

MY DHAKA

ELEVATOR POLITICS OF DHAKA

The unseen hierarchy in vertical transit

JANNATUL BUSHRA

There was a time Dhaka only sprawled horizontally, stubbornly, like a city allergic to the sky. But then, when the land grew scarce, Dhaka simply looked up and thought -- why not the sky? So now, it climbs.

Buildings shoot up like they're competing in a race to touch the clouds, staircases are quietly written off as relics, and elevators have become the new vertical vehicles of survival.

And, because this is Dhaka, the elevator was never going to be just a machine. It is politics on pulleys. Not only do we rage on the roads, we now fume in little steel boxes too.

All of Dhaka's Class System, in a Box with a Button

Yes! Step into a lift, and you've already entered a miniature model of the city's class system. It's rarely a neutral experience. Who gets in first? Who gets to press the buttons? Who is invisible enough to blend into the corners? In corporate towers, executives glide into air-conditioned cabins while staff wait for the service lift as if queuing for rations. In posh apartments, domestic workers perfect the skill of being there without being there. All of Dhaka's social gymnastics are squeezed into six square feet of metal.

The People We Know Without Knowing

Elevator silence deserves its own study.



You know your neighbour's face, their schedule, their floor number, and maybe even the brand of their cologne. And yet, you've never spoken. Both of you stare at the glowing digits as

if they're the last great invention of mankind. Somehow, a simple hush inside a lift manages to be louder than traffic outside Bijoy Sharani during rush hour.

The Politics of the First Floor

In Dhaka, time is a rare mineral, mined in seconds. So, shaving half a minute by sneaking into a lift feels like luxury. But there are the mysterious

and mocks our hierarchies, amplifies silences, breeds grudges, and yet, still allows brief sparks of humanity. The city rises, yes—but it drags all its politics, big and small, up with it.

lift shutdowns. Sometimes for hours. Energy-saving? Technical issue? A new form of punishment? Nobody knows, but everyone sweats.

And let's not forget the first-floor residents who faithfully occupy lifts as if climbing one flight of stairs would risk their life expectancy. These are often the same people who ignore the "stand on the right, walk on the left" escalator rule.

The Box You Keep Coming Back To

Ask any Dhaka resident and they'll have a lift horror story—being stuck mid-ride during a blackout, pounding the panic button, calling out for the building guard like a character in a badly written play. The fear is real. But then, like many Dhaka traumas, it is repurposed into humour. "Remember when we spent 25 minutes trapped with that aunty from 3B?" becomes dinner-table folklore.

Dhaka's Oddest Stage for a Brief Humanity

But sometimes, just sometimes, a neighbour who's never once stepped inside your flat might offer a polite nod. A junior might whisper a timid "good morning" to the boss. Students cram in a week's worth of gossip between the ground floor and the fifth. For a few fleeting floors, strangers become co-passengers in life's most awkward intimacy.

The elevator, then, is Dhaka's oddest stage. A box that both reveals

CRACKDOWN ON MISUSE Businesses, users hit as Nepal restricts social media

AFP, Kathmandu

Several social media platforms, including Facebook, were inaccessible in Nepal yesterday after the government blocked unregistered platforms, leaving millions of users angry and confused.

The Ministry of Communication and Information Technology has instructed the telecommunication authority to deactivate access to 26 unregistered platforms operating in Nepal, including Meta-owned Facebook, YouTube, X and LinkedIn.

"After the directive yesterday we stopped the URLs but a full shutdown will take time," Sudhir Parajuli, the president of the Internet Service Providers Association of Nepal, told AFP. "We are deciding what methods to employ."

Popular platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and X have millions of users in Nepal who rely on them for entertainment, news, and business.

"I really feel bad about the government's decision because we run our business through Facebook and, if it is closed, our business will be affected," said Jenisha Joshi, 25, who sells jewellery and accessories through Facebook.

Western troops in Ukraine would be fair targets

Says Putin as European countries pledge post-war security support to Kyiv

REUTERS, Vladivostok

Russian President Vladimir Putin said yesterday that any Western troops deployed to Ukraine would be legitimate targets for Moscow to attack, in a warning to Kyiv's allies as they discuss measures for its future protection.

Putin was speaking a day after French President Emmanuel Macron said 26 countries had pledged to provide postwar security guarantees to Ukraine, including an international force on land, sea and in the air.

Russia has long argued that one of its reasons for going to war in Ukraine was to prevent Nato from admitting Kyiv as a member and placing its forces in Ukraine.

"Therefore, if some troops appear there, especially now, during military operations, we proceed from the fact that these will be legitimate targets for destruction," Putin told an economic forum in Vladivostok.

"And if decisions are reached that lead to peace, to long-term peace, then I simply do not see any sense in their presence on the territory of Ukraine, full stop."

Miladunnabi today

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AFM Khalid Hossain in the chair.

Meanwhile, President Mohammed Shahabuddin and Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus issued separate messages yesterday, greeting the people of Bangladesh and Muslims around the world on the eve of Miladunnabi.

The national flag will be hoisted atop all government, semi-government, autonomous offices, and private buildings.

As in previous years, the government will decorate important roads and key locations in the capital with national and colourful flags and banners inscribed with the Kalima Tayiba.

The Islamic Foundation has been instructed to organise various religious and cultural programmes, including Qirat, Naat recitations, poetry readings, cultural competitions, and an Arabic Khutba writing contest.

The foundation will also release a commemorative publication and arrange seminars.

Starting from the 12th Rabiu Awval, the foundation will host a two-week-long Islamic book fair on the southern premises of the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque.

Bangladesh Television, Bangladeshi Betar, and other electronic media outlets will air special programmes, while newspapers will publish special supplements marking the day.

Universities and all educational, cultural and religious institutions, along with the offices of the Waqf Administrator, Islamic Foundation, and Hajj offices in Dhaka and Jeddah, have been directed to organise discussions, prayers and milad, Naat recitations, and quiz competitions.

These programmes will focus on the life and teachings of Prophet Muhammad (PUBH), including Islam's messages of peace, progress, tolerance, global brotherhood, human rights, and women's dignity.

Bangladesh's embassies and missions abroad will also observe the day with due solemnity.

SECURITY MEASURES

The government has made extensive arrangements across Bangladesh to ensure the peaceful observance of the day, reports BSS.

Security measures focus on smooth and safe congregations and processions, especially in major cities like Dhaka, Chattogram, Sylhet, Khulna, and Rajshahi.

Home Adviser Lt Gen (retd) Md Jahangir Alam Chowdhury has directed the law enforcement agencies to remain on high alert and ensure tight security at mosques and other religious sites expecting large gatherings.

EC denied power to appoint its secy

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and joint secretary. It would also create a structured career path for EC personnel, enabling them to advance to senior roles within the EC secretariat.

According to the existing EC Secretariat Act, 2009, officials from outside the commission are allowed to serve in various positions at the EC secretariat.

The current EC secretary -- the top position at its Secretariat -- is an officer from the administration cadre. At least 10 other mid-level positions are held by officers from either the same cadre or the judicial service, according to EC sources.

At a meeting on August 19, the Cabinet Division's Inter-Ministerial Committee on Reviewing Draft Laws turned down the proposal, arguing that the formation of such a service falls under the jurisdiction of the public administration ministry as per the Rules of Business.

The committee is responsible for reviewing draft ordinances to decide which ones can be placed before the Advisory Council.

Experts strongly disagree with the committee's view.

"There is no scope for blocking reform initiatives by citing the Rules of Business or any other laws and regulations. If reforms are blocked with excuses, then what can we say?" Badiul Alam Majumdar, who headed the Electoral Reform Commission, told The Daily Star.

"Reform means creating something new or updating the existing one... Rejecting reform proposals is nothing but an attempt

to preserve the old system," he noted. EC officials said that the commission, as a constitutional body, does not fall under the public administration ministry and therefore the Rules of Business, which outline the roles of ministries and divisions, cannot be applied in this case.

Jesmin Tuli, former additional secretary at the EC Secretariat, said that if the EC is to emerge as a self-reliant and independent institution, it must have its own officials at all levels.

"How can an officer, who has spent most of his career following government orders across various ministries and departments, suddenly act independently in a constitutional body?" she told The Daily Star.

Until 2007, the EC Secretariat operated under the Prime Minister's Office. Later in 2009, the then caretaker government amended the law, bringing the secretariat under the EC Secretariat.

However, a provision was kept allowing the public administration ministry to depute officials including those from the admin cadre to fill several posts at the EC.

EC officials see this as a major obstacle to the functioning of the commission as a fully independent institution.

Some former admin cadre officials who worked in the EC secretariat said the EC's proposal, if approved, could disrupt the secretariat's operation.

"It is unfair to blame the administration cadre officers alone because it is the government that compels officers to act with bias in

carrying out election duties," said a former EC secretary, requesting anonymity.

EC officials usually serve as ROs in local elections. However, during parliamentary polls, the role is usually assigned to deputy and divisional commissioners -- all of whom come from the admin cadre.

Officials at EC have been calling for an end to this practice for a long time.

On August 30, the Upazila Election Officers' Association demanded that the government establish the EC Service by 15 September, cautioning that without it, the upcoming national election may lack credibility.

CONTRADICTORY

STANCE ON NID

The draft ordinance proposed assigning the responsibility of "preparing and preserving the National Identity Card database" to the EC Secretariat.

However, at the August 19 meeting, the Cabinet Division's Inter-Ministerial Committee rejected the proposal, saying it goes against the Electoral Reform Commission's recommendation for establishing a separate statutory body for NID database.

EC officials view this as a double standard.

"The committee did not consider the reform commission's proposal on formation of a separate EC Service. But it referred to the reform commission's recommendation while rejecting the proposal on NID database. This is a contradictory position," said a deputy secretary of EC on condition of anonymity.

"Such acts of barbarity will not be

1 killed in attack on 'darbar sharif'

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Locals said Nurul had a 12 foot-high tomb built before his death. He was buried in the elevated platform after he died on August 23.

The tomb generated heated debate in the locality. The local administration held multiple discussions with Nurul's followers and the group opposing the matter, said locals.

Initially, Nurul's family requested a week's time to resolve the dispute. However, an agitated crowd attacked Nurul's house after a protest rally at the Goalanda Ansar Club grounds yesterday. During the protest, they also vandalised vehicles belonging to police and Goalanda UNO, said witnesses.

Protesters, after the rally, broke the gate of Nurul's house, vandalised it, and set it on fire, said Rajbari Additional Superintendent of Police (Crime and Ops) Sharif Al Rajib.

Later, the fire service went to the spot and brought the blaze under control.

"Immediately after the incident, we went to the spot and sent four injured individuals, along with local journalists, to the upazila health complex," the police officer said.

The situation calmed down after five hours, around 8:00pm. "There's an increased presence of police, army, and Rab members in the area," he said.

Meanwhile, in a statement, the Chief Adviser's Press Wing said, "The interim government strongly condemns the abhorrent desecration of the grave and the vile torching of the body of Nurul Haque Molla, also known as Nural Pagla, at Goalanda. This inhuman and despicable act is a direct affront to our values, our laws, and the very fabric of a just and civilised society."

"Such acts of barbarity will not be

tolerated under any circumstances. The interim government is committed to upholding the rule of law and preserving the sanctity of every human life, both in life and in death.

"We assure the public that the perpetrators of this heinous crime will be identified and brought to justice with the full force of the law. No individual or group is above accountability. Immediate and tough legal action will be taken to ensure that those responsible face the consequences of their actions."

"We call on all citizens to reject hatred, stand united against violence, and uphold the principles of dignity, justice, and humanity."

In Rajshahi's Paba upazila, a mob reportedly attacked and vandalised a khanqah sharif in Panishail Chandrapukur village yesterday, leaving the establishment in ruins.

The attack followed a three-day Eid-e-Miladunnabi programme, which featured performances of Bhandari and Murshidi devotional songs -- an act that had reportedly angered some locals.

Video footage showed around 150 people storming the site while police, who had deployed two vehicles nearby, did not intervene.

Azizur Rahman Bhandari, the khanqah's founder, accused local BNP leader Golam Mostafa and Jamaat-e-Islami activists of leading the attack.

Mostafa, Jamaat's Paba upazila unit Convener Ali Hossain denied involvement.

Paba OC Monirul Islam said police were outnumbered but promised action if complaints were filed.

Criticising the police for inaction, Azizur said he would not lodge a case.

Israel opens 'gates of hell'

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Arej Ahmed, a 50-year-old displaced Palestinian who lives in a tent in the southwest of Gaza City, told AFP that her husband "saw residents of the Mushtaha Tower throwing their belongings from the upper floors to take them and flee before the strike".

"Less than half an hour after the evacuation orders, the tower was bombed," she said by telephone.

Gaza's health ministry said Israeli strikes across Gaza City killed at least 51 people. Among the dead were seven children.

Contacted by AFP, the Israeli military requested timeframes and coordinates to comment on specific strikes.

Media restrictions in Gaza and difficulties in accessing many areas mean AFP is unable to independently verify the tolls and details provided by the civil defence agency or the Israeli military.

BNP says 'no' to constitutional reforms

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that any dangerous attempt to disrupt constitutional continuity is not realistic in the current political situation."

Talking to The Daily Star, BNP Standing Committee member Salahuddin Ahmed said no arrangement could alter the constitution while it remains in force. "Any such move would face a legal challenge in court and would not stand," he said.

In its letter, the BNP referred to Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus's June 5 address to the nation, where he described the charter as "a pledge".

Quoting him, the party noted, "By signing the July Charter, the political parties will make a pledge to the

nation to implement it."

The BNP praised the chief adviser's "thoughtful and well-planned" position on implementation and urged the consensus commission to follow his guidelines.