

SM Ali's 33rd anniversary of death today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Today marks the 33rd death anniversary of Syed Mohammad Ali, founder editor-publisher of The Daily Star and a luminary in journalism of Bangladesh.

In a career spanning 44 years, SM Ali made his way up from a cub reporter to becoming one of the country's most brilliant editors. He also led the Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB) as its chairman.

Educated in Kolkata, Dhaka and London, he was one of the few Asian journalists who stood out in regional journalism.

Ali was born in a well-known family in Sylhet, in

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After a decade-long closure, the newly renovated Osmani Udyan in the capital is set to reopen to the public on October 19. The historic park and the newly built July Memorial will be inaugurated by the prime minister. The photo was taken yesterday. PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

IN FOCUS

Durga Puja begins with Maha Shasthi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Durga Puja, the biggest religious festival of the Hindu community, began yesterday with Maha Shasthi amid tight security, with members of several forces deployed at mandaps across the country.

At Dhakeshwari National Temple in the capital, priests began the Shasthi rituals beneath the bel tree around 9:00am, to the beat of dhak and the sound of conch shells. Devotees then offered anjali to the goddess.

On the first day, devotees performed Bodhan, the ceremonial awakening and invocation of Goddess Durga, marking the formal commencement of the festivities.

Pujas are being held at 33,851 mandaps across the country this year, according to Bangladesh Puja Udjapan Parishad.

Maha Saptami will be observed over two days, today and tomorrow, followed by Maha Ashtami on Monday and Maha Nabami on Tuesday. The festival will end with Bijoya Dashami and the immersion of idols on Wednesday.

According to sources, Border Guard Bangladesh will provide security at 2,727 mandaps from October 16 to 22, while the Coast Guard has deployed around 3,500 personnel at 615 temples and mandaps in coastal and riverine areas. In Dhaka, 2,072 additional police personnel will guard 257 mandaps, while more than 6,000 members of the SRB are on Durga Puja duty nationwide, with 2,457 deployed daily.

'They said it was a minor accident. My son was dead'

Says father of Sahriar Sayon, killed by school bus



School ID card of eight-year-old Sahriar Sayon. PHOTO: COLLECTED

SAURAV HOSSAIN SIAM, *Narayanganj*

Like every day, Sahriar Sayon, 8, was waiting beside the school bus on campus after class, when another school bus struck and ran over him, killing him at the scene.

The incident took place on Tuesday at Adamjee Cantonment Public School and College in Jolshiri Abashon project in Narayanganj's Rupganj.

Sayon, elder of two siblings, was buried at his ancestral home in Pabna the following morning.

His father, Md Sazu Ahmmed, works at a private company in Dhaka. The family lives in Khilkhet.

"The school called me around 3:45pm that day and told me my son had been in a 'minor' accident. I immediately rushed from my workplace in Dhanmondi. When I reached there around 4:30pm, I realised it was not a minor accident at all -- my son was dead," Sazu said.

"His body was lying in the dust beside the rear wheel of the bus. Several buses were lined up there for different routes. My son's bus had

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A fresh bid to streamline Dhaka's bus network

Owners pledge support for franchise plan; wage disputes, enforcement remain concerns

SHAMIMA RITA

After years of failed attempts, the government has again renewed efforts to introduce a bus route franchise system in Dhaka, with transport owners now pledging support.

However, enforcement and workers' wages remain unresolved.

At an October 8 meeting chaired by Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, authorities decided to launch services on two routes within seven working days, finalise franchises for 32 routes within two months and complete the rollout within six months.

Of Dhaka's 418 approved routes, only 98 operate, with around 7,500 buses belonging to 66 companies, according to the Dhaka Transport Coordination Authority (DTCA).

Overlapping routes and unfit vehicles contribute to congestion, competition for passengers, and crashes, it said.

To consolidate 98 routes into 32, the DTCA surveyed over 10,000 passengers' boarding patterns and more than 35,000 journeys' origins and destinations.

Officials say 70 percent of proposed routes correspond to existing ones, although some passengers will need to change buses.

Each route will have a designated operator, uniformly coloured buses, fixed stops, electronic and counter-based ticketing, and GPS tracking. Authorities propose 12-metre, 52-seat buses, with extra booking fees and unauthorised collections prohibited.

The five priority corridors are Beraid-Sadarghat (Route 21), Nandan Park-Demra (1), Kanchpur-Gazipur Chourasta (27), Konabari-Keraniganj (5) and Sreepur-Dhakeshwari Temple (4).

Authorities are also evaluating 25 circular routes connecting metro rail and eight routes for BRTC electric buses.

Contacted, DTCA Additional Executive Director Mohammad Mashiur Rahman said the 66 companies would form five operating groups, sharing route revenue based on the number of buses each operates. Owners would also help police prevent unauthorised operators from using assigned routes.

Each route will have a designated operator, uniformly coloured buses, fixed stops, electronic and counter-based ticketing, and GPS tracking.

SM Khokon, additional secretary of Bangladesh Road Transport Owners' Association, said poor coordination among owners had stalled earlier efforts.

He also said owners have proposed paying drivers and helpers per completed trip, recorded at ticket counters, instead of by working hours.

The DTCA says operators will determine wage structures.

However, several drivers interviewed by The Daily Star opposed trip-based wages.

Rokon, a Projapoti driver on the Mohammadpur route, said congestion and competition from metro rail and battery-run rickshaws have reduced passenger numbers. "A trip-based wage system would make our earnings uncertain and make it harder for us to meet our regular living expenses."

Romjan Molla, a Dewan driver on the Mohakhali route, said he would accept the system if it met drivers' needs but insisted that owners reach an agreement with workers first.

The DTCA said a meeting between workers and owners will take place within the next few days.



Last year, a government task force recommended fixed salaries instead of commission-based pay.

WHY PREVIOUS EFFORTS FAILED

Bus route reform first featured in the 2004 Strategic Transport Plan. Late Mayor Annisul Huq of DNCC revived the initiative in 2015, but it lost momentum after his death in 2017.

A Ghatarchar-Kanchpur pilot launched in December 2021 under then DSCC mayor Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh failed to expand amid owners' resistance.

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All dev partners back Bangladesh

Says Amir Khosru

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury yesterday said multilateral development partners are working closely with Bangladesh and have pledged support for the government's programmes.

He named the World Bank, the IMF and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) as close partners. Meetings with other partners had been held the previous day.

"They [IMF] have now decided that a team from each side will sit in the next two to three weeks to work out the outstanding issues in greater detail. After that, the two sides will have to decide how to formally conclude the matter," Khosru said, speaking on the sidelines of the IMF-World Bank Annual Meetings in Bangkok as the week-long gathering closed.



He said the government and the IMF had agreed on the principles without difficulty.

Bangladesh had been under IMF's $4.7 billion loan programme since January 2023, signed by the then Awami League government. The amount was later increased to $5.5 billion by the interim government.

In May this year, the BNP-led government decided to exit the programme eight months before its expiry. The country received $3.8 billion in five tranches under the $4.7 billion loan programme.

The government later applied for a fresh loan package worth up to $5 billion and it has been in talks with the IMF.

Bangladesh also wants to sign a partnership agreement with the World Bank under its five-year development framework.

Why Tk 250cr July fund still unreleased?

July Shaheed Smriti Foundation asks govt at roundtable

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The July Shaheed Smriti Foundation has questioned why the government is yet to release Tk 250 crore allocated for rehabilitating families of those killed and injured during the July uprising.

Lt Col (retd) Kamal Akbar, chief executive officer of the foundation, said it had rehabilitated 150 families with just 25 staff members.

He made the remarks at a roundtable titled "Strengthening National Solidarity with Soft Power: Designing a Way Towards the Dreams of July Heroes", organised by the foundation at The Daily Star Centre yesterday.

Students, injured July fighters and family members of martyrs attended the event.

Kamal said the government had provided the foundation with Tk 58 crore, while it had distributed Tk 80 crore among beneficiaries. Meanwhile, its employees had gone without salaries for six months.

"Tk 250 crore has been allocated for the rehabilitation of the injured and families of the martyrs. The programme should have started by now. Why has it not been started yet?" he asked.

Samsi Ara Zaman, mother of July martyr and journalist Tahir Zaman Priyo, said many of the injured were struggling financially.

"We must work to rehabilitate them and help the martyrs' families overcome their trauma. The government must make arrangements to disburse the fund," she said.

She urged people to support the July Shaheed Smriti Foundation.

Photographer and rights activist Shahidul Alam said people's sacrifice deserved recognition and must not be overlooked in documenting the uprising's history.

He called for an archive that would preserve the history without being politically influenced.

Dilara Chowdhury, political scientist and former professor at Jahangirnagar University, said more initiatives were needed to preserve the uprising's memory rehabilitate the martyrs' families and those injured.

Jaber bin Noor, an injured in the uprising, called for clarification of the death toll.

"We need to find out why the figure of 843 people recorded during the interim government's tenure has not increased since then," he added.



An excavator removes makeshift shops in front of Jatiya Sangsad as Dhaka North City Corporation conducts an eviction drive there yesterday. PHOTO: PRABIR DAS