

MY DHAKA

Dhaka's rhythm of heat and rain

RBR

A tree toppled during the recent nor'wester is being cleared away from Ramna Park.***

It was as if the heavens took offence at my last piece on Dhaka's heatwave shaming. They replied with thundering, sharp cracks like the lash of a whip, ripping the sky with electrifying jolts of lightning. Then came the rains – pouring until our scorched moods softened and we had our fill.

Kalboishakhi, our nor'wester, is an intense, fleeting storm that strikes almost without warning. It lashes the horizon as though the sky itself has fractured. This is the unpredictable rhythm of our summer month, Boishakh.

This rain relief should not be confused with the monsoon rains. Those are the incessant downpours with occasional breaks. What we witnessed was the sudden darkening of the northwest sky, heavy black clouds, and violent, localised thunderstorms with high winds and often hail. These are the pre-monsoon rehearsals, striking between March and May. And there is a certain indescribable beauty to both.

With fierce Kalboishakhi storms and hail, you will invariably hear of green mangoes taking a hit. You'll see young and old alike hurrying to collect that windfall – in every sense of the word.



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Alongside this fun comes the joy of getting drenched to the core. Whenever I sense an overcast sky inviting heavy clouds, I rush to the roof as though my plants need tending. I love getting wet in the rain, and to this day I still indulge in a "brishhti te bheja" – a deliberate soaking in the downpour.

That reckless streak in me revels in the electric charge of the air. Kalboishakhi never begins as a drizzle; it falls all at once, a torrential weight, warm yet striking like cold stones against my skin. In the roar of the storm, if you dare to step outside, its splendour

is both terrifying and magnificent – you are stripped down to nothing but nerves and adrenaline.

When the chaos of the downpour subsided, I paused to appreciate the sunset over Dhaka. My mood was perfectly tuned to the storm's frequency.

I was returning from an errand, crossing Uttara's third phase, when I was met by that rare golden light of dusk – the kind that appears only after a heavy rain. Shower, when the setting sun sheepishly offers its last perfect glow. That golden light after a stormy sunset

is often called the photographer's hour. Though I spent much of my career conducting photoshoots, I was a poor photographer – I could never truly capture the divinity of that "godhuli logon", that twilight hour.

The evening's golden light, a rainbow arched across the sky, a cool breeze, and rain-drenched greenery bursting with joy – together they made last evening a gift I will not forget, but only until the next heatwave.

I stopped by the famous Uttara farmer's market and treated myself to a steaming cup of tea, a naga shingara, and onion fritters – not forgetting to buy a bag full of fresh greens. The array of shak, the leafy greens or edible leaves on the outskirts of the metro, deserves its own story.

For now, let us savour these short-overcast hours and sudden storms. Dhaka is forecast to see a wet week ahead, with heavy rain dominating most days through early May. Expect frequent thunderstorms, cooler temperatures compared to the recent heat, and high humidity.

So, keep your umbrella handy, enjoy the cooler evenings after the storms, but never forget the electrolyte drink. And let us welcome the storms as fleeting gifts – moments when Dhaka's heat loosens its grip, and the city glows in that golden twilight, reminding us that even the fiercest rains leave behind a gentler light.

Harvest or not, heartbreak almost certain Most exit polls give BJP edge in West Bengal

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Moniruzzaman said farmers will be allowed to use private rice mills and government warehouses to dry their paddy with departmental support, after which the Directorate General of Food will procure the dried paddy directly. Millers are also being encouraged to quickly purchase paddy and process it into rice so the government can maximise procurement while sustaining mill operations.

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman told parliament yesterday that the government will identify and assist haor farmers affected by heavy downpours over the next three months.

After Sunamganj-5 MP Kalim Uddin Ahmed raised the issue, Tarique said, "Based on weather reports three days ago, I instructed local administrations in three haor districts, including Sunamganj, to take preparations according to forecasts and decide what measures could be taken in case of rainfall."

The prime minister described the situation facing haor farmers as "very painful". "Even before this sitting began this morning, I spoke with the disaster management minister and instructed him that three haor districts along with some areas of Mymensingh have faced various problems due to heavy rainfall."

RIVERS SWELLING

As of yesterday afternoon, the Someshwari, Bhugai-Kangsha, and Mogra rivers in Netrokona, Manu in

Moulvibazar, and Sutang in Habiganj were flowing above the danger mark, according to the Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC) of the Bangladesh Water Development Board.

The FFWC also forecast that the Surma and Kushiya rivers may cross the danger level in the next three days, flooding vast areas in Sunamganj, Sylhet, and Habiganj. Heavy rainfall is likely to worsen the situation in Netrokona.

With three rivers swelling in Netrokona, almost all haors – including Sonadubi, Goradoba, Angajura, Holavanga, and Boichajuri – have been inundated.

Nikli recorded the country's highest rainfall of 160mm in 24 hours till yesterday morning, while Habiganj saw 125mm, according to the FFWC and Bangladesh Meteorological Department.

Rainfall upstream in India is decreasing, with 74mm recorded in Tripura's Agartala and 68mm in Mawkrywat, Meghalaya, according to the India Meteorological Department.

Farmers in the haor region cultivated paddy on 4,55,000 hectares this Boro season, according to the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE).

With freshly submerged croplands, 5,715 hectares are now flooded, with around half the district's paddy on the verge of damage, the DAE estimates.

Md Abu Zafur Al Munsur, deputy director for monitoring at the DAE

field service wing, said latest estimates suggest rice crops on 27,000-28,000 hectares are at risk. "The crops may not be fully damaged if the water recedes within 15 days," he added.

Asked about crop damage this season, Md Obaidur Rahman Mondol, director of the DAE field service wing, said it would take two to three days after the rain stops to assess the extent of losses.

Md Jamal Uddin, additional director for monitoring and implementation at the DAE field service wing, said 71 drier machines were being mobilised to Sunamganj as support.

According to the Bureau of Statistics, haor areas contribute nearly 20 percent of the country's total Boro production.

DEBTS, DEATHS AND FALLING PRICES

Azizul Haque, a farmer from Hakaluki Haor in Moulvibazar's Kulara, said, "The harvested paddy is rotting on the floors as we cannot thresh or dry it. All we see is our hard-earned crop decaying. I am in huge debt for this harvest, and my family will suffer for the rest of the year."

In Nikli's Singpur area of Kishoreganj, Abdul Qadir hired labourers at Tk 1,200 per day after seeing one acre of land all-out on Tuesday evening. But by yesterday morning, his paddy was submerged, labourers refused to work in water, and a thunderstorm alert loomed overhead.

Farmer Nur Hossain

of Majlishpur in Nikli, Kishoreganj, was seen walking with an umbrella beside one of the largest threshing floors. "In favourable weather, hundreds of farmers and children would be busy threshing paddy here, but now the floors are empty. It is not just the fear of rain, but also of lightning," he said.

Alongside torrential rainfall, Kalboishakhi thunderstorms have struck different parts of the country, with lightning emerging as the deadliest hazard for farmers.

Media reports say 38 people have been killed by lightning strikes across the country this month alone, more than half of them farmers working in paddy fields.

Amid this crisis, many farmers are being forced to sell their harvested paddy at cheaper rates.

Makhon Mia of Siloni village in Itna, Kishoreganj, said prices are the lowest in years. He sold paddy at Tk 650-800 per maund (37.32kg) depending on quality, though production costs reached Tk 1,200 per maund due to higher fuel and fertiliser prices.

"While prices of everything else are rising, the value of farmers' produce is declining," he said.

[Our correspondents Sukanta Halder, Dwaha Chowdhury, Mintu Deshwar, Jaydul Islam, Talisul Aziz and Masuk Hridoy contributed to the report]

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year rule. Two surveys said TMC is expected to retain power. Meanwhile, one survey predicted a neck-and-neck fight between the parties.

