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Uphold integrity, patriotism

Army chief tells new officers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Army Chief General Waker Uz Zaman yesterday called on newly commissioned officers to uphold integrity, discipline and an unwavering commitment to the nation as they embark on their military careers.

Addressing the President's Parade at the Bangladesh Military Academy in Bhatiary, he greeted those attending the ceremony marking the commissioning of officer cadets of the 89th BMA Long Course and the 60th BMA Special Course.

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Police dispersing a crowd outside Evercare Hospital in the capital's Bashundhara Residential Area yesterday afternoon. People continue to gather in front of the hospital to inquire about the health condition of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia. The former prime minister has been hospitalised since November 23.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

'Auto-rickshaw driver shot dead in drug feud'

Suspect police; family denies dispute, files case; 2 held

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

The 26-year-old CNG-run autorickshaw driver who was shot dead in the capital's Jurain area on Monday night was targeted by top drug dealers over previous enmity, police said.

The family, however, said the deceased, Pappu Sheikh, had no dispute with anyone.

Meanwhile, Rab-10 has arrested two FIR-listed accused: Yousuf Sarder, 45, and Uzzal alias Kanchi, 30. A team arrested the two from Alambagh in Jurain around 11:15am yesterday, according to a press release.

Pappu's father, Montu Sheikh, filed a murder case with Kadamtali Police Station accusing four, including Uzzal and Yousuf, who are listed as narcotics traders, said Md Ayub, officer-in-charge of the station.

Uzzal was accused in three narcotics cases, while Yousuf was accused in two.

The OC said the initial investigation indicates there may have been prior disputes over drug-related matters. Over this, absconding accused Bapparaj and others shot Pappu dead as he went to the spot with Bapparaj's rival group.

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NOVEMBER 25 BLAZE

A week on, Korail still struggling to recover

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and TOUSIF KAIUM

In a narrow lane of the Korail slum, Shafiqul Islam and Fatema Begum begin preparing tea before dawn.

Their small stall in the Boubazar area runs until midnight, but it now brings in only Tk 500 to Tk 700 a day, about half of what they earned before last week's devastating fire.

The November 25 blaze destroyed or partially damaged around 1,500 shanties in Korail, leaving hundreds homeless and turning long-established households into ashes, including Shafiqul and Fatema's.

Shafiqul, a father of four, said he once ran a small shop selling tea, cigarettes and groceries.

"It covered our expenses and sometimes left a little extra." Over seven years, he had invested around Tk 2.5 lakh in the business.

"But the fire destroyed everything. For our six-member family, I had to borrow money from my sister to restart the stall," he said.

Yesterday afternoon, the couple was

seen serving tea on two small tables, using brand new kettles, cups and spoons. Their stall now stocks only a few items: cigarettes, bread and biscuits.

Fatema said she borrowed Tk 38,000 from her maternal aunt to buy all the utensils and supplies again.



PHOTO: STAR

Shafiqul Islam at his tea stall inside the Korail slum. After losing everything in last week's fire, he had to borrow money to restart his little shop.

Earlier, the stall earned Tk 6,000 to Tk 8,000 a day because it was fully stocked, with profits of Tk 1,000 to Tk 1,200 that kept the family going.

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Bangladesh can 'reset the narrative' with credible polls

Says EU envoy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has a chance to reset the narrative with credible and professionally run elections, European Union Ambassador in Dhaka Michael Miller said yesterday.

This is a time when the country can reset its reputation with its international partners and demonstrate that it can hold these elections in a very correct and professional manner, he told reporters after a four-member EU delegation met Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin at Nirbachan Bhaban in Agargaon in the morning.

Miller said the EU is preparing to deploy a very large election observer

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Need stronger political will for disability inclusion

Ekushey Padak-winning disability rights activist Saidul Huq tells Star

NILIMA JAHAN

As the country is set to observe the International Day of Persons with Disabilities today, Ekushey Padak-winning activist Md Saidul Huq has urged stronger political commitment to ensure the full participation of persons with disabilities.

Huq, founder and executive director of the Blind Education and Rehabilitation Development Organisation, told The Daily Star that disability issues continue to be overlooked in policies, party manifestos and organisational structures, even with the national election approaching.

He said persons with disabilities remain under-represented in electoral processes, leadership roles and policymaking.

Their political empowerment, he stressed, is a rights-based responsibility of the state, not charity.

"The government must proactively integrate disability inclusion into policies, manifestos and organisational structures," said Huq, who himself is visually impaired.

He, however, emphasised that systemic gaps in laws and policies still prevent persons with disabilities from exercising their rights fully.



Women with disabilities face higher risks of sexual, psychological and physical violence. Adequate protective measures and legal support systems are urgently needed. The state must ensure safe shelters and accessible justice mechanisms.

He highlighted Bangladesh's slow progress in implementing disability rights laws and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Although Bangladesh ratified the CRPD in 2007 and replaced the 2001 disability law with the Disability Rights and Protection Act 2013, implementation remains weak due to inadequate political will.

"There is not enough funding for essential services, such as specialised schools, healthcare centres and accessible infrastructure," Huq said.

Awareness among persons with disabilities about the law is also limited, he added.

He pointed to tangible consequences of policy gaps, such as last year's quota reforms, which reduced job opportunities for persons with disabilities in both public and private sectors.

"After the July uprising, the changes that followed reduced our prospects. Only a 1 percent quota now exists for government jobs, which is insufficient."

He called for raising quotas to 2 percent for grades 9-13 and 5 percent for grades 14-20, divided by disability type to ensure effectiveness.

"Quotas must be strictly enforced, recruitment processes monitored, and hiring agencies held accountable. Only then can inclusion in public and private-sector employment move beyond paper commitments."

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Fair polls alone cannot guarantee democracy

Says Badiul Alam Majumdar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has held several fair elections in the past, but these did not lead to a democratic transition, said Badiul Alam Majumdar, secretary of Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik, yesterday.

He said elections are essential but not sufficient on their own, as true democratic transition requires legal, institutional and structural reforms.

He made the remarks at a roundtable titled "Fair Elections and Democratic Transition: Citizens' Reflections," organised by Shujan at the Cirdap auditorium in Dhaka.

Badiul Alam, who also heads the electoral reform commission, said elections are only the first step in the democratic process. Although some previous elections may be considered fair and neutral, they did not result in a democratic transition, he added.

He said a democratic transition means establishing a sustainable democratic system where every election is fair, good governance is ensured and citizens'

democratic and civil rights are protected. Despite a few fair elections, such a system has not taken shape.

To achieve a democratic transition after a fair election, he said issues such as creating a clean political environment must be addressed.

Explaining the decline in political integrity, he said the electoral system has become criminalised over time, allowing wrongdoers to enter parliament and undermine the political sphere.

He added that major corruption in the country is carried out under political protection. Large-scale corruption, he said, stems from collusion among politicians, some bureaucrats and businesspeople.

He called for legal, institutional and structural reforms to change these conditions.

Political scientist Prof Dilara Chowdhury, photographer Shahidul Alam and Electoral Reform Commission member Jesmin Tuli also spoke at the event.

The discussion was chaired by Shujan Vice President MA Matin.

Elections are only the first step in the democratic process. Although some previous elections may be considered fair and neutral, they did not result in a democratic transition.



Women entrepreneurs from Chawk Bazar, Narayanganj and Munshiganj rent a boat for the day to make door to door sales by visiting several residential areas in Dhaka. These small business owners purchase daily household items made of plastic and steel from their respective areas and sell them to earn around Tk 500 to Tk 600 a day. The photo was taken yesterday in the Mitford area of Old Dhaka, on the north bank of the Buriganga river.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN