

KAZI NAZRUL ISLAM'S 49TH DEATH ANNIVERSARY

Like an undying phoenix, THE SPIRIT OF NAZRUL LIVES ON



DESIGN: DOWEL BISWAS



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DOWEL BISWAS

Is it a coincidence or inevitability that Kazi Nazrul Islam's verses echo whenever Bengal rises in defiance? Each uprising, each cry for freedom, seems to find its mirror in the words of this fiery young man who, at just 22 and fresh from the mud of the First World War, sat with a wooden pencil in a modest Kolkata room and gave birth to *Bidrohi* (*The Rebel*). That night in December 1921, while his comrade Muzaffar Ahmed slept, Nazrul scribbled furiously. By the morning, the air was charged with something new. "Bolo Bir, Chiro Unnoto Momo Sheer..." ("I am the Rebel Eternal, / I raise my head beyond this world, / High, ever erect and alone!") he declared. It was not merely the birth of a poem but of a cultural rupture. Critics would later see in *Bidrohi* a break from the 'Rabindric' serenity that had long defined Bengal's literary

landscape—a new current of words forged in fire, laced with the clang of rebellion. In each of our fate-defining uprisings, resistance, and even a brutal war, revolutionaries kept their spirit high and unbroken against death. Nazrul's verses struck at the very marrow of oppression. "Bolo Bir, Chiro Unnoto Momo Sheer" ("Proclaim, Hero, my head is ever held high"), Ami Aponare Chara Kori Na Kahare Kurnish ("I bow to none but myself"), and "Ami Mani Na Kono Ain, Ami Oniyom Usshringkhol" ("I obey no law, I am unruly, disorderly")—these were more than poetic flourishes; they were manifestos, thunderbolts hurled at both colonial authority and social convention. But the rebel's pen did not stop at empire. Nazrul turned his fire against the internal chains that shackled society—caste hierarchies, economic disparity, and the poison of communal

division. "I do not bend to anyone," he roared, as if to remind Bengal that true freedom meant dismantling every hierarchy, not just the colonial one. In this way, his rebellion was at once national and universal. His *Bhangar Gaan* (*Song of Destruction*), first sung in 1921 after his return from Cumilla, still reverberates like a clarion call: "Ore o torun Ishan, Baja tor proloy-bishan! Lathi mar, bhang re tala, Joto shob bondi shalay—Agun jwala, agun jwala, phel upadi!" ("O young wind, rise and blow your doomsday horn! Break the locks, smash the chains, set the prison houses aflame!") The British Raj understood the danger of such words. *Bhangar Gaan* was banned by 1924, and soon after, his incendiary *Prolay Shikha* met the same fate. His newspaper, *Dhumketu*, landed him in prison, where he endured starvation and cruelty at the hands of jailers. Yet even in chains, he mocked authority. At Hooghly Jail, under the notorious superintendent Arston, Nazrul sang parody songs to keep the prisoners' spirits alive: *Tomari jele palish thele, tumi dhonno dhonno he!* ("In your jail, polishing floors, how glorious you must be!").

Denied rice, forced to live on thin gruel, he began a hunger strike that lasted 39 days. Tagore himself wrote pleading for him to relent—"Give up hunger strike, our literature claims you"—yet prison authorities suppressed the message. Only the maternal appeal of Biraja Sundari Devi finally persuaded him to break his fast. Even so, his defiance had already transformed prison walls into a theatre of resistance. Nazrul's rebellion was never nihilistic. His songs were at once destructive and creative—tearing down the old, but also urging the forging of unity and justice. In *Chal Chal Chal* (*March Forward*), he roused his countrymen with lines that still march across history: "March forward, brothers, march forward, For the freedom of the country, for the salvation of the people. Let the shackles break, let the sky be lit—March, march forward, to the call of

independence." This was poetry as drumbeat, verse as anthem. In *Bolo Bolo Bolo* (*Speak, Speak, Speak*), he sharpened silence into weaponry: "Speak with strength, Let your voice be the weapon, Shake the very foundations of unjust rule." And in *Sarbojanin* (*Universal*), he transcended the nationalist frame altogether, envisioning a world where: "Let there be no more division, no more pain, Let the light of love shine through every heart, For all men are brothers, and all lands are one." Here was Nazrul at his most radical—not just a rebel poet of Bengal, but a prophet of humanism, collapsing borders, faiths, and hierarchies into one vast fraternity. Born in 1899 in Churulia, Nazrul knew the sting of poverty and hunger. Those scars carved into his verse a visceral intimacy with the downtrodden. Yet his hardships did not break him; they sharpened his words into steel. It is this union of pain and defiance that keeps his poetry alive today. Nearly half a century after he died in 1976, Nazrul's voice has not dimmed. His verses still ignite rallies, protests, and uprisings. They are sung not only in Bangladesh, where he is revered as the national poet, but wherever injustice demands resistance. For the rebel poet did not merely write for his own time; he wrote for all time. Kazi Nazrul Islam remains less a figure of history than a pulse in the bloodstream of resistance. His words, written by candlelight in a Kolkata room or carved on prison walls, continue to thunder against oppression. To read him today is to hear the drum of rebellion, the cry of freedom, the eternal defiance of a poet who refused to bow.



PHOTOS: COLLECTED

NEWS

Unicef to pull plug on maintenance support

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out maintenance at SCANUs. The National Electro-Medical Equipment Maintenance Workshop & Training Center (NEMEMW & TC) provides maintenance and repair services—mostly through third-party providers—for medical equipment in around 700 government hospitals across the country. Contacted, Zainal Abedin Tito, line director of Hospital Service Management of DGHS, said the hospitals concerned were directed to take necessary steps to ensure uninterrupted services at SCANUs. Technicians at the hospitals will carry out routine maintenance, and in case of major problems, NEMEMW & TC will assist them, he told this correspondent on August 11. However, at least two DGHS officials said SCANU equipment is highly sophisticated and requires regular maintenance. Given the shortage of technical staff at public hospitals, Unicef's departure may disrupt the services. They noted that NEMEMW & TC itself, which doesn't have divisional-level offices, is running with inadequate manpower. At least 58

of the 95 posts at the agency remain vacant. Asked, Jayanta Kumar Mukhopadhyaya, chief technical manager of NEMEMW & TC, said they have yet to receive any directive on SCANU maintenance. "If the authorities ask us to do it, we will need some time to hire a vendor to provide the services," he told The Daily Star on August 19. Prof Sayedur Rahman, special assistant to the chief adviser for the health ministry, said the government has decided to maintain SCANUs with its own funds. Funding for SCANU maintenance was incorporated in the interim government's transitional plan as a "critically important task." As part of the plan, the government took up two projects to complete the unfinished tasks of the Fourth Health, Population and Nutrition Sector Programme that ended in June 2024. However, the projects are yet to be approved. "The approval may take some time, but I don't think SCANU services will be interrupted," said Sayedur. WHAT UNICEF SAYS Contacted, Rana Flowers, Unicef

representative to Bangladesh, said Unicef, together with its partners, has supported the establishment and expansion of SCANUs and Neonatal Stabilisation Units (NSUs) since 2011. Unicef engaged a specialised agency to deliver preventive and corrective maintenance nationwide. In recent years, significant progress has been made to institutionalise this work, she said, noting that DGHS recruited over 200 biomedical technicians in 2022. With Unicef's technical guidance, training modules and guidelines on medical equipment maintenance have been developed, and 60 technicians had already been trained by the end of 2024, she pointed out. "With a growing pool of government biomedical technicians now deployed across all districts, the time is right for DGHS to take full ownership of equipment maintenance, ensuring sustainability in the long run," she told The Daily Star on August 19. This transition reflects UNICEF's long-standing approach: to catalyse innovation, build systems, and then enable government leadership and sustainability, she added.

Digital bank licence window reopens

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cancellation of the application. The central bank said it recognises the changing landscape of the global financial ecosystem, which is being driven by continuous technological innovation. Earlier, BB raised the paid-up capital requirement for digital banks from Tk 125 crore to Tk 300 crore. The central bank approved the guideline on digital banks in 2023. According to the guideline, a branchless, end-to-end virtual banking system will help extend financial services to the last mile of the country. Sponsors of the proposed digital

banks must provide the minimum paid-up capital, and the bank must launch an initial public offering (IPO) within five years from the date of licence issuance by BB. The IPO amount cannot be less than the sponsors' initial paid-up capital. Under the guidelines, preliminary approval was granted to Nagad Digital Bank and Kori Digital Bank. However, the initiative was suspended following the fall of the Awami League government in August, 2024. Aref Hossain Khan, executive director and spokesperson of the central bank, said that the interim licenses of Nagad Digital Bank and Kori

Digital Bank have not been cancelled. "We had issued interim licenses to them. The feature of such a license is that once it is provided, the entities prepare their platforms and then apply for a full license. After receiving the application, we conduct an on-site inspection, and if we find them ready, we issue them the license for commercial launching and operation. But they have not yet sent us any application requesting a full operational or commercial license," he said. "However, if they prepare their platforms now, they will have to raise their capital to Tk 300 crore instead of previous Tk 125 crore," he added.

Cocaine haul raises transit route concerns

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destinations were Europe and North American countries, according to police and officials of the DNC. Cocaine is produced mainly in South American countries and international drug traffickers have been using Bangladesh and other countries as a route to smuggle cocaine to Europe, North America, and sometimes to India for years, they said. Police and DNC officials said around 30kg of cocaine was seized in Bangladesh over the last five to six years, including 13kg haul in 2023. In January last year, a Malawian woman, Nomthandazo Towera Soko,

35, was arrested with around 8.3kg of the drug at the airport. Later, at least seven others from Malawi, Cameroon, Nigeria, and Bangladesh were arrested in this connection, but the ringleader, a Nigerian national, is still at large. The contraband item is usually smuggled into the country via air. In some cases, law enforcers and DNC officials carried out drives and seized the items after they had been smuggled out of the airport, said officials. Talking to The Daily Star, Khurshid Alam, deputy director (intelligence) of DNC, said cocaine is produced mostly in Peru and Colombia and the

smugglers use Bangladesh as a transit point to smuggle the drug to other countries. "We did not find anyone in the country's rehabilitation centres who had become addicted to cocaine." "We found a few cases, possibly one or two, who became addicted to cocaine abroad. They returned home later and were admitted to rehabilitation centres here to recover, as they couldn't find the drug in the country." Bashir Uddin, director (operations) of DNC, told this newspaper that they would investigate whether any Bangladeshis are involved in the racket.

Drones take

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Technology, which developed the project. "So, as a solution for this problem, we came up with a concept of using our heavy-lift drone to carry garbage." After a successful pilot on Everest last year, the company tested the system on nearby Mount Ama Dablam, where it removed 641 kilos of waste. "This is a revolutionary drive in the mountains to make it cleaner and safer," said Tashi Lhamu Sherpa, vice chairman of the Khumbu Pasang Lhamu rural municipality, which oversees the Everest area. GAME CHANGER The drones are proving to be far more efficient, cost-effective and safer than earlier methods, said Tshering Sherpa, chief of the Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee. "In just 10 minutes, a drone can carry as much garbage as 10 people would take six hours to carry," Sherpa told AFP. The powerful drones cost around

\$20,000 each, but were supplied by the China-headquartered manufacturer to support the cleanup operation and promote its brand. Other costs were borne partially by the local authorities. Beyond waste removal, the drones have also been deployed to deliver essential climbing gear such as oxygen cylinders, ladders, and ropes—reducing the number of dangerous trips across the Khumbu Icefall, one of Everest's deadliest sections. That can help improve safety for the guides and porters, especially the early "fixing" teams who establish routes at the start of the new season. "People in the fixing team were very happy," said record-holding climber Nima Rinji Sherpa, the youngest to summit all 14 of the world's highest peaks. "They can simply just go by themselves and the drone will carry ladders or the oxygen and ropes for them. It saves a lot of time and energy."

Israel strike on Syria kills one: state media

AFP, Damascus
An Israeli strike killed a man in southern Syria, state media reported Tuesday, a day after a new Israeli incursion in the area drew condemnation from Damascus. Israel has carried out hundreds of strikes in Syria since an Islamist-led alliance toppled longtime ruler Bashar al-Assad in December. It has also opened talks with the interim authorities in Damascus. "A young man was killed in an Israeli strike on a home in the village of Taranja," on the formerly Syria-controlled side of the armistice line on the Golan Heights, the official SANA news agency reported. On Monday, the Syrian foreign ministry condemned what it called an "Israeli military incursion" in nearby Beit Jinn.

Govt to fix prices

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towards fixing their prices," he said, noting that the rates may be set in two or three categories. Sayedur also said the government will soon introduce digital monitoring of medical equipment to ensure timely maintenance. In the first phase, 300 pieces of equipment from 114 hospitals will be brought under the system by December. Replying to queries, he cautioned people against relying on medical advice from Google or Artificial Intelligence. He also said publicity of medicines is prohibited and the government would soon take visible action on this. On BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir's criticism of the interim government's handling of the pharma sector, Sayedur said

he believed it was Fakhrul's personal remark. "We are working for the people's interest and will continue to do it," he said. On August 13, Fakhrul voiced concern over potential risks in the pharmaceutical sector and urged the government to safeguard it through transparent and inclusive policies. Health Services Secretary Saur Rahman said they were ensuring transparency in the recruitment and posting of doctors and nurses. "We have taken it as a challenge," he said. Prof Abu Jafor, director general of the Directorate General of Health Services, said the government has decided to move away from decades-old sectoral programmes that lacked transparency, which has disrupted some services. "We are working to solve those problems," he said.

Kazi Nazrul Islam's death anniversary

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have chalked out programmes to pay respect to the national poet. Nazrul was born on 11 Joishthha, 1306 Bonggabo in the village Churulia, West Bengal of India's Bardhaman district. His father's name was Kazi Faqeer Ahmed and mother was Zahida Khatun. His nickname was "Dukhu Mia". The nation got inspirations from Nazrul's poems and songs during the great Liberation War in 1971 and other democratic movements and struggles. Nazrul wrote nearly 3,000 songs and composed many of them which are known as Nazrul-Geeti or Nazrul Sangeet. After the independence of Bangladesh, Nazrul was brought to Dhaka from Kolkata along with his family. The family was given a home in Dhanmondi.