Almost all the surveys showed very few seats for the Indian National Congress, the CPI (M) and the Indian Secular Front.

Buoyed by the survey results, the BJP, which never ruled the state, expressed confidence in forming government with a clear majority, while the TMC rejected the exit poll predictions and said it hopes to retain power with the people's mandate.

According to Matrize, a survey agency, the BJP is likely to win 146 to 161 seats, while the TMC is projected to secure 125 to 140. Other parties are expected to win 6 to 10 seats.

According to P Marq, the BJP is likely to win 150 to 175 seats, the TMC 118 to 138, and others 2 to 6 seats.

Chanakya Strategies has predicted 150 to 160 seats for the BJP, with the TMC at 130 to 140 and other parties at 2 to 6 seats.

Praja Poll gave the BJP the highest tally among the

exit polls released yesterday, projecting 178 to 208 seats, followed by the TMC with 85 to 110 seats, and others with 0 to 5 seats.

The exit poll conducted by Poll Diary projected 142 to 171 seats for the BJP, while the TMC is expected to win 99 to 127 seats. Other parties are projected to secure five to nine Assembly seats.

On the other end of the spectrum is Janmat Polls, whose data predict that the Trinamool Congress will get a thumping majority for the third straight time. The agency has predicted between 195 and 205 seats for the Mamata Banerjee-led party and 80-90 for the BJP, which is very close to the figures both parties had in the 2021 elections.

Peoples Pulse also predicted the BJP to win 95 to 110 seats and giving the TMC an outright majority of 177 to 187 seats, with other parties winning 1 to 4 seats.

Meanwhile, the JVC Exit Poll predicted a neck-and-neck battle between the duo, giving the BJP 138-159 seats and the TMC 131-152 seats.

Votes will be counted on May 4, and results will be declared the same day.

The Election Commission's contentious Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls has further complicated predictions. While the TMC used the exercise – which led to the deletion of 91 lakh voters – to attack the BJP, its impact on the ground remains unclear.

Exit polls in India have a mixed record and can be inaccurate.

In 2021, several exit polls not only failed to capture the TMC's dominant showing of 215 seats in the 294-member assembly, but some also gave the BJP an outright majority. The BJP won 77 seats, well short of the 148-seat majority mark.

In every assembly polls since the TMC first came to power in 2011, the party has increased its seat tally, from 184 in 2011 to 215 in 2021. In the 2021 election, the BJP won 77 seats.

After the polling ended, Suvendu Adhikari, leader of the opposition and BJP candidate from Nandigram and Bhabanipur, expressed confidence that the party would form government with around 180 seats.

Shashi Panja, TMC leader and a former Mamata-led

cabinet member, rejected the exit poll projections.

"We've seen exit polls like this before. But when the party emerged victorious, did anyone apologise? This keeps happening," she said.

"The answer to all this will be known on May 4," she added.

TMC spokesperson Arup Chakraborty also expressed confidence that the party would win the polls.

Apart from West Bengal, assembly elections were held in three states – Assam, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu – as well as the Union Territory of Puducherry. Results will be announced on May 4.

Exit polls in these regions projected a BJP return in Assam and Puducherry. In Tamil Nadu, the DMK led alliance, headed by former chief minister MK Stalin, is predicted to return to power.

In Kerala, the Congress-led United Democratic Front is tipped to return to power after 10 years, defeating the Left Democratic Front led by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan. Most surveys projected only a few seats for the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance in the state.

Control over cattle market

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Hasan Helal alias Pichchi Helal, and several others, including Badal alias Killer Badal alias Kaila Badal, Shahjahan, and Rony alias Dagari Rony, in connection with the rivalry.

According to the complaint, Titon had recently been in dispute with them over the lease of the Bosila cattle market. Investigators and family sources said he was called to the New Market area on Tuesday for a meeting to settle the matter, and was shot dead while returning.

No arrests had been made till filing of this report, but several teams from different law enforcement agencies were working to identify and arrest those involved.

Titon's elder brother, Khondaker Saeed Akhtar Ripon, filed the case against eight to nine unidentified assailants with New Market Police Station yesterday morning, Mohammad Ayub, officer-in-charge of the police station, told The Daily Star.

In the complaint, Ripon said his brother was released on bail on August 13, 2024, after spending a long time in jail, and had wanted to rebuild his life through honest work.

A few days ago, Titon told Ripon that he had secured a lease schedule and hoped to earn a living through business. On April 26, he said he was in dispute with Helal, Badal, Shahjahan, and Rony over the Bosila cattle market lease.

The next day, he said he

had been called for a meeting to resolve the matter and work together.

Later on Tuesday night, family members learned that Titon had been gunned down in the New Market area.

According to police, Titon entered the underworld in the early 1990s, first as a local gang member before expanding his network. He was also involved in arms trading and faced several murder cases, including the high-profile killing of businessman Babar Elahi.

His name appeared second on the government's list of 23 top criminals in 2001. Law enforcers arrested him in the Dhaka Cantonment area in 2004. A decade later, he was sentenced to death in the Babar Elahi murder case.

Police officials said Titon, along with several other alleged top criminals listed by police, was released from jail after the fall of the Awami League government during the 2024 uprising. They said he did not appear in court afterward and was in "hiding".

Shafiqul Islam, additional commissioner (Detective Branch) of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said at a press briefing yesterday that investigators had identified some suspects in connection with the incident.

"As you know, Titon himself was a listed top criminal. Initially, we believe the murder was linked to a dispute over control of the area."

About the names

mentioned in the complaint, including Pichchi Helal and Badal, he said police were acting on the complaint filed by the plaintiff.

"There was rivalry over dominance. As you know, Eid-ul-Azha is approaching, and there was also conflict over the cattle market. We will identify those involved and take legal action."

Contacted by The Daily Star, Titon's brother Ripon, said Titon visited his family in Jashore twice after being released from jail and stayed in touch occasionally through messaging apps.

Titon is also the brother-in-law of top criminal Sanjiddul Haque Emon.

Ripon added that claims of conflict between Titon and Emon were inaccurate and intended to divert the investigation.

According to the family, Titon bought the schedule for the Bosila cattle market in the name of one of his friends. Meanwhile, Pichchi Helal allegedly secured the schedule in the name of Badal.

They said the two sides held several rounds of talks, during which Helal reportedly proposed a negotiation.

Ripon said Titon was supposed to submit the schedule for the cattle market lease yesterday.

Shimul, who is acquainted with Titon, said he was not alone at the spot and was accompanied by several men.

The family initially suspected Pichchi Helal due

74% measles patients

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Officials of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), Unicef Bangladesh and the World Health Organisation Bangladesh shared the information during a press conference at the DGHS yesterday.

DGHS arranged the press conference at its headquarters in the capital's Mohakhali to disseminate the latest information about the ongoing vaccination campaign amid the measles outbreak.

Earlier, before the authorities lowered the vaccination age to six months only for the ongoing campaigns on March 30, the DGHS said 34 percent of the patients who contracted measles were below nine months old, or the age required to get the first shot.

So far, 1.09 crore children have received the vaccine during the campaign, which is 61 percent of the total targeted children, said Pravath Chandra Biswas, director general of DGHS.

"This is a very positive development. We hope that we will come down from the peak of the outbreak very soon," he said.

Vaccination in 30 high-burden upazilas across 18 districts began on April 5, said Chiranjit Das, national professional officer (immunisation) at WHO Bangladesh.

Case reporting from these upazilas has declined sharply since April 17 and the number of cases across the country is expected to fall as the nationwide vaccination campaign continues, he said.

Asked when nationwide cases would decline, Riad Mahmud, health manager (immunisation) at UNICEF Bangladesh, said more than one crore children out of the targeted 1.8 crore have already been vaccinated, and no new infections have been reported from the 30 upazilas that have already come under vaccination.

"This gives us hope."

In areas where vaccination is ongoing, it takes three to four weeks to see a visible impact.

"So, we expect the number of cases to decline sharply by the end of May," he added.

The vaccination campaign in four city corporations – Dhaka South, Dhaka North, Barishal and Mymensingh – started on April 20 and will continue until May 20.

The nationwide campaign also began on April 20; it will end in city areas on May 20 and in the rest of the country on May 10.

Meanwhile, DGHS recorded one more suspected measles death in the 24 hours to 8:00am yesterday, taking the total number of suspected deaths to 227, Biswas said.

No confirmed death was reported during the time, meaning the confirmed deaths remained unchanged at 47.

In the last 24 hours, a total of 88 confirmed measles cases were recorded, taking the total confirmed cases to 4,944.

Some 1,318 suspected cases were recorded during the same time, taking the total suspected cases to 35,980.

Govt pitches charter panel, opposition seeks time

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a list of 12 – seven from BNP and five from other parties. If the opposition provides five names, we want to present the matter tomorrow [Thursday] and move forward with forming the special committee."

Following the minister's proposal, Deputy Speaker Kayser Kamal addressed the opposition leader, "The government side has prepared a list of 12 members. From your opposition side, five names are requested. Thus, the special committee will have 17 members. Kindly provide your five names so the formation process can proceed."

Opposition Leader and Jamaat Ameer Shafiqur Rahman responded that the chief whip spoke to him, conveying greetings from Leader of the House and Prime Minister Tarique Rahman.

"I told him we have matters to discuss among ourselves. There are conceptual differences. We cannot give an opinion right now. We will inform later. It may not be possible today [Wednesday]."

"We want reform [of

the constitution], but here it is amendment. We had differences before, and that remain. We have received and listened to the proposal, but we will respond later. At this moment, we are not making any statement."

Thanking the opposition leader, the law minister said, "We have no objection. We will wait. We will move forward with constitutional amendments in light of the July charter. Waiting until the next session is not a problem."

Constitutional reforms or amendments remain a flashpoint between the opposition and the ruling party.

Calling the July Charter Implementation Order "a document of endless deceit and national betrayal", the treasury bench on March 31 recommended forming an all-party special parliamentary body to amend the constitution.

In response, Opposition Leader Shafiqur proposed a separate special parliamentary committee to convene the Constitution Reform Council. "But our

appeal is that the committee should have an equal number of members from both sides, so that we can present our views properly."

The lawmakers were participating in a discussion on an adjournment motion brought by the opposition leader, calling for convening the Constitution Reform Council in accordance with the July Charter Implementation Order.

Under the order, members of the 13th Parliament were expected to perform a dual role – serving as lawmakers and as members of a Constitution Reform Council – to deal with 48 constitutional provisions outlined in the July charter within 180 working days.

For this purpose, MPs were required to take two separate oaths: one as members of parliament and another as members of the council.

However, the council was not convened.

According to the order, the first session of the council should be convened in the same manner as the first session of parliament – within 30 calendar days

of the election results being declared.

However, this has not yet been done.

MPs from the BNP-led alliance refused to take oath as members of the Constitution Reform Council. Meanwhile, 77 MPs from the Jamaat-led 11-party alliance took both oaths.

The July National Charter was drafted by the National Consensus Commission through discussions with political parties. Of its proposals, 48 relate to the constitution. On several of the fundamental reform proposals, BNP holds differing views and issued notes of dissent. The party supports constitutional amendment according to its own position.

On the other hand, Jamaat, NCP, and other opposition parties favour implementing all the proposals of the July charter through a Constitutional Reform Council.

A referendum was held to implement the 48 constitution-related proposals and "yes" won.