

MY DHAKA

HAWKER'S HOWL

the unofficial soundtrack of Dhaka

JANNATUL BUSHRA

If Dhaka ever commissioned an audio documentary of itself, the soundtrack wouldn't bother with birdsong or anything that implies urban maturity. No, it would open with a long, nasal, soul-stabbing cry: "Murgiiiiiiiiiiiiiii!"

Yes, a sound so elastic and so shamelessly dramatic that it slinks through alleyways, somersaults around electric poles, and ricochets off your seventh-floor balcony like it's practising for an audition with a metal band that never got past your garage!

They say every city has its own music. New York gets the subway screech, Istanbul gets the call to prayer, Rome gets scooters humming like caffeinated mosquitoes. Dhaka? We get a man screaming "Murgiiiiiii!!!" (just chicken) as if the entire capital is one giant chicken clearance sale.

Walk through any neighbourhood of Dhaka -- Dhanmondi, Shantinagar, Mirpur, take your pick, and you'll see them on the streets with baskets, trolleys, or buckets full of who-knows-what. Their voices are so loud and powerful, scientists could probably run the national grid with them. But Dhaka, being Dhaka, prefers its load-shedding. And yes, I'm only half-joking.

There's an art to the hawkers' howl. It takes patience and practice!

First comes the warm-up: a small cough, a throat clear, and then a declaration to the universe that

mattresses can, in fact, be fixed. Then the tempo rises, a melodic cry for old bottles, newspapers, and any other object that has ever existed in your home.

And who are the listeners of these soul-piercing cries?

Us, the half-awake, T-shirt-wearing Dhakaites who swear we're tired of the noise, but pause our Netflix episode to see if the daa-boti (large sharpened knife) becoming a guy is passing our building today. Of course, we complain and write about sound pollution while eagerly leaning over the balcony to negotiate the price of a quick umbrella fixation. Because we are nothing if not contradictory!

And it's not just umbrellas. There are hawkers who claim to fix literally anything and everything. "Puraton TV, radio, electronic shomogri thik kora hoy!" they shout with the confidence of surgeons announcing walk-in open-heart procedures. But the moment you take your year-old, obese television, the one rotting in the corner like a forgotten family member -- they will examine it with the solemnity of a judge, shake their head, and declare, "Ei ta aar thik hobe na. Bechhe din." (Translation: We fix everything... except

the thing you actually need fixed.)

Then there's the famous murgi guy, strutting down the street with chickens hanging upside down. And watching those poor birds sway with each step can make even the most carnivorous Dhakaite feel a soft, guilty ache. For a fleeting second, you might even consider becoming vegetarian. But then you will remember morog polau exists.

However, the city planners are forever suspicious of these roaming entrepreneurs. Hawkers are like Dhaka's stray cats, impossible to regulate, permanently resourceful, and appearing exactly where you don't expect them. The authorities often try to "organise" them, a word Dhaka interprets somewhat like "make it worse." So, they remain!

And God forbid your flat is anywhere near a kacha

bazar. Then you're doomed, not metaphorically, but acoustically. From dawn till dusk, your life becomes a live-action soundscape of men yelling "Jharuuuuuuu!" with the emotional intensity of someone offering life-saving medicine. They're just selling brooms. Regular, unremarkable, everyday brooms. But the way they scream it, you'd think civilisation itself depended on your purchase.

The closer you live to the bazar, the more chaotic the soundtrack. One guy is dragging a trolley full of ginger like he's hauling treasure; another is advertising coriander leaves as though they come with a free plot of land. There is constant shouting, constant movement, constant bargaining -- a relentless, unedited documentary of Dhaka life unfolding right beneath your balcony. It is maddening, yes. It may rattle the brain, of course! But it also anchors you. Because only Dhaka can turn such pure cacophony into something resembling comfort.

এই সুরগিইইইইই...

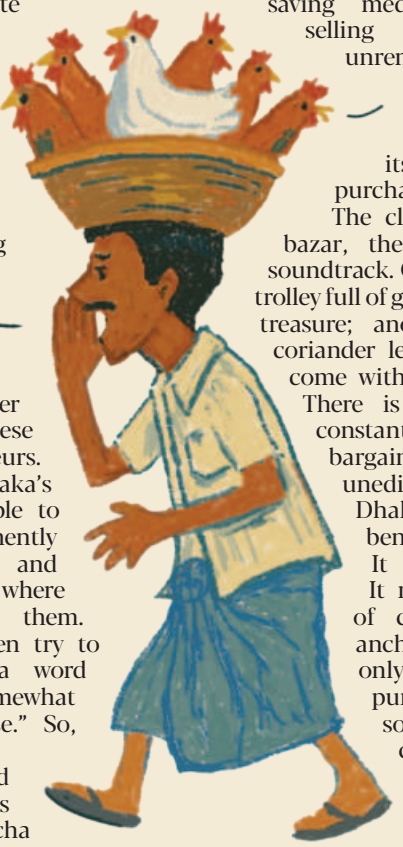


ILLUSTRATION: JAWWAD SAMI NEOGI

Ex-president Hamid's house attacked after ICT verdict against Hasina

A CORRESPONDENT, Kishoreganj

Former president Md Abdul Hamid's house in Kishoreganj's Mithamoin upazila was attacked and vandalised on Monday night, police said.

A group broke into the residence around 11:00pm, damaging furniture, doors, windows and several framed photos, Mithamoin Police Station Officer-in-Charge Alamgir Kabir told The Daily Star yesterday.

No casualties were reported, he said, adding that police and army personnel later visited the spot and security has since been tightened.

No arrests had been made at the time of filing the report last night.

According to local sources, a procession was brought out in Mithamoin Bazar after the International Crimes Tribunal handed down death sentences to deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina and former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal. A faction of 20-30 individuals separated from the procession near Kamalpur village and broke into the former president's house before carrying out the vandalism.

Witness Kamrul Islam said the procession, reportedly joined by around 100 people and led by local BNP activists, began around 10:30pm, though he could not confirm who was involved in the subsequent attack.

Attempts to contact Upazila BNP President Md Jahidul Islam were unsuccessful, as his mobile phone was found switched off.

Police said legal procedures are underway and the situation in the area is currently under control.

NCP member, youth held for threatening schoolboy with gun

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

Police have arrested a National Citizen Party member and another youth in connection with holding a "pistol" against a schoolboy's head during an altercation in Rangpur's Park intersection on Monday.

Ragib Hasnain, 30, NCP Rangpur Metropolitan Coordination Committee member, and Rakibul Islam, alias Tushar, 28, were detained by locals and handed to police around 8:00pm.

Unions applaud EC, govt going full steam ahead

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However, the threshold for union formation could have been calculated as a percentage of workers. For instance, the 20 percent threshold could have been lowered to 10 percent or 12 percent or 15 percent.

So, forming unions with 20 signatories may be challenging for workers in small industrial units, he added.

Towhidur Rahman, president of the Bangladesh Apparels Workers Federation, welcomed allowing an additional eight days for maternity leave. In the amended law, the maternity leave for workers has been increased to 120 days with pay from 112 days.

Bangladesh is not ready to adopt all kinds of standard labour law as the country needs further preparation, said Mohammed Amirul Haque, managing director and chief executive officer of Premier Cement Mills.

The outsiders will be able to instigate the union leaders in factories because of lowering the workers' threshold to 20 workers from 20 percent, he said.

The implementation of the amended labour law will be difficult and is a deterrent for industries, said Anwar-Ul-Alam Chowdhury (Parvez), president of Bangladesh Chamber of Industries.

New investors will be worried about investing because of some difficult clauses in the law, he added.

In a joint statement, the leaders of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association and the Bangladesh Textile Mills Association expressed dissatisfaction as the decisions of the Tripartite Consultative Council (TCC), the highest platform for labour law amendment, were not incorporated.

The definition of a worker, the 20-worker threshold for forming unions and the provision of the provident fund were not agreed upon at the TCC.

"We are rejecting the amended labour law -- our demands are not addressed in the amendment," said BGMEA President Mahmud Hasan Khan.

198 murders

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"Considering Dhaka's population and socio-economic dynamics, the number of incidents is at a manageable level. We are successfully uncovering the motives behind most cases and arresting the perpetrators," the DC said.

Meanwhile, at least three people, including a listed criminal and a Jubo Dal leader, were shot dead in the capital over the last eight days.

Last night, Golam Kibria, member secretary of Jubo Dal's Pallabi thana unit, was shot dead in the Pallabi area.

Police said they are investigating the killing.

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34 parties since November 13. It is scheduled to meet several more today, including the BNP, Jamaat, and NCP. By tomorrow, the EC expects to conclude talks with all 56 registered parties.

'POSTAL VOTE'

For the first time, the EC yesterday launched the "Postal Vote BD" app, marking a pioneering step to ensure the voting rights of Bangladeshi expatriates.

Through this IT-supported postal voting system, non-resident Bangladeshis in about 140 countries will be able to cast their ballots in the upcoming polls.

The registration process, divided into seven regions, will run from November 19 to December 23, with each region allotted five days.

