

Tofail Ahmed laid to rest with state honour

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

Tofail Ahmed, a key figure in the mass uprising of 1969 and an organiser of the Liberation War, was laid to rest in his ancestral village in Bhola yesterday.

The veteran Awami League leader was buried in the family graveyard beside his mother Fatema Begum in Koralia village under South Dighaldi union in Bhola's Sadar upazila following a namaz-e-janaza after Zuhr prayer, reports our correspondent from the spot.

Thousands of grieving residents of Bhola bid a tearful farewell to the former commerce minister.

Earlier, a helicopter carrying his body arrived at the Bhola helipad around 1:30pm, drawing thousands of people who gathered to catch a final glimpse of the leader widely regarded as Bhola's most prominent political figure.

His body was later taken to the Bhola Government High School ground, where a namaza-e-janaza was held. People from all walks of life, irrespective of political affiliation, attended the janaza to pay their last respects. He was given a guard of honour there before the janaza.

SEE PAGE 8 COL 4



Thousands gather to catch a final glimpse of Tofail Ahmed and pay their last respects after his body arrived in Bhola town yesterday afternoon.

PHOTO: MONIR UDDIN ANIK

Boy killed by mortar shell in Bandarban

Child was playing with unexploded ordnance

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

A 12 year-old boy was killed in a mortar shell explosion near the Bangladesh-Myanmar border in Bandarban's Naikhongchhari upazila yesterday afternoon.

The victim, Satnaing Tanchangya, was the son of Kinghla Tanchangya of Baishphari Tanchangya Para in Ghumdhum union, said police.

His native home is in Medai village under Dekibunia in Myanmar's Rakhine state, said Mohammad Mozzamel Haque, officer-in-charge of Naikhongchhari Police Station.

Police and local representatives said Satnaing and his family came to Bandarban from Myanmar's Rakhine two years ago following the war between the Arakan Army and Myanmar's military junta.

According to police, the explosion took place in the Moringajhiri area, around 100 yards northeast of Border Pillar 39 in Ward No 3 of Ghumdhum union.

Citing locals, the OC said the boy had gone to a jhum field with his parents in the morning. While his parents were constructing a temporary shelter, he wandered around the area and played by himself.

At one point, he found a mortar shell and started playing with it. The device exploded, killing him on the spot. His parents were present in the field at the time.

The OC said locals later recovered the body and brought it to the Baishphari area. The exact circumstances of the incident will be determined after an investigation.

Lt Col SM Khairul Alam, commanding officer of BGB-34 Naikhongchhari Battalion, said a child died in an explosion at a jhum field near the zero line adjacent to Border Pillar 41 in the Baishphari border area of Ghumdhum.

He said the matter is being treated with utmost importance and necessary measures have been taken.

Cities to fight dengue blind

FROM PAGE 1

adding that a field hospital is ready at Dhaka Medical College Hospital to provide treatment to patients.

If needed, more field hospitals will be established in different parts of the country.

The government yesterday directed private hospitals across the country to provide free treatment to dengue patients in at least 10 percent of their beds, while also mandating discounts of up to 80 percent on dengue-related diagnostic tests.

The directives were issued during Sardar's meeting on dengue preparedness with representatives from private hospitals, diagnostic centres and private medical college associations.

But entomologists said preparedness cannot depend only on hospital management once infections begin to surge.

They stressed that preventing mosquito breeding before the outbreak season is the most effective way to reduce infections and deaths.

Surveys are crucial for evidence-based decision-making and targeted control measures and should be

conducted nationwide across all cities, said Kabirul Bashar, a professor at Jahangirnagar University's zoology department.

He said they carry out small surveys in different cities and towns for their research and found almost every city in Bangladesh is now affected by dengue.

The survey currently being conducted by DSCC is a positive step, but it should have started earlier to yield better results, he said.

The previous surveys were not very effective as they were not conducted comprehensively across the country, said GM Saifur Rahman, associate professor of the National University of Bangladesh's zoology department.

The surveys were mainly limited to Dhaka city, which reduced their effectiveness, he said, adding that effective results could have been achieved through representative sampling across the country.

"There needs to be representation from high-infection areas, low-infection areas, and other regions; that is what we call representative sampling,"

Saifur stressed the need for

baseline, sentinel, and hotspot surveillance.

Until 2024, the DGHS regularly conducted three entomological surveys every year -- pre-monsoon, monsoon and post-monsoon -- to detect the presence of Aedes mosquito larvae in different areas of the two Dhaka city corporations.

The studies used to be conducted under the Communicable Diseases Control Programme, a component of the fourth Health, Population and Nutrition Sector Programme (HPNSP).

The programme's tenure expired in June 2024, and the interim government cancelled the proposed fifth HPNSP, creating a financing gap for the work.

Although all three surveys were conducted in 2024, the DGHS could not carry out any survey last year due to a funding crisis, according to DGHS officials.

However, a pre-monsoon survey was conducted last year by the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR).

But neither the DGHS nor the IEDCR has taken any steps to carry

out such a survey this year.

Only for the previous year, the health ministry gave the responsibility and budget to IEDCR for the entomological survey, said its director Tahmina Sharmina on May 23.

If the responsibility is given to IEDCR this year too, IEDCR is ready to do the surveys.

Contacted, Prof Halimur Rashid, director (disease control) of DGHS, said they were not carrying out any survey due to a funding crisis after the expiry of the sector programme.

He also appeared to downplay the initiative. "This [survey] is not important. We have to kill all mosquitoes."

Besides, the DGHS's task is to ensure curative services, he said, adding that the city corporation should conduct such surveys.

A DSCC official said they completed their survey on May 27 and are now analysing the data.

"We hope to disseminate the data through a press conference within a few days and will take necessary steps based on the survey findings," he said, seeking anonymity.

CPJ urges govt

FROM PAGE 1

100 days into the BNP government's tenure.

"Press freedom in Bangladesh has too often been treated as an opportunity for each new government to turn the law against journalists allegedly aligned with the previous administration," said CPJ's Asia-Pacific Programme Coordinator Kunal Majumder in the statement.

"Prime Minister Tarique Rahman's government pledged to be different, but 100 days in, meaningful progress remains limited."

Bangladesh has had three governments in under two years. Through each transition, journalists have been detained, prosecuted, surveilled, attacked, and vilified, often for their perceived alignment with whichever government had just fallen, the statement said.

It also referred to a report by The Daily Star, which said police were conducting background checks and profiling journalists across the country.

The rights body listed 10 steps to restore press freedom, beginning with ending the use of the criminal justice system against journalists.

"The government could start by releasing imprisoned journalists, dropping politically motivated cases, ending political vendettas, protecting journalists from mob violence, halting smear campaigns, and fixing laws that make such actions possible," it said, adding that dozens of journalists who produced coverage seen as supportive of deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina had been detained or charged since August 2024.

Authorities often criminalise journalists through First Information Reports naming hundreds of people, or through cases filed against unidentified people and later used to "accuse reporters of wrongdoing", CPJ said.

It mentioned Farzana Rupa, Shakil Ahmed, and Mozzammel Babu of Ekattor TV; and Shyamal Dutta of Bhorer Kagoi, who have been detained since August-September 2024.

Farzana and Shakil were granted bail in most cases by the High Court on May 11, but remain detained in other cases.

The CPJ urged the government to review all cases against journalists, stop opposing bail in cases arising from journalistic work, and end mass FIRs and case-stacking.

On May 28, when PM Tarique

marked 100 days in office, an Editors' Council delegation handed the government a list of 282 journalists facing politically motivated cases, the rights body said.

Information Minister Zahir Uddin Swapon said the prime minister expressed solidarity with the council and directed the authorities to take necessary measures regarding the lawsuits, the statement said, adding that acknowledgement must be followed by action.

CPJ also urged the government to stop using the International Crimes Tribunal against journalists.

"At least 25 journalists are under ICT investigation, many over genocide or crimes against humanity allegations tied to their alleged support for the Hasina government," it said, adding that media liability precedents under international criminal law concerned direct and sustained incitement of mass killing, not editorial decisions on contentious coverage.

The CPJ called for accountability for crimes against journalists, regardless of politics, through transparent and independent investigations.

Referring to the December 2025 unrest, it said the offices of Prothom Alo and The Daily Star were attacked and set on fire, trapping journalists inside burning newsrooms.

It also called for replacing or substantially amending the Cyber Protection Act, 2026, and dismissing politically motivated cybercrime cases.

The group further urged reforms to the Anti-Terrorism Act, Special Powers Act, and Official Secrets Act, saying these laws have frequently been used against journalists. It also asked the government not to adopt the draft broadcast and media commission ordinances in their current forms.

The CPJ also called for implementation of the Media Reform Commission's recommendations, and for reforming accreditation, introducing safeguards against abusive litigation, repealing criminal defamation provisions, and reforming surveillance and interception laws.

It asked the government to end smear campaigns against journalists, including labels such as "pro-India", "anti-Islam", "traitors", or agents of the former government.

"Journalism is protected under article 39 of the constitution and article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights," the statement added.

PM's first visit abroad likely to be KL, then Beijing

FROM PAGE 1

and global geopolitical environment.

Initially, there were discussions on visits to Bhutan or Saudi Arabia instead of India or China. The decision to choose Malaysia, foreign policy observers say, reflects a balanced approach by the BNP government.

The new government is pursuing a foreign policy dictum of "Bangladesh First" in place of the previous Awami League slogan, "Friendship to all, malice to none."

"Just days ahead of Eid, prime minister expressed interest that his first visit would be to Malaysia before China," a senior government official told this correspondent.

Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman has made official visits to India and

China, while Expatriates Welfare Minister Ariful Haque Choudhury and the Prime Minister's Adviser on Expatriates' Welfare Mahdi Amin visited Malaysia in early April.

Foreign ministry officials said preparations are under way for both visits, but the agendas have not been finalised. The foreign minister is currently in the US for the UN General Assembly presidential election.

"More discussions will be held before finalising the agenda and the delegation," an official said.

However, officials said key issues for the Malaysia visit are expected to include opening of the labour market, migrant welfare, education cooperation, and boosting trade and investment.

About 800,000 Bangladeshi migrants work in Malaysia, but the foreign labour market has remained closed since June 1, 2024, following allegations of irregularities in recruitment.

Around 12,000 Bangladeshi students, second only to Chinese students, are currently studying in Malaysia.

Malaysian authorities are also keen to expand cooperation in the education sector, officials said.

"There is significant scope to boost trade and investment, including in semiconductors and halal food, but we have not done enough beyond labour migration," an official said.

China remains Bangladesh's largest import source, with annual

imports worth about \$25 billion, and is also a key development partner in infrastructure.

Officials said Chinese investment in new projects slowed after the fall of the Awami League government amid political uncertainty. Following the formation of the BNP government, both sides are now discussing fresh funding.

China is keen on the prime minister's visit to Beijing, which could open new avenues for investment and financing, officials said.

"Bangladesh sought Chinese support for the Teesta River management project during Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman's visit to Beijing. This will be on the list," an official said.

Testifying ends in a day, arguments today

FROM PAGE 1

The court is scheduled to examine the accused and hear arguments today.

Supreme Court lawyer Musa Kalimullah represented the accused as state defence counsel and cross-examined the witnesses.

Ramisa's father, Abdul Hannan Mollah, was the first witness. At one stage, he became emotional and, after feeling unwell, obtained the court's permission to continue his testimony while seated.

He said he left home for work around 9:30am on May 19 and was later informed by his wife that Ramisa was missing.

After returning home, he found a crowd gathered outside the building. His wife told him Ramisa was trapped inside a neighbouring flat, whose occupants were not responding despite repeated requests to open the door.

"A man was already trying to break the lock... I then ran downstairs, brought a hammer, and tried to break the lock. Other people also joined in."

"Eventually, the lock broke... After entering, ... I saw blood inside one of the toilets. At that time, I saw Swapna standing silently. The room where the accused lived was locked. One of the people present lifted a steel bed and found Ramisa's head inside a bucket. Then, I lost consciousness," he said.

He added, "Later, the police

arrived and completed the necessary procedures. Afterwards, I went to the police station and filed the case based on these events."

Then Ramisa's mother, Parveen Akhter, testified.

She said while she was cooking that morning, she asked her elder daughter, Raisa, to visit her uncle's house. Ramisa also wanted to go, but Raisa left without her, and Parveen did not realise the child had gone out alone.

"While I was in the kitchen, I heard screams. I thought it was the child from the neighbouring flat making noise. A little later, I noticed that our door was open."

Parveen continued: "A short while later, Raisa returned home alone. I asked her, 'Why are you alone? Where is Ramisa?' I went downstairs but could not find Ramisa there. I asked people whether they had seen her."

She said she had noticed one of her daughter's shoes in front of the door of the accused's flat on the second floor.

"I knocked on the door, but no one responded. Then I screamed. People from different flats came over. They also knocked on the door, but no one opened it. Later, 10 or 12 people came upstairs. By that time, my husband had returned from work."

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She further said, "After the door was opened and we went inside, I saw the bathroom was flooded with blood.

I saw my daughter's head in one place and her body in another. At that time, I saw Swapna inside the flat."

Pointing to Swapna in the dock, Parveen said she repeatedly pleaded with Swapna, a neighbour on the same floor, to open the door, but she did not.

She also pointed to Soheli and stated: "Later I heard that he [Soheli] raped my daughter, murdered her, and escaped by cutting through the window grill."

Raisa testified via camera because she is a minor, according to the prosecution.

The day's proceedings concluded with testimony from investigating officer Ohiduzzaman, a sub-inspector of Pallabi Police Station.

Amid growing public anger, Prime Minister Tarique Rahman on May 23 said the maximum punishment for Ramisa's killer would be ensured within a month, while Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed promised an exemplary trial at the earliest.

The swift proceedings have been welcomed by rights activists.

Supreme Court lawyer Ishrat Hasan praised the expeditious trial and expressed hope that all child rape and murder cases would receive the same urgency.

"Justice should not be fast-tracked only in a few high-profile cases; every victim deserves timely justice," she said.

Fahmida Akhter, a lawyer with the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association who works with rape survivors at the One Stop Crisis Centre of Dhaka Medical College Hospital, said, "When the charge sheet is filed quickly, and the judicial process is completed within a short period, it reinforces the rule of law and increases public confidence in justice. Such confidence can also help deter future crimes."

Ramisa, a second-grade student of Popular Model High School, was found beheaded in the flat of her neighbour Soheli on May 19. The next day, her father filed a case with Pallabi Police Station against the couple and an unidentified person.

According to the case statement, Soheli took Ramisa to his room and raped her. Investigators said he later slit her throat and attempted to dismember the body to conceal the crime.

On May 24, SI Ohiduzzaman submitted the charge sheet to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court in Dhaka, accusing Soheli of rape, murder and destruction of evidence, and Swapna of destruction of evidence and providing false information.

The charge sheet named 18 prosecution witnesses. Several hours later, the CMM Court transferred the case to the Children Violence Suppression Tribunal for trial.

Khalilur elected UNGA president

FROM PAGE 1

saying the achievement reflects Bangladesh's growing contribution and credibility on the global stage.

"We believe he will proudly represent Bangladesh and forge connectivity, dialogue, and cooperation in addressing multilateral, shared challenges. We wish him every success in this new responsibility," he said in a Facebook post last night.

Khalilur, in his address after the election, pledged to strengthen effective multilateralism, safeguard the interests of developing countries and enhance international cooperation for climate-vulnerable states in his tenure.

He also pledged to advance the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, support UN peacekeeping efforts, and amplify the voice of the Global South.

Bangladesh formally announced

its candidature for the UNGA presidency in 2020, but nominated Khalilur as its candidate only on February 27 this year.

Bangladesh last held the post in 1986-87, when then foreign minister Humayun Rasheed Chowdhury was elected president of the 41st General Assembly.

A statement from the Bangladesh Permanent Mission to the UN in New York said the "landmark victory is a strong testament to the confidence and trust that the international community places in Bangladesh, as well as to the country's growing diplomatic stature and constructive engagement within the multilateral system."

This is a recognition of Bangladesh's longstanding commitment to international peace and security, sustainable development, and global cooperation, it added.