

BANGLADESHIS IN MALAYSIA Clock ticking for 26,000 migrants

High commission in KL unable to renew their passports; irregularities, mismanagement blamed

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Khorshed Alam, a Bangladeshi migrant worker in Malaysia, wanted to renew his machine-readable passport in June as his year-long employment visa is about to expire this month.

He gave the required documents to a tout involved in the passport

“Without the passport, I won’t be able to renew my visa, and my entire life will come to a standstill,” says Khorshed Alam, Bangladeshi migrant worker in Malaysia.

processing work and he also wanted to upgrade his passport to an e-passport.

But the tout claimed e-passports were not available for Bangladeshis in Malaysia. Khorshed said the tout also charged him 250 ringgits, although the renewal fee is 145 ringgits.

The timeframe for MRP delivery is 21 business days, but Khorshed has yet to receive his renewed passport.

“Without the passport, I won’t be able to renew my visa, and my entire life will come to a standstill. I’d have to start all over again,” Khorshed told The Daily Star.

Khorshed from Cumilla is among over 26,000 Bangladeshis facing a delay in passport renewal, which has made their expatriate lives uncertain. Around 15 lakh Bangladeshi migrants work in Malaysia, according to the government.

A nexus between touts and a section of officials at the Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur is allegedly behind the situation surrounding the migrant workers’ passports.

Since acts of corruption and irregularities are difficult to carry out in e-passport processing, this ring created such a situation that forced the authorities to issue more MRPs, sources at the high commission said.

The Bangladesh government introduced e-passport services in Malaysia on April 18 this year to ease suffering and make the process easier.

But the high commission processed only 20,829 e-passport applications until October, compared to 56,080 MRP applications in the same period.

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Diplomats of foreign missions in Bangladesh yesterday visited The Daily Star Centre in the capital to see the “36 Days of July: Saluting the Bravehearts”, an exhibition organised by the newspaper to pay tribute to the unparalleled courage and resilience of the heroes of the July uprising.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

‘We may see an elected govt next year’

Wahiduddin Mahmud hopes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Education and Planning Adviser Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud says he would like to see a politically elected government next year.

“I think we’ll see a politically elected government next year. This is my opinion, but I’m not sure what will happen,” he told a conference in Dhaka yesterday.

“No country becomes a developed nation overnight. It requires collective efforts. Our interim government is here for a short term,” the adviser said while responding to a query on



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State sponsored dis-equalising factors

Prof Rehman Sobhan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The state itself had deepened inequality as it “sponsored dis-equalising factors”, exempting corporations from taxes and helping banks with liquidity for years on end only to benefit the elite, said Prof Rehman Sobhan, chairman of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, yesterday.

The major governance problem has been around loan default through the years, and it continues to pile up even today. After a period, the bad loans were rescheduled and then written off, he said.

“This led to a financial crisis for state-run banks and the government recapitalised the banks year after year,” said the noted economist at the annual

conference of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS).

According to the central bank, bad loans of six state-owned banks were Tk 65,781 crore in December 2023, making up 20.99 percent of their total outstanding credits. The amount would be much higher now because those banks classified more loans as default after the fall of the Awami League regime.

Prof Sobhan said he saw that a proposal for recapitalising banks came up at an advisory council meeting in 1991 for the third time when he was part of the caretaker government. By now, the government has recapitalised banks several times, spending thousands of crores.

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Three-wheelers flouting traffic laws and plying the roads of Tongi haphazardly, increasing the risk of accidents. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

3 pro-BNP bodies march to Indian mission today

RSS to take out procession towards Bangladesh High Commission in Delhi on Tuesday

STAR REPORT

Jubo Dal, Swachhchasebak Dal, and Chhatra Dal will march towards the Indian High Commission in Dhaka today.

It will begin from the party’s Navapaltan central office at 10:00am, said a joint press release yesterday.

The march, aimed at submitting a memorandum, is being organised in protest the attack on Assistant High Commission of Bangladesh in Agartala, desecration of the national flag in Kolkata, and an alleged conspiracy to incite communal unrest.

In the release, leaders of the three organisations of BNP called on leaders and activists to join the demonstration.

The organisations planned the programme a day ahead of Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri’s visit to Dhaka tomorrow. There will be foreign office consultations led by foreign secretaries of the two countries.

It will be the first top diplomatic contact with Bangladesh since the ouster of Sheikh Hasina in August.

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We were complicit by our silence

Writers and poets say at Star discussion on July uprising

DOWEL BISWAS

In a country where a sense of freedom has barely returned after over a decade of suppression, the question of a writer’s role looms large.

Do writers have a duty to speak the truth, to be the voice of the people, and to stand for the country when freedoms are curtailed?

This question took center stage at a recent gathering of writers, poets, and intellectuals at The Daily Star Centre in the capital.

As part of the “36 Days of July – Saluting the Bravehearts”, the discussion, “Abhuthan Poroborti Lekhoker Daay (The responsibility of writers after the uprising)”, delved into what it means to be a writer in the wake of the July uprising.

Poet and publisher Monirul Monir posed a question that cut straight to the heart of the issue: “Did we, as writers, do our duty? Did we speak the truth when it mattered the most during the fascist regime? Now that we have a semblance of freedom, do we have a plan for how to stand up to oppression?”

His questions exposed a troubling reality: a divide among the intellectual class, many of whom remained silent during the most critical moments.

For Monir, the link between artistic expression and civic duty is clear. “If I don’t speak as a poet or writer, how can I expect to live as a free citizen or even call myself a writer or poet?”

Author Mohammad Nazimuddin, renowned for his novel “Rabindranath Ekhanek Kokhono Khete Ashenni”, said, “As writers, we knew what was happening. We knew the narratives the government was feeding us were false, and yet we didn’t challenge

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We were complicit by our silence

FROM PAGE 1
them. Where was our sense of duty then? We betrayed our role as the voice of the people.”

He argued that extremism was not confined to political or religious factions – it had infiltrated the intellectual elite class as well.

“Some of us, the so-called liberals, became silent collaborators of the regime’s agenda. We were complicit by our silence, by choosing not to speak out.”

This idea of complicity through silence was echoed by Afsana Begum, director of Jatiya Grantha Kendra. “Writers are the mirrors of society. We owe it to our future generations to write the truth, to record what is happening in real time, and to create a platform for debate, discussion, and understanding.”

For her, the role of writers is clear: they are the voice of their people, and that voice must never be stifled – neither by external forces nor by



Writers and poets attend a discussion titled “Abhuththan Poroborti Lekhoker Daay”, a part of the “36 Days of July: Saluting the Bravehearts” exhibition and storytelling week at The Daily Star Centre in the capital yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

internal self-censorship.

“We must not censor ourselves,” Begum insisted, “Especially in times of crisis. If our writing doesn’t

provoke, challenge, and spur debate, then we have failed in our duty as writers.”
Lyricist Shahidullah Farazee

paid tribute to the martyrs of the July Uprising, noting the courage shown by even the youngest of protesters.

Clock ticking for 26,000 migrants

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While e-passport delivery has been smooth due to a digital process, approximately 26,096 MRP applications remain stuck due to a shortage of MRP booklets, leaving applicants like Khorshed in a precarious situation.

Amid the worsening crisis, the Department of Immigration and Passports (DIP) on October 28 requested the Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur to charge additional fees to MRP applicants to provide e-passports instead, citing a critical shortage of MRP booklets.

IRREGULARITIES

On September 22 last year, the high commission signed a deal with outsourcing company Expert Service Kuala Lumpur (ESKL) for e-passport processing and visa services, upon approval from the home and foreign ministry.

Mia Mohammad Keyamuddin, councillor (passport and visa) at the high commission, signed the deal with ESKL with a service charge of 32 ringgits for each application.

Although ESKL has government permission to provide both MRP and e-passport services, the high commission’s passport wing signed the deal for e-passport and visa processing so that the wing can handle MRP processing.

Pranab Kuman Bhattacharjee, councillor (political) at the high commission, sent a show-cause notice to Manzil Hossain, an office assistant at the passport wing, on September 26 over his involvement in irregularities.

The notice asked Manzil to explain an audio conversation in which he was heard saying, “Many people are involved with embassy and passport work in Malaysia. Their earning fully depends on this work, as they have no other means of income.”

At one point in the conversation, the notice read, Manzil was heard saying, “If the high commissioner gives any order, I have access to make a counter to the high commissioner. He knows everything about my connections with up to three ministers ... Bahauddin Nasim, Asaduzzaman Kamal They are like family, relatives.”

Pranab sent another show-cause notice to the passport wing’s councillor Keyamuddin on October 23.

An internal task force had found irregularities in MRP applications, including unsigned applications and identical signatures across multiple

applications.

The notice asked why Keyamuddin approved such applications by violating the rules.

This newspaper obtained copies of the notices.

A senior official at the high commission, who wished not to be named, told The Daily Star: “We have received replies to the notices. We are now analysing their claims. If the allegations are found to be true, administrative action will be taken.”

Keyamuddin did not take phone calls or reply to messages for comments.

Bangladesh High Commissioner to Malaysia Shameem Ahsan did not answer queries from The Daily Star about pending MRP applications, steps to address the issue, and allegations of mismanagement and irregularities against officials.

RUNNING OUT OF TIME

In Malaysia, expatriates unable to renew their visas due to passport delays or financial constraints can obtain up to eight special monthly passes at 200 ringgits each.

They must either return home or face the risk of staying without valid documents if the visa is not renewed in this period.

Uzzal Hossain, a Bangladeshi expatriate in Malaysia, submitted his passport renewal application on May 15, with a promised delivery date of October 25. By November, he had yet to receive it.

“I’ve already taken six special passes against my visa. If I can’t renew my visa within two months, my life will be stuck,” Uzzal said over the phone.

Amid the crisis, High Commissioner Shameem sent a letter to the senior secretary of the home ministry on November 18, highlighting documentation issues faced by expatriates applying for e-passports.

To prevent mass job losses in the country, he recommended allowing an alternative process for issuing MRPs to those with information mismatches, and spelling issues of names in their national identity cards or other documents.

The letter also noted that the high commission and ESKL were charging additional fees to renew and upgrade MRPs to e-passports of those who have necessary documents as per the directives.

He said the problems need to be solved quickly since the issue is creating grievances among expatriates. Otherwise, the situation may spiral out of control and will

pose “security risk” to the high commission and ESKL officials, reads the letter, of which a copy this newspaper obtained.

CONTACT TERMINATED

High commission sources said ESKL has been providing day-long services with 45 desks to around 800 people daily, while the high commission does not have such facilities or manpower.

Now the high commission is looking for an alternative since the contract with ESKL has been terminated.

Contacted, High Commissioner Shameem shared the termination document, stating, “I have nothing to add except this (document).”

The document, issued on December 3, revealed that the agreement, signed on September 22, 2023, would be terminated after three months’ notice, effective March 2, 2025.

ESKL Managing Director Gias Ahamad said the six-year agreement included a probationary clause for the first year and was extendable to another five years based on performance.

He claimed there was no mismanagement on their side. “But our contract was terminated without any justification.”

“Middlemen, who used to embezzle 300-500 ringgits from expats for passport renewal, opposed our operation from the beginning.”

None from the high commission, however, agreed to talk about the issues on record.

A high official at the high commission requesting anonymity told this newspaper that they were working, and hopeful to find out a solution soon.

Shah Mohammad Tanvir Monsur, director general of the foreign ministry’s consular and welfare wing, refused to talk about the issue. “The high commission in Kuala Lumpur will take necessary steps in this regard,” he told The Daily Star yesterday.

The Daily Star contacted Md Firoz Sarker, additional secretary (security and immigration wing) at the Security Services Division of the home ministry who was recently transferred as Khulna divisional commissioner, for comments regarding the MRP crisis and delivery delays.

“We have some problems regarding our LC (Letter of Credit) to import foil papers for MRP,” he said.

“We have already addressed the problems and the crisis will be solved at the earliest possible time.”

Diplomats pay tribute to July bravehearts

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photographs, along with testimonies of its journalists who put their lives on the line to bring stories of indomitable courage to their readers.

Launched on November 30, “36 Days of July: Saluting the Bravehearts”, an exhibition of news reports and photographs, is dedicated to the martyrs and those injured during the mass uprising in July and August. The exhibition will continue till December 14.

At the special invitation of the daily, the distinguished guests started arriving at The Daily Star Centre at around 3:00pm to join the special viewing programme.

The programme commenced with the documentary film “Droher July: Shongbade, Shongrame (July of Rebellion: In News, In Battle)”.

After the inauguration, the visitors explored the exhibition, moving through the photographs and news coverage on the ground floor and first floor of the building and appreciated the newspaper’s coverage during the movement.

The exhibition highlights The Daily Star’s coverage of this historic uprising, including editorials and commentaries, along with articles and features.

A dedicated corner was set up for guests to reflect on, and the diplomats shared their thoughts regarding the exhibition and the uprising in the visitors’ book.

After visiting the exhibition, Michael Miller, ambassador and head of delegation of the European Union, in his reaction told this newspaper that he was grateful to The Daily Star leadership for the invitation. He commended the photographs at the exhibition as “striking, tragic and impressive”. “The European Union is here to identify how it can support the interim government at this moment of political transition in your country,” he added.

In the visitors’ book, he wrote, “Extremely impressive! No one can leave without a deep sense of tragedy mixed with hope and more.”

Palestinian Ambassador Yousef SY Ramadan also thanked The Daily Star and said the newspaper has always contributed to everything positive for the people of Bangladesh – something he has witnessed for the last 10 years.

“Children, students died to protect our freedom. How could we, as writers, stand by and not write for them? How could we be silent when they gave their lives for a cause we should have been leading?”

“It’s better to die in the front lines than live with the shame of having done nothing.”

Farazee’s call for a clear framework of action was mirrored by others at the discussion, including Sayeed Ferdous, vice chancellor of Bangladesh Open University.

While acknowledging the atrocities of the past, Ferdous urged a focus on the future, advocating for a rigorous self-examination among intellectuals. “It’s easy to write against visible enemies, but what about the hypocrisy within ourselves? We’ve become so fearful, so compromised by our own greed and cowardice, that we lost our voices. We need to confront this internal duality – the part of us

that conforms to power rather than speaking truth to it.”

Litterateur Ahmad Mostafa Kamal reflected on the power of the people during the aftermath of the regime’s fall.

In the days following the Sheikh Hasina government’s ouster, the country was left without formal law and order over than three days.

Kamal pointed out, “There was no chaos. The people protected each other. This shows that we, as citizens, are capable of safeguarding our nation. We must never allow fascism to take root here again.”

Educationist Wakil Ahmed, who presided over the event, concluded the discussion by stressing the importance of writers in the mass uprising. “The success of this revolution lies in the narrative we write for the future.”

The discussion was conducted by Emran Mahfuz, sub-editor of The Daily Star Bangla.

[Bangladeshi] people.”

Fasih Ullah Khan, press counsellor of the Pakistan High Commission, wrote, “Very impressive. Saw some rare pictures.”

Debapriya Bhattacharya, distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue, also visited the exhibition yesterday.

Such “extraordinary” exhibitions need to be held around the country so that all the people can have a glimpse of the history in this momentous occasion.

“I think it brings back history into life, and it’s a testimony of the bravery of this country,” he said.

The sacrifices young people have made to bring back democracy and open up a new way to the progress of the country have to be carried forward.

“But what is more important that the promise made through the sacrifices has to be kept alive. We will have to bring back all those memories in order to inspire our generation in building our future Bangladesh,” Bhattacharya said.

Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, said the newspaper organised the exhibition as part of the efforts to remember and pay tribute to the fearless souls who sacrificed their lives during the “36 days of July”.

Among the guests were French Ambassador Marie Masdupuy; Spanish Ambassador Gabriel Maria Sistiaga Ochoa de Chinchetru; UAE Ambassador Abdullah Ali Al Hamoudi; Libyan Ambassador Mahmud MM Sallabi; Swedish Ambassador Nicolas Weeks; Danish Ambassador Christian Brix Møller; Dutch Ambassador Andre Carstens; Nepalese Ambassador Ghanshyam Bhandari; Italian Ambassador Antonio Alessandro; acting high commissioner of Australia Nardia Simpson; and Moroccan Embassy’s Deputy Head of Mission Majid Halem.

Besides Alberto Giovanetti, head of economic, political and communication affairs at the Swiss Embassy; Towheed Feroze, EU Embassy media and information adviser; Gokul VK, first secretary of the Indian High Commission; and Mohamed El Emam, country manager of Qatar Airways, also attended the event.

‘We may see an elected govt next year’

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when Bangladesh might achieve a developed country status.

The Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) organised a four-day annual conference at Lakeshore Hotel in Gulshan. The conference’s theme is “equality, opportunity, freedom, and dignity: restructuring institutions for equitable and sustainable development”.

“We are still not thinking about the low-income trap. We have not yet considered how we would achieve the position that the Philippines and Thailand have achieved, let alone Malaysia,” the adviser said.

He recalled Vietnam’s per capita income in the 1990s, claiming it was like that of Bangladesh at the time.

The adviser added that Vietnam’s per capita income is now 40 to 50 times more than Bangladesh. The country is now availing \$20 billion in foreign direct investment every year, while Bangladesh gets \$1-2 billion.

“While their entire economy is export-oriented, we only have one or two sectors like that,” said Prof Mahmud.

“Currently, they have 30 to 40 free trade agreements (FTA), including with the European Union,” he said.

Recently, Vietnam has signed a strategic partnership with the US on particular technology transfer. They also trade with The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries.

“Our economy has to be more competitive as a prerequisite condition for that.

“If you don’t become competitive, you can ask for a one-sided concession rather than any bilateral or multilateral move where there is an issue of give and take,” he said.

Prof Mahmud also expressed concern about the quality of human capital as it would be difficult to move on creative destruction. “Our industries must be more competitive for the economic development of the

country.”

“Competitive does not mean only cheap labour and poor technology. Technological innovation and human resource development are needed where education will play a role.”

He explained that in East Asia, 30 percent students pursue higher education, while about 70 percent go for vocational education.

“In our country, only 20 percent students pursue vocational education. Around 80 percent posts of teachers are vacant.”

On the other hand, the country is building infrastructure for universities in every district for general education, the adviser said.

“From this perspective, how will we go for the creative destruction? It is not possible for us [interim government]. I have enough doubt whether any political government can do it.”

BIDS Director General Binayak Sen delivered the opening remarks during the inaugural session.

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“If one adds up all the recapitalisation... and also adds up the implications of written-off loans, this will give one an idea of how resources were transferred and who were the beneficiaries.

“Similarly, if you deconstruct your budget and you take into account both subsidies, tax forgiveness, and various tax concessions... you will find a significant transfer of resources.”

The problems can be solved if the government intervenes and redistributes resources to the deprived, he said at the event at a hotel in Gulshan.

Regarding the spread of inequality, Prof Sobhan said there were high profits in politics and getting elected as an MP.

As a result, 70 to 75 percent of the MPs were businessmen. The elected representatives ran businesses using their political power, he said.

As crony capitalism became embedded in the political system, the political elites became “Zamindars”

in rural areas. Besides, the power was concentrated in the Prime Minister’s Office, and the main parties ran undemocratically. This is an in-built problem in the political structure which manifested in the administrative system, he said.

Governance is identified today as a paramount concern.

Law and order, default loans, all-pervasive corruption, and deterioration of administration are now embedded in the social-political fabric of the country, he said, adding that these problems originate from the state’s failure.

As the previous regime stayed in power for a long time, it could move forward from these problems, but it failed to do so, and the problems deepened and consolidated, he said.

“Now, the country needs not just therapeutic intervention, but surgical interventions.”

The country saw the emergence of an articulated and concentrated class enjoying power. In the recent

white paper, they were termed crony capitalists and oligarchs.

The economy has transformed from agricultural to manufacturing, while the apparel sector played a significant role. During the transformation, many sectors that were protected by the government are now competitive.

In the meantime, the country did remarkably well in poverty reduction.

Prof Sobhan said some of the problems embedded in the social and political system are the politicisation of administration, erosion of judicial independence, and weaponization of law enforcement.

He proposed that small producers associated with the agro-processing sector be given opportunities to be shareholders of the agro-processing enterprises.

He also recommended associating garment factory workers with opportunities of equity participation so that they become stakeholders and share the value addition process even without nationalisation.

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July uprising offers path to challenge autocracy

Says UK academic Geof Wood

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Geof Wood, Emeritus Professor of International Development at the University of Bath, UK, has suggested that Bangladesh's recent uprising might offer a pathway for overcoming autocratic regimes, a challenge faced by many nations worldwide.

Speaking at a conference organised by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) at a Dhaka hotel yesterday, Professor Wood delivered a lecture titled "Keeping Democracy Alive in Bangladesh or Anywhere".

"The world is in a period of great turbulence, with a general increase in autocratic regimes and

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Once the lifelines of Dhaka, the city's canals are now mere shadows of their former selves—clogged with pollution, suffocated by encroachment, and neglected due to flawed urban planning. In this seven-part series, The Daily Star explores the current condition of the capital's canals, botched restoration attempts, and how the sorry state of these waterways is exacerbating the city's waterlogging woes. Together, these stories reveal what it will take to bring Dhaka's dying canals back to life. Here is the fourth part of the series:

Dhaka's disappearing FLOOD-FLOW ZONES

How the city buried its natural water channels, wetlands in the name of development

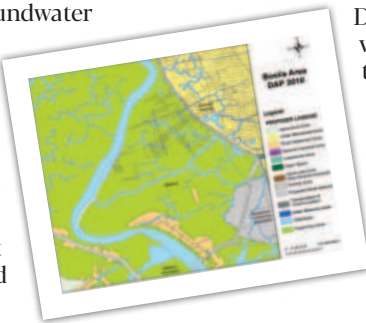
HELEMUL ALAM

Flood-flow zones, crucial for maintaining Dhaka's ecological balance, are rapidly vanishing, leaving the city increasingly vulnerable to waterlogging, loss of groundwater recharge, and potential flooding.

Experts and urban planners blame rampant encroachment, questionable policies by the Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk), and a culture of impunity that has legitimised illegal land use.

FLOOD-FLOW ZONES: A CRITICAL RESOURCE

Flood-flow zones are designated low-lying areas meant to retain water during monsoons, preventing urban flooding and aiding groundwater



recharge. Historically, these zones ensured that excess water from rivers like the Buriganga had natural outlets, reducing the risk of flash floods and waterlogging.

However, Dhaka has lost vast swathes of these zones due to unplanned urbanisation.

According to a 2019 study by the Bangladesh Institute of Planners (BIP), the city lost 1,072 acres (57 percent) of its 1,879-acre flood-flow zones in metropolitan areas within a decade.

Till 2019, since the publishing of the gazette on the previous master plan (DAP-2010), the city lost 3,440

acres out of 9,556 acres of flood-flow zones, water retention areas, and water bodies.

POLICIES FUELING ENCROACHMENT

The Detailed Area Plan, approved in 2023, has drawn severe criticism for legalising residential developments in previously conservable flood-flow zones.

While the DAP imposes penalties for unauthorized construction under the Building Construction Rules, these penalties remain negligible, with no substantive action against encroachment.

"This is a glaring weakness of Rajuk and the DAP," said Fazle Reza Sumon, former president of BIP. "This legalisation benefits certain quarters, encouraging others to encroach upon flood-flow zones with the hope of eventual regularization," he said.

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High-rise buildings and smaller establishments occupy a designated flood-flow zone in Bosila. *Inset*, the Detailed Area Plan 2010 shows the place was supposed to be all green and free from establishments for flood retention, a vision, that has been disregarded over the years. Encroachments like this are eroding Dhaka's natural defences against waterlogging and floods.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Unite against 'Indian aggression'

Say ex-armed forces officials

UNB, Dhaka

A group of retired Armed Forces officers, under the banner of the National Unity and Solidarity Council, staged a protest yesterday against what they described as Indian aggression.

The rally, led by Col Ahsan Ullah (ret'd), convener of the council, was held in Mohakhali's Raowa Complex, concluding after a procession through Bijoy Sarani. The protest condemned the recent attack on Bangladesh's Assistant High Commission in Agartala. Speakers criticised Indian media's alleged propaganda since the July-August mass uprising and urged India to respect Bangladesh's sovereignty.

The council also demanded the disclosure of all bilateral agreements. Lieutenant Col (ret'd) Manish Dewan and Col Lutful Haque (ret'd) also spoke.

16,500 murders in last five years of AL

Police release crime data after a long break

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

More than 16,500 people were murdered across Bangladesh over the past five years, during the Awami League government's third term.

On average, over nine murders took place per day, according to crime statistics published on the Bangladesh Police Headquarters (PHQ) website.

The police released this data on Thursday after a gap of over five years.

The figures show 16,555 murders were recorded between 2019 and December 2023. Each case may cover multiple killings, such as double or mass murders.

An analysis of the data reveals an annual average of 3,311 murders, with over 3,500 murders reported even during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

During the same period, 9,955 robbery cases and 1,685 dacoity (organised robbery) cases were reported. However, the actual number of such crimes is believed

FROM 2019-23
9+ murders per day
3,311 murders per year
1,07,000+ cases of violence against women/children

CRIME DATA RELEASED AFTER FIVE YEARS

The PHQ used to regularly publish crime statistics on its website. However, in the lead-up to the 11th National Parliamentary Elections, numerous politically motivated "ghost cases" were filed against opposition leaders and activists.

These cases, often fabricated, included charges like attacks on police and bomb-throwing.

A Prothom Alo report in December 2018 revealed that police filed 578 sabotage cases in Dhaka in September 2018 alone, alleging 90 attacks on law enforcers.

Following this, the police stopped publishing crime statistics and removed previously available data to avoid scrutiny.

Last Thursday, the newly appointed Inspector General of Police (IGP) Baharul Alam addressed the issue. Following journalists' inquiries, the IGP ordered the release of crime data from January 2019 to August 2024.

This data highlights alarming figures for crimes such as murder, robbery, theft, abduction, and violence against women and children during the Awami League's third term. Over 1,07,000 cases were filed under the Women and Children Repression

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CJ stresses freedom of judiciary

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed yesterday emphasised the need to strengthen the independence of the judiciary and enhance its efficiency, placing people at the centre of its mission.

He made the remarks while addressing a conference titled "Judicial Independence and Efficiency" jointly organised by the Supreme Court and the UNDP at a hotel in Dhaka.

In his written speech, the chief justice highlighted his vision of a judiciary that is accountable and ensures impartiality for every litigant, irrespective of their status or circumstances.

"I envision a judiciary that bridges the gap between the legal system and the people it serves, making justice more

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Teenager stabbed, mother injured; stalker still at large

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and NILIMA JAHAN

On a bed at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, a teenage girl lies motionless, her back marked by deep stab wounds, inflicted by a stalker whose relentless harassment escalated into a night of terror.

Fifteen-year-old Raisa*, from Tebaria village in Gopalganj, was referred to DMCH from Gopalganj's 250-Bed General Hospital, after she required urgent surgery.

During a power outage on November 10, Raisa and her mother were attacked in their own home by their neighbour, Arman Molla, 20, and three accomplices, following months of harassment.

While Raisa fights for her life, her mother Runa*, 32, severely stabbed in the abdomen, is recovering after surgery.

The family now demands justice for the brutal assault.

According to Raisa, Arman had been harassing and stalking her for seven months leading up to the attack.

"He used to follow me on my way to school, on my way home, and anywhere he saw me. He would also propose to me," she said.

"I was completely distressed. My family lodged at least eight complaints with his family, but they never took any action. Instead, they would get angry with us," said Raisa.

"On that night, around 7:00pm, I was studying by candlelight because there was no electricity. It was just my mother and me at home. My father

SEE PAGE 4 COL 8

JULY UPRISING Families of victims want recognition, justice

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Families of those killed during the July uprising have demanded the construction of a memorial in their honour and the swift trial of those responsible for the deaths.

At a programme held yesterday afternoon at Shaheed Mughdh Mancha

(formerly Bangabandhu Mancha) in the capital's Uttara, they urged the interim government to expedite the judicial process and bring the perpetrators to justice. They alleged that most killings during the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement remain unaddressed.

The event, titled "List of Martyrs

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6



Participants at the convocation ceremony at Bangladesh-China Friendship Exhibition Centre in Purbachal, Dhaka yesterday.

PHOTO: NSU

NSU 25th convocation held in Dhaka

STAR REPORT

North South University (NSU) held its 25th convocation ceremony at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Exhibition Centre in Purbachal, Dhaka yesterday.

Over 8,000 students were awarded graduation degrees at the event, according to a press release.

Education and Planning Adviser Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud presided over the ceremony, conferring degrees on behalf of President Mohammed Shahabuddin.

The event featured a welcome address by Prof Md Mamun Molla, chair of the Department of Mathematics and Physics. Gwyn Lewis, the UN resident coordinator for Bangladesh, was the convocation speaker.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 8

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SCAN THE QR TO APPLY

Prof Khan Sarwar Murshid's death anniv

STAR REPORT

Today is the 12th death anniversary of eminent educationalist, diplomat and intellectual Prof Khan Sarwar Murshid.

On the occasion, wreaths will be placed at his grave at the capital's Mirpur Martyred Intellectuals' Graveyard at 10:30am. Besides, prayers will be offered and food will be distributed among the destitute, said a press release.

Born in 1924, Murshid was at the forefront of the Language Movement of 1952, the Mass Upsurge of 1969, the Six-Point Movement and the Liberation War of 1971.

During the Liberation War, he was a member of the planning commission of the Mujibnagar government in exile.

In his illustrious diplomatic career, Murshid served as the Bangladesh high commissioner to Poland and Hungary. Murshid was the first chairman of Transparency International, Bangladesh (TIB) and a former vice chancellor of Rajshahi University.

Youth stabbed to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A college student, Md Shimul Hossain, 21, was stabbed to death, and two others were injured in a clash at Char-Ghoshpur village, Pabna Sadar, on Friday night.

Police arrested three suspects and investigations are ongoing, said Pabna Sadar Police Station Officer-in-Charge Md Abdus Salam.

The two injured—Shimul Hossain, Kawsar Hossain and Dishar Ali, are admitted to Pabna General Hospital.

Shimul was caught up in a dispute with a group of locals over a trivial issue regarding an event, the OC added. Shimul's family was preparing to file a case, he said.

CJ stresses

FROM PAGE 3
accessible through technology, legal aid, and procedural reforms," he said.

Quoting Lord Hewart's famous words, "Justice delayed is justice denied," the chief justice underscored the urgency of addressing case backlogs and procedural delays in Bangladesh, which, he warned, could undermine public trust in the judiciary.

"It is our duty to ensure that justice is swift without compromising its integrity," he said, adding that the judiciary must not only resolve disputes but also uphold principles of fairness, equality, and dignity.

He further described judicial independence and efficiency as the twin pillars sustaining justice, which he called the "lifeline for the vulnerable, a shield for the oppressed, and a symbol of hope for all."

"Independence ensures that justice is free from undue influence, while efficiency guarantees it is timely and accessible. Together, they form the foundation of a judiciary that is not only fair but also trusted by the people it serves," he added.

"Independence ensures that justice is free from undue influence, and efficiency ensures that it is timely and accessible. Together, they form the foundation of a judiciary that is not only fair but also trusted by the people it serves," he added.



At the onset of winter, farmers are busy harvesting Aman paddy from the fields to their homes. After threshing, the new rice will be used to prepare seasonal dishes like pitha and payesh. The photo was taken from the Kedarpur village in Keshabpur upazila of Jashore recently.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Fertiliser crisis hits farmers

Prices soar amid artificial shortage

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Farmers in the district of Lalmonirhat are suffering from an acute shortage of fertiliser just as the Rabi season started. Meanwhile, fertiliser stock in the warehouses of Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC) and Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC) has run out.

Taking advantage of this circumstance, some unscrupulous individuals have started selling fertilisers to farmers, and unregistered traders are selling fertiliser to farmers at incredibly inflated prices.

Rafiqul Islam, 60, from Durgapur village in Aditmari upazila, told The Daily Star that he is disappointed as he has not been able to get MOP, DOP, TSP and Urea fertilisers from the registered fertiliser dealers. He had prepared his land for cultivating maize and tobacco, but the fertiliser shortage has halted his plans and left him distressed.

Haider Ali, 66, a farmer from Parulia village in Hatibandha upazila, said that the fertiliser crisis at the beginning of the Rabi season is an incredibly serious concern for farmers. Now, some well-off farmers and unscrupulous traders have stockpiled fertiliser and have created an artificial crisis.

Traders said the government fixed the rate for each sack (50kgs) of DAP fertiliser at Tk 1,050, TSP at Tk 1,350, MOP at Tk 1,000 and Urea at Tk 1,350.

However, some unscrupulous

sellers are secretly selling fertiliser at Tk 200-300 higher per sack than the government rate.

Fertiliser dealers told The Daily Star that they did not get any allocation of urea fertiliser in October and November. Due to this, there is no stock of urea fertiliser in their warehouses. However, they got the allocation of MOP, TSP and DAP from BADC. Due to the huge demand for MOP, TSP and DAP at the beginning of the Rabi

season, the government-allocated fertilisers ran out in the first week of November.

Farhad Alam Suman, a BADC fertiliser dealer at Burirbazar in Aditmari, said he sold almost all his stock of fertiliser in the first week of November. If he gets further allocation in December, he will be able to sell again.



November. However, the allocation of BADC's MOP, DAP and TSP was as per the demand. An artificial crisis of fertiliser has arisen in the local market due to some wealthy farmers and unscrupulous fertiliser sellers hoarding stocks.

He said they are now secretly selling fertiliser at higher prices. A drive is being launched against them. This problem will be minimised if fertiliser allocation is available in December.

A similar agenda applies to the civil services, local government and forces of law and order. The Election Commission itself cannot be left out of this agenda.

"The Public Services Commission and Establishments Division have presided over a network of patronage via recruitment and promotions for years. Clientelism has been everywhere. Political interference has been rife," he said.

To restore trust in the state, he proposed cleaning up public services and considering a truth and reconciliation commission to confront past abuses, reset careers, and establish principles to prevent future slippage.

"Without such reforms, the culture of public service cannot be established," he concluded.

Govt

FROM PAGE 5
Md Shahaduzzaman, deputy director of DAE in Faridpur, said that in this regard, a meeting was held at Faridpur deputy commissioner's office on November 27. In that meeting, a four-member inquiry committee was formed to investigate the matter. The committee will report next Thursday.

Apart from identifying the culprits, recommendations will be made on how to compensate the affected farmers, he added.

Families of victims

FROM PAGE 3

from the July Uprising in Uttara, was organised by Chobbishe Uttara, a platform formed during the anti-discrimination movement that began on July 18.

The programme began with the publication of a list of 46 individuals killed in Uttara during the uprising, including their names and identities. Among them, the identities of eight individuals were confirmed, but their photographs were unavailable.

The relatives of 12 victims spoke at the event. **HEART-WRENCHING TESTIMONIES**

Halim Sarkar, father of Sajib Sarkar, an MBBS doctor who was shot dead on July 18, said, "My son provided immediate care to injured protesters. That afternoon, he was shot and later declared dead at Uttara Adhunik Hospital. I urge the government to honour their memory by establishing a memorial. It might bring some solace to grieving families like ours."

Bilkis Zaman, mother of engineer Jahiduzzaman Tanvin, broke down as she recounted her son's death. "Tanvin built drones and worked on innovative projects. On July 18, he left home to withdraw money from the bank, promising to return in half an hour. He never came back."

Calling for justice, she added, "I demand that my son's name, along with all

the martyrs, be etched in golden letters in history. The killers must face justice urgently."

Forhad Ali, father of Kishorganj Polytechnic Institute student Samit Hossain, killed on August 5, recalled, "Samit left home to visit a friend. By 3:30pm, I received the devastating news of his death. I demand justice for my son and all the victims of this movement."

CALL FOR DOCUMENTATION

Samia Rahman and Sohana Saki, organisers of Chobbishe Uttara, moderated the event. The platform began compiling a list of those killed on September 20.

Samia said, "The July uprising in Uttara saw significant participation. We built networks through the protests, but the exact number of victims remains unknown. While some figures have been released, many cases remain unreported."

She urged the interim government to create an official list of victims and injured protesters.

The event concluded with a candlelight vigil and a minute of silence in memory of those who lost their lives during the uprising.

Families reiterated their demands for justice and accountability, calling for recognition of the sacrifices made during the anti-discrimination student movement.

16,500 murders

FROM PAGE 3

Prevention Act, often covering rape incidents.

Additionally, 3,15,000 drug-related cases, nearly 14,000 smuggling cases, and over 9,000 illegal arms recovery cases were reported during this time. Crime in Early 2024

In the first six months of 2024, 1,533 murders were reported. Other crimes included 183 robberies, 1,222 incidents of mugging and looting, 281 abductions, 9,000 cases of violence against women and children, 33,000 drug-related cases, 15,000 smuggling cases, and over 1,500 illegal arms recovery cases.

During the July Uprising July and August 2024 saw heightened unrest, with student-led anti-discrimination protests

escalating into a mass uprising. The government responded with lethal force, resulting in numerous civilian deaths.

Police statistics show 334 murders in July and 618 in August. During these months, there were 64 dacoity cases, 203 incidents of mugging, 59 abductions, and over 1,000 cases of theft.

Additionally, 2,774 cases of violence against women and children, 307 smuggling cases, 5,818 drug-related cases, and 149 illegal arms cases were also reported in this period.

The Awami League government fell on August 5 following the uprising. Many police