Bangladeshis in East Asia, South America, and Africa must register between November 19 and 23; those in North America and Oceania between November 24 and 28; and in Europe from November 29 to December 3. Registration for the Middle East (Saudi Arabia) will take place from December 4 to 8, South and Southeast Asia from December 9 to 13, and the Middle East (excluding Saudi Arabia) from December 14 to 18.

After registration, voters will receive ballot papers bearing candidate symbols once nominations are finalised. These ballots, sent to expatriate voters, must be filled out

Only 44% make it to class 10 after primary

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She said early marriage remains a major factor in girls dropping out, as many families, particularly outside Dhaka, prefer to marry off their daughters rather than keep them in school.

"Affordability is another reason. A significant number of low-income families still prioritise boys for contributing to household income over continuing education and thereby push them into income-generating work by withdrawing them from school.

"Rather than seeing the value in learning, they consider it more logical to let the boys engage in alternative ways of earning," said Rasheda, also the executive director of the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE).

Another concern, she said, is the mundane learning process in post-primary schools. "The teaching learning process in our mainstream schools is not interesting enough to make the students stay in class. Since these schools are privately managed, there's a question over their quality."

Another concern, she said, is the mundane learning process in post-primary schools. "The teaching-learning process in our mainstream schools is not interesting enough to keep students in class."

Prof Siddiquir Rahman, another noted educationist, cited similar reasons, early marriage for girls and early entry into the workforce for boys.

He added that many families also find schooling for girls more expensive, as they often need to be accompanied. "While a male student can walk,

and returned to the returning officer within 16 to 28 days.

Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin, while inaugurating the app at the EC headquarters, said, "Currently, 13 crore Bangladeshis are living abroad who were previously deprived of voting rights. This initiative ends their disenfranchisement and strengthens democracy."

PUBLICITY CAMPAIGNS

Following meetings of the advisory council committees on economic affairs and government purchase at the Secretariat yesterday, Finance Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed announced that a cultural affairs ministry proposal for a voter awareness campaign had been approved in principle.

According to officials concerned, the government will spend Tk 25 crore on publicity to create a festive atmosphere ahead of the election.

The plan includes producing TVCs, video documentaries and other digital content, and displaying them through LED activation caravans in all 64 districts and 300 upazilas of the country.

In addition to government efforts, the EC has chalked out an extensive awareness campaign to inform people about the voting system, the electoral code, and other guidelines.

ROADMAP, READINESS

The EC unveiled its electoral roadmap in August. As part of the preparation, the government has made amendments to the Representation of the People

a female student often requires a rickshaw."

About the implications, Prof Siddiquir, a former director of the Institute of Education and Research at Dhaka University, said the nation is being affected in two ways due to the early dropout.

"A large number of students are deprived of education. Those who drop out do not get better work opportunities, as there are no adequate policies or programmes for their vocational training."

STEADY DECLINE

The survey reveals a steady decline in school completion as students move from primary to lower secondary and then to upper secondary across all divisions.

While 83.7 percent children complete primary school, the rate falls to 69.3 percent at the lower secondary level and drops further to 43.9 percent at upper secondary.

"The current policy in Bangladesh that focuses on universal primary education, alongside the need to prioritise attendance in higher grades, is reflected in these data," the report said.

It added that only 21 percent children from poor families complete upper secondary schooling, 23 percentage points below the national average. In contrast, around 66 percent children from well-off households reach this stage.

The survey highlighted disparities between urban and rural areas: 49 percent students in urban areas complete upper secondary education

Order, 1972, in line with the EC's recommendations. The commission also made changes to the electoral code of conduct for the parties and candidates.

On September 4, the EC finalised the delimitation of 300 constituencies, redrawing the boundaries of 46 parliamentary seats in 16 different districts across the country. Disputes over the redrawing in some constituencies led to writ petitions being filed with the High Court. The commission is, however, hopeful that these petitions will be resolved within this month.

At the end of September, the EC launched a series of dialogues with stakeholders, including former election officials, observers, civil society representatives, university teachers, and journalists.

The commission has updated guidelines for journalists, observers, and polling station setup. Trainers are now being readied to guide election officials. Final selection and training will begin after the election schedule is declared.

The EC also met law enforcement and intelligence agencies on October 20 and top government officials on October 30.

Home Adviser Lt Gen (retd) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury, while meeting with German ambassador Rudiger Loltz yesterday, said law enforcers were fully prepared to perform election duties.

compared to 42 percent in rural areas.

The decline is more pronounced in some divisions. Sylhet records the lowest completion rates at both lower and upper secondary levels.

In Dhaka, the drop is also steep: while 81.6 percent of students finish primary school, only 42.7 percent complete class 10.

The attendance rates mirror this downward trajectory. Net attendance stands at 84.3 percent at primary level but drops to 59.6 percent at lower secondary and 50.5 at upper secondary.

"Children from the poorest households and boys are less likely to attend school than those from the wealthiest households and girls. These data may reflect economic imperatives," the study said.

Sylhet stands at the bottom also in terms of attendance, with just 44 percent of students staying through upper secondary, it added.

WAY FORWARD

To retain students, Rasheda K Choudhury suggested making the teaching-learning process more engaging. "School has to be interesting, otherwise the students won't feel encouraged to stay back and learn."

She stressed the need for improving the standard of education, saying public spending on education is continuously decreasing despite repeated calls from educationists.

"If we need quality education, we will require quality teachers who will make lessons interesting. And for that, more investment in education is a must."

Dhaka to seek Interpol help in getting Hasina, Kamal back

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Talking to reporters at the foreign ministry yesterday evening, Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain said Dhaka has not yet sent the letter. "The letter is being prepared. It may be sent today [yesterday]."

The ministry will not send the copy of the ICT verdict, but a note verbal to India.

After cases were filed against Hasina, Asaduzzaman, and others in connection with crimes against humanity, the National Central Bureau (NCB) of the Bangladesh Police had formally requested Interpol's help in issuing red notices against 12 people, including Hasina, who have been declared "absconding" and are living abroad.

Red notice is a global alert declared by Interpol to find a person and to provisionally arrest them pending extradition, surrender, or equivalent legal measures.

Now, as Hasina has been convicted, the prosecution at the ICT is modifying its earlier application and will soon submit a fresh request seeking Interpol notices based on the conviction warrants, ICT Prosecutor Gazi Monawar Hossain Tamim told journalists on the ICT premises yesterday.

"The work on this process has already begun," he said.

After the ICT delivered judgment on Monday, the foreign ministry called upon India to immediately hand over convicted Hasina and Asaduzzaman.

In a statement, the ministry said, "Under the existing extradition treaty between the two countries, this is also an obligatory responsibility for India [to hand over her to Bangladesh]."

The interim government revoked the diplomatic passport of Hasina, putting her at risk of extradition. Her extradition falls within the legal framework of the extradition treaty signed between Bangladesh and India in 2013.

According to the treaty that was amended in 2016, "Extradition may be refused if the offence for which it is requested is an offence of a political character."

It also says that certain offences -- like murder -- "shall not be regarded as offences of a political character" for the purposes of the treaty.

However, one of the grounds for refusal of extradition is if the charges being pressed have not been "made in good faith, in the interest of justice".

A former Indian high commissioner to Bangladesh, seeking anonymity, told this newspaper that regardless of the law, the decision of Hasina's extradition will ultimately be a "political call".

According to Prof Sreeratha

Dutta of international affairs at the OP Jindal Global University in India, extradition will neither be an easy nor a quick process.

"Bangladesh can request extradition, but I believe it will become a long drawn judicial process. Even if Bangladesh revokes her passport, that might have no implication for India. India will question the decision and its legitimacy," Prof Dutta earlier told The Daily Star.

"Since a government politically opposed to Sheikh Hasina is the one prosecuting her, it might be perceived that she is fleeing political persecution and a threat to life. We have a history of looking after our friends."

PROSECUTOR'S STATEMENT

ICT Prosecutor Tamim said if Hasina and Asaduzzaman do not file their appeals within 30 days of the verdict delivery, they will lose the opportunity to appeal as they have been convicted under a special law.

Tamim was replying to reporters' queries.

He, however, said the Appellate Division has the authority to allow it for the sake of "complete justice, if nothing regarding this is mentioned in the law. But if a timeframe is mentioned in any special law, once the time is up, no appeal for condonation will be accepted."

Responding to another query regarding Hasina's comment that the verdict is politically motivated, and she did not get the opportunity to defend herself, Tamim said, "We welcome her remarks, as now the lawful path is open."

"She must surrender within 30 days, file an appeal, and present all her arguments before the Appellate Division. That court hears both sides and ensures justice."

Tamim said, "Let there be no misunderstanding, we categorically reject the claim that the trial was politically driven. The tribunal's proceedings were transparent to a standard that can withstand scrutiny before any court in the world. The documents and evidence we submitted would survive any legal challenge, anywhere. The punishment delivered here would be delivered there as well..."

Supreme Court lawyer Azizur Rahman Dulu, however, said that under the jurisdiction of complete justice provided by article 104 of the constitution, the Appellate Division has the authority to allow the application even after 30 days.

Mentioning the fundamental rights enshrined in the constitution, he added that the constitution is the supreme law, and it will prevail over any laws of the land that curtail fundamental rights.