligible to become PM.

The Nagorik Committee proposed that the president should be the commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

Jamaat-e-Islami suggested that the lower house recommend the name of the president based on a majority vote, and the upper house approve it with a three-fourths majority. The president should have the power to dissolve parliament under certain circumstances without requiring the PM's advice.

Gono Odhikar Parishad (Faruk Hasan faction), Bhashani Anusari Parishad, and Jatiya Party (Kazi Zafar) advocated for increasing the president's powers.

Gono Odhikar Parishad (Faruk) also suggested that the presidential election be held two and a half years after the parliamentary election.

Rastro Sangskar Andolon proposed that the president should be elected by MPs, with the opposition nominating the candidate.

The prime minister should keep

the president informed about matters related to national and foreign policies and, if requested by the president, refer any matter to the cabinet for consideration, the party proposed.

Gono Odhikar Parishad (Nur faction), Insaniyat Biplab Bangladesh, Jatiya Nagorik Committee, and Islami Andolan Bangladesh proposed countrywide polls for electing the president.

Nagorik Committee and Islami Andolan suggested that the PM may continue to advise the president on appointments to constitutional posts but that need not be binding.

PM'S TENURE

BNP proposed limiting the prime minister's tenure to two consecutive terms.

CPB, Gono Odhikar Parishad (Nur) and Pragatishil Green Party also proposed limiting the PM's tenure to two terms.

Bashod, Ganosamhati Andolon, JSD, Jatiyatabadi Samamona Jote, Bangladesh Labour Party, both factions of Gono Odhikar Parishad, Jatiya Party (Kazi Zafar), Bangladesher Samajtantrik Party, and Pragatishil Green Party proposed two-term limits for the president, the PM and also the MPs.

BNP proposed introducing the post of deputy prime minister.

Ganosamhati Andolon, Jatiya Nagorik Committee, Islami Andolan Bangladesh, Bangladesh Labour Party and Jatiya Party (Kazi Zafar) are of the view that the same person should be allowed to hold only one of the three positions – the prime minister, the leader of the house and the chief of a political party – at any point of time.

Nagorik Committee and Islami Andolan Bangladesh proposed that a prime minister be disqualified from holding any position of the state and be restricted from joining corporations or businesses.

Nagorik Committee suggested that the central bank become the custodian of the prime minister's properties and assets.

Nagorik Oikya proposed that the PM be barred from holding any party position and cabinet members will be ineligible to become president or general secretary of any party.

COMMISSION'S PROPOSALS ON PM, PRESIDENT

The commission proposed limiting the tenures of the president and the prime minister (as well as that of parliament) to four years, instead of five, and two terms, consecutively or not.

The president will be elected by a majority vote of the electoral college, comprising all members of both houses, 64 district coordination councils and city corporation coordination councils.

An individual will be eligible to hold only one of the three positions of prime minister, the leader of the house and the chief of parliamentary party at the same time.

Price spiral hits fixed-income families hard

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Non-bottled soybean oil sells for Tk 162-170 per litre, up from Tk 158-168; palm oil for Tk 145-156 per litre, up from Tk 144-150; non-packaged flour for Tk 40-45 per kg, up from Tk 38-45; and brown eggs for Tk 40-45 for four pieces, up from Tk 38.

Onions have seen the sharpest rise with the Bangladeshi variant being priced at Tk 65 per kg, an increase of Tk 30-35.

Local garlic is priced at Tk 200-220 per kg, up from Tk 190-220; ginger at Tk 250-300, up from Tk 240-280; small cardamoms (elaichi) at Tk 4,600-5,100, up from Tk 4,500-5,100.

According to TCB data, retail prices have increased by 1.90 percent for coarse rice, 2.41 percent for non-packaged flour, 1.84 percent for non-bottled soybean oil, 2.38 percent for non-bottled palm oil, 1.64 percent for super palm oil, 38.16 percent for local onions, 2 percent for broiler chicken, and 2.41 percent for eggs.

Of the 14 vegetables tracked by the Department of Agricultural Marketing, seven have become pricier over the last month.

Tomatoes are now Tk 25-40 per kg, up from Tk 15-20; eggplants Tk 60-70 per kg, up from Tk 50-60; and gourds Tk 55-60 apiece, up from Tk 35-40.

Aurangazeb Lablu, who runs a wholesale store at Karwan Bazar, says, "The supply of winter vegetables has ended. Since it is early in the season for the ones grown in summer, the prices are high."

The price of bottled soybean oil has increased by Tk 14 per litre and palm oil by Tk 12 after the government removed VAT exemptions.

Commenting on the matter last week, Commerce Adviser Sheikh Bashir Uddin said the government's

priority was on revenue collection.

Amanat Ullah, a wholesale egg trader in Teigaon, says the demand has risen after offices and educational institutions reopened after Eid.

WHAT EXPERTS SAY

Zahid Hussain, former lead economist at the World Bank's Dhaka office, says the government is focused on raising revenue and cutting subsidies to meet the conditions set by the IMF.

"In order to be eligible for the next IMF tranches, the government must boost revenue," he opines.

Prof Jahangir Alam of the Department of Agribusiness and Marketing at Bangladesh Agricultural University says Ramadan coincided with the abundance of winter vegetables, helping keep the prices down.

"It is no longer winter, and summer produce is costlier. Besides, during Ramadan, policy steps helped stabilise the market. Such measures are now missing," he says.

He added that extortion by political parties was also a reason for higher prices.

SM Nazer Hossain, vice-president of the Consumers Association of Bangladesh, suspects that the government prioritises business interests over public welfare.

"A day after raising soybean oil prices, it waived 5 percent advance income tax on its import," he says.

The government claims it wants revenue, but it offers tax-break to businesses. "This indicates that protecting business interests has taken precedence over public welfare."

He urged the government to revise the taxes on essentials.

Besides, the government should take action against cartels that manipulate the market, he adds.

Yunus flies to Qatar

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Prof Yunus will present a keynote in the second edition of the summit that will bring together over 1,000 participants from more than 100 countries, including ministers, business leaders, academics, and youth leaders.

The summit will focus on "Building Our Legacy: Sustainability, Innovation, and Traditional Knowledge," on April 22-23 at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel, Bin Jelmood Museum and Barahat Msheireb.

It will bring together global policymakers, thought leaders, academics, and businesses to tackle environmental challenges while showcasing Qatar's commitment to sustainability in hot and arid environments, integrating cultural heritage and ecosystems into modern solutions.

The summit will also feature Earthna Village, along with multiple sessions and interactive workshops.

A key highlight of the summit will

be the announcement of the inaugural Earthna Prize winners.

With more than 75 speakers and 20 sessions, the summit will tackle key areas such as sustainable urbanism, traditional knowledge, biodiversity, and education.

Bangladesh will focus on key issues such as environment, sustainable development, energy cooperation, investment, manpower export, and immigration during the visit.

Qatar is an important destination for Bangladeshi workers and a source for energy for Bangladesh.

"Cooperation in these sectors could be the highlights of the chief adviser's meeting with the Qatar emir," a foreign ministry official said.

Besides, Prof Yunus will also highlight his theory of net zero carbon emission, renewable energy and sustainable development, he added.

Conflicts in the Middle East, Rohingya crisis and other global issues may also come up during the discussion, the official said.