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At Shaheed Minar, one last time

Nation pays tribute to Language Movement veteran Ahmad Rafique

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Language Movement veteran, Rabindra researcher and essayist Ahmad Rafique spent his final days in solitude. But yesterday, hundreds of admirers gathered at the Central Shaheed Minar to honour his legacy.

Ahmad Rafique passed away at BIRDEM Hospital around 10:12pm on Thursday. He was 96. He left behind no spouse or children.

His body was brought to the Central Shaheed Minar around 11:00am yesterday for the public to pay tribute. Long before his arrival, mourners had gathered with wreaths, waiting in silence.

In 1952, Rafique, then a young student at Dhaka Medical College, was one of the initiators of the first Shaheed Minar. Seventy-three years later, his body returned to that same site for one last time.

The coffin was soon covered in

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As the nation bid farewell to Language Movement veteran Ahmad Rafique, admirers from all walks of life -- along with political parties, cultural groups, student bodies, and academic institutions -- gathered at the Central Shaheed Minar yesterday to pay their final respects, placing wreaths at his coffin.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Communal harmony will be stronger in new Bangladesh: Yunus

BSS, Dhaka

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus has expressed hope that communal harmony and tolerance among the people of the new Bangladesh after the July uprising will become stronger.

"I hope that the journey to build a non-discriminatory, just and humane state, enriched with human values, will be stronger, smoother and more successful through the collective efforts of all, regardless of race, religion and caste," he said.

He made the remarks yesterday while greeting members of the Buddhist community on the occasion of Shubho Probarona Purnima and Kathin Chibar Dana, a religious festival of the community.

In a message, Prof Yunus said the great Gautama Buddha throughout his life preached the message of non-violence, equality and friendship for the welfare of humanity and for establishing peace in society.

"The principal aim of Buddha was to build an ideal society based on peace and harmony. His ideals still shine brightly with the glory of humanity and sacrifice," he added.



390 girls raped in first eight months this year

Says report of National Girl Child Advocacy Forum

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 54 girls were sexually harassed or abused, and 390 others were raped or gang-raped in the first eight months of this year, according to a report by the National Girl Child Advocacy Forum (NGCAF).

During the same period, 104 children died by suicide, the report said.

Compared to last year, incidents of sexual harassment and abuse, rape and attempted rape, abduction and trafficking, murder, mysterious deaths and drowning have increased, though the number of suicides has declined, it stated.

The findings were presented at a press conference held at the Jatiya Press Club in Dhaka yesterday. The report was prepared based on national and regional media coverage, with support from Educo Bangladesh.

According to the report, girls are frequently subjected to sexual harassment on streets, in vehicles, markets, public places, educational and religious institutions and

private homes.

From January to August 2025, 54 girls were victims of sexual harassment -- more than double the figure from the same period last year but lower than in 2023. During the same period in 2024, 28 girls faced sexual harassment, while in 2023 the number was 117.

The report said incidents of rape and attempted rape have also increased compared to last year. From January to August this year, 390 girls were raped or gang-raped. In 2024, the number was 224, while in 2023, 493 girls were victims of rape.

Cases of abduction and

trafficking have risen as well. In the first eight months of this year, 34 girls were trafficked, of whom 18 were rescued. During the same period last year, 19 girls were victims of trafficking.

The report said 104 girls took their own lives during this period, fewer than last year's 133.

A total of 83 girls were murdered in the first eight months of this year, up from 81 during the same period in 2024.

In the first eight months of 2024, 20 girls died under mysterious circumstances. This year, that number rose to 50, though no clear reasons were identified.

In the same period last year, 187 girls drowned, while this year the number has risen to 205.

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Types of violence	Number of Victims in 2024 (Jan-Aug)	Number of Victims in 2025 (Jan-Aug)
Sexual Abuse	28	54
Rape	224	390
Trafficking	19	34
Murder	81	83
Mysterious Deaths	20	50

National security adviser meets senior US officials

STAR REPORT

National Security Adviser and High Representative for the Rohingya issue Dr Khalilur Rahman met with senior US officials in Washington DC yesterday.

Bangladesh's new Ambassador to the US Tareq M Ariful Islam was present at these meetings.

During his meeting with Allison Hooker, undersecretary for political affairs, they discussed regional political and security issues.

Hooker expressed support to Bangladesh's efforts to resolve the Rohingya issue.

Rahman also held meetings with Nicole Chulick, principal deputy assistant secretary, and Andrew Herrup, deputy assistant secretary.

Govt bans single-use plastics in Secretariat

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has imposed a complete ban on single-use plastics in the Secretariat from today.

From now on, no one will be allowed to enter the Secretariat carrying such items, according to a press release by the environment ministry. It said a monitoring team has been assigned to oversee enforcement of the ban.

The government is encouraging the use of alternatives such as jute, cloth or reusable bags instead of single-use plastics.

One dead, 374 get hospitalised with dengue

UNB, Dhaka

One more death from dengue was reported in the 24 hours till yesterday morning while 374 people were hospitalised with the mosquito-borne disease during this time.

With the new death reported in Mymensingh division, the total number of deaths across the country has risen to 203 this year, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

The total number of cases has risen to 48,865 so far this year.

Currently, 787 patients are receiving treatment in Dhaka while 2,304 patients are undergoing treatment at different hospitals across the country.



417 killed, 682 hurt in road crashes in Sept

Road Safety Foundation says in report

STAR REPORT

At least 417 people, including 63 women and 47 children, were killed and 682 others injured in 446 road accidents across the country in September.

Of them, 18 people were killed and 33 others injured in 42 road accidents in the capital, according to a report of the Road Safety Foundation released yesterday.

The report was prepared based on news published in nine national dailies, seven online news portals and electronic media.

Among the deceased, 143 people died in motorbike accidents alone, accounting for 33.85 percent of the total fatalities. The dead also included 112 pedestrians, 56 drivers and their assistants.

Besides, 21 people died and six were injured in 17 accidents on waterways, while 27 were killed and 13 others injured in 29 train accidents across the country during the same period.

Of the total accidents, 161 occurred on national highways, 139 on regional roads, 57 on rural roads and 89 on city roads, according to the report.

Across the divisions, 28.69 percent of accidents occurred in Dhaka, 18.83

percent in Rajshahi, 24 percent in Chattogram, 6.72 percent in Khulna, 3.58 percent in Barishal, 8.29 percent in Sylhet, 4.48 percent in Rangpur and 5.38 percent in Mymensingh division.

Dhaka division saw the highest number of deaths with 128, while Barishal recorded the lowest with 14.



The report identified several major causes behind the rise in accidents and fatalities, including faulty vehicles, reckless driving and motorcycling -- especially among the youth -- drivers' incompetence and illnesses, unsettled wages and working hours, presence of low-speed vehicles on highways, violation of traffic rules, poor traffic management, inefficiency of the BRTA and extortion in the transport sector.

Teaching roots one letter at a time

Nila Wan's fight to keep the Rakhine alphabet alive

MOKAMMEL SHUVO

Inside a small classroom in Cox's Bazar's Burmese Market area, 12 to 15 Rakhine children sit together, learning in a setting different from regular schooling.

Their teacher, Nila Wan, guides them through the Rakhine alphabet, helping them read and write in their own language.

This language programme is not part of their official school curriculum and does not carry marks in examinations, yet the children are eager to learn in the hope of finding identity in their mother tongue.

After completing her Bachelor's degree at the University of Chittagong and later a Master's in Education at the Asian University for Women, Nila launched Chaaloong Academy in May last year.

In Rakhine, Chaaloong means "meaningful word".

"Many from our generation could read and write in Rakhine.



But in the new generation, that number has decreased significantly," Nila told The Daily Star.

"These children can still speak the language at home, but they are not familiar with the alphabet. They cannot read or write. Books about Rakhine history and traditions remain out of their reach. This is why I began this initiative.

"If a tree has no roots, can it survive? No. One must first

know their roots, their people, and work for them. That sense of responsibility drove me."

Although the academy offers English and Mathematics, promoting the Rakhine language has become one of its main purposes. The programme is mainly for Rakhine children and is conducted only on Fridays and Saturdays.

It began with 50 children but now runs several batches of around 40 students each.

"Many in our community support me. Parents, in particular, want their children to know their language and culture. They couldn't take such initiatives in their time, so they are more enthusiastic now," said Nila.

But not all share this view. Some parents believe reading and writing in Rakhine will not help their children in exams.

Textbooks were also a challenge. "At first, it was very hard to find books. Later, we managed to bring them from Myanmar."

One of the students, Ja Then U, said, "Earlier, we could not read or write in Rakhine. After this academy started, now we can. I feel very happy that I can finally read books written in my own language."

"Just as Bangla is important for our country, I want our Rakhine language to be valued in the same way," said Nila.

"Some indigenous languages

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