



## Unite to build a just, prosperous Bangladesh

### Yunus urges all

BSS, Dhaka

To build a prosperous country free from discrimination and corruption, everyone must work together, forgetting religious and caste differences, said Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus yesterday.

He made the remarks while greeting all Hindu citizens of the country on the occasion of Durga Puja, the biggest religious festival of the Bangalee Hindu community, which begins today. SEE PAGE 9 COL 2



Buses, pick-up trucks, and rickshaws drift through a dilapidated, waterlogged road, half of which has been closed off for the construction of the elevated expressway. The construction work has left the road in poor condition, causing waterlogging even after light rain. The photo was taken in the capital's Khilgaon area yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

## MJF condemns rape of eighth grader in Khagrachhari

### Calls for swift arrest, trial of perpetrators

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) has strongly condemned the rape of a 12-year-old schoolgirl in Khagrachhari, calling for the swift arrest and trial of those involved.

In a statement issued yesterday, the rights organisation termed the assault a "horrifying reminder of the persistent violence faced by children and women in Bangladesh".

"This tragic assault is not an isolated case. It reflects a culture of impunity where women and girls remain vulnerable, and perpetrators act without fear of arrest or punishment," said MJF Executive Director Shaheen Anam.

The organisation urged the government and law enforcers to take immediate and effective action, including enforcing strict legal penalties for violence against children and women, and expanding support for survivors through access to shelter, counselling, and livelihood programmes. The statement comes amid rising tensions in Khagrachhari.

The district administration imposed Section 144 yesterday following a dawn-to-dusk road blockade organised under the banner of "Jumma Chhatra-Janata" demanding justice for the victim.

The Class 8 student was allegedly raped on the evening of September 23 while returning from private tuition.

Her father filed a case with Khagrachhari Sadar Police Station the following day.

Meanwhile, police have arrested one suspect, who has been placed on a six-day remand by a court.



# Children face toxic toll of pollution

Experts warn of deadly impacts of air, noise and e-waste pollution

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh is grappling with alarming levels of air and noise pollution and electronic waste, all of which pose serious health risks to children, experts cautioned at an event yesterday.

They were speaking at the launch of a new handbook on Children's Health and the Environment at CIRDAP in the capital, jointly organised by the Directorate General of Medical Education and Unicef.

According to the handbook, Bangladesh was ranked the world's most polluted country in 2023, while Dhaka remained the second most polluted city globally between 2018 and 2021. It also noted that in 2021 alone, air pollution caused more than 2,35,000 deaths, including 19,000 children under the age of five.

Household air pollution from burning wood, coal, charcoal, kerosene, animal dung, and crop waste accounted for around 69,000 premature deaths and contributed to a further 13,500 deaths linked to ambient PM2.5 exposure, it added.

Emerging research links prenatal and early childhood exposure to fine particulate matter and nitrogen dioxide with higher risks of autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and childhood leukaemia, the handbook mentioned.

It also highlighted that noise pollution has become a major public health hazard, particularly in urban areas.

Dhaka now ranks as the noisiest city among 61 major cities worldwide,

with average sound levels reaching 119 decibels, far above the WHO's safe limit of 55 decibels.

Vehicle traffic is the main source, producing 75 percent of the city's noise, with some areas recording levels as high as 110-132 decibels, comparable to a rock concert or chainsaw, it said.

Citing data from Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon, the handbook showed that 5-7 percent of patients at Bangladesh Medical University suffer from noise-induced hearing loss. Children

recycling sites are exposed to toxic air that can reduce lung function, increase the risk of stillbirth and premature birth, and damage the immune system, growth parameters, DNA and genes.

Reported symptoms include insomnia, headaches, muscle weakness, chest pain and dizziness, the handbook said.

Unicef supported the DGME in developing the document, which is based on the WHO-Unicef online course "Protecting Children's Health from Environmental Threats".

Prof Dr Md Abu Jafar, director general of the Directorate General of Health Services, said, "Our children are among the most affected by climate change, and air pollution is one of the biggest challenges we face. It directly impacts neuroendocrine development, especially in children under five. Around 90 percent of neuronal development occurs within the first six to seven years of life, so preventing air pollution is critically important for protecting their health and future."

Unicef Deputy Representative Deepika Sharma said, "Climate change demands a united response. All concerned organisations must work together to address these challenges and implement effective policies."

Prof Dr Nazmul Hosain, director general of the Directorate General of Medical Education, added, "Strong policy measures are essential to reduce the environmental impacts of climate change. This requires everyone - government, institutions and communities - to work in coordination."

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PROF DR MD ABU JAFAR  
Director general of DGHS

attending schools near busy roads, including Motijheel Ideal School and College and Willes Little Flower School, are already showing signs of harm.

Bangladesh generates an estimated 2.81 million tonnes of e-waste each year, a figure projected to rise to 4.62 million tonnes by 2035, according to research by the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet). Children living near e-waste

## 'Form independent info commission immediately'

TIB slams govt for failing to reconstitute it in over a year

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Slamming the government for its failure to reconstitute an Information Commission more than a year after the fall of the Hasina regime, Transparency International Bangladesh yesterday called for the immediate formation of an effective and independent commission.

"Although the interim government has taken several initiatives towards state reforms, no steps have been taken to make the Information Commission functional or to reform the RTI Act," said TIB Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman in a statement issued on the occasion of International Day for Universal Access to Information.

"Despite repeated recommendations from civil society and statements in the media, no action has followed. This indifference to protecting citizens' right to information is deeply unfortunate - and marks one of the interim government's major failures," said Iftekharuzzaman.

The anti-corruption watchdog urged the appointment of qualified individuals, free of conflicts of interest, as commissioners through a transparent process.

At the same time, TIB called for necessary amendments to the Right to Information (RTI) Act 2009 and comprehensive reforms to transform the Information Commission into an effective and independent institution.

Iftekharuzzaman further noted that even when citizens file RTI applications, in the absence of an active commission, complaints remain unheard and unresolved.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 4

## 'It's very difficult to work in Bangladesh'

### CEC Nasir cites challenges ahead of upcoming polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin yesterday said they are facing "many seen and unseen challenges" as they are preparing for the upcoming national polls.

He said it is very "difficult" to work in Bangladesh, particularly considering the current situation in the country.

"While a few find it easy to get work done, the majority struggle with it. This is the reality we face today," the CEC said while addressing the Election Officers' Conference 2025 at the EC headquarters yesterday afternoon.

Urging election officials to remain impartial,

SEE PAGE 9 COL 2

## Shahidul Alam joining Gaza-bound media flotilla

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



Photographer Shahidul Alam is set to join the Freedom Flotilla Coalition's (FFC) Media Flotilla as the first Bangladeshi, in an attempt to break the information-media blackout in Gaza.

He will depart for Italy today, from where they will embark on a journey for Gaza.

Shahidul presented the goals of this programme and expressed a message of solidarity with the struggling people of Palestine at a press conference held at Drikpath Bhaban on Panthapath in the capital at 3:00pm yesterday.

On joining the global media flotilla, he said, "A genocide is going on right now. Israel and the

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

## TONGI FIRE

### Another firefighter dies, death toll now 4

OUR CORRESPONDENT,  
Gazipur

The death toll from the Tongi warehouse fire has risen to four after another injured firefighter succumbed to his burns yesterday.

Khandaker Jannatul Naem, 37, a warehouse inspector of fire service, passed away around 10:00am at the National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery in the capital. He had suffered 42 percent burns, said doctors.

Hailing from Sherpur, Naem had joined the fire service in 2016.

He was among the four firefighters who were burned while extinguishing the blaze at a warehouse in Sahara Market of Tongi, Gazipur on September 22.

Earlier, firefighters Shamim Ahmed died on September 23 and Nurul Huda on September 24 while undergoing treatment.

## Case filed over shaving of fakir's hair in M'singh

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A case was filed yesterday over the incident of forcibly shaving the hair of 70-year-old Halim Uddin Akand in Kodalia Kashiganj village of Mymensingh's Tarakanda upazila.

Halim's son Md Shahid Akand lodged the case with Tarakanda Police Station, accusing five to six people involved in the incident, said Md Tipu Sultan, officer-in-charge of the police station.

However, the OC did not disclose the names of the accused for "the sake of the investigation".

A viral video of the incident has triggered nationwide outrage and condemnation.

The video, widely shared on social media, shows Halim walking down a road when three men in grey vests chase him, drag him aside, and pin him down. As he struggles and cries out "Allah, Tui Dehis!" (O Allah, You are witness!), they shave off his hair.

The incident happened just before Eid-ul-Azha this year, said Rezaul Karim Aslam, general secretary of the Mymensingh Baul Association.

Halim had been keeping his matted hair for 37 years. Once a farmer, he now leads a quiet spiritual life.

The perpetrators came to Kashiganj Bazar from Dhaka that morning after receiving a tip that "a madman was roaming the market".

"They chased Halim for a long time before capturing him and cutting his hair, ignoring locals who tried to intervene," said Aslam.



A farmer arranges watermelons for sale at a wholesale market in Khulna's Dumuria. Farmers in Dacope, Batiaghata, and Dumuria have profited greatly from cultivating off-season watermelons using the mulching method. At present, the fruits are being sold at Tk 35-45 per kg in the wholesale market, depending on size. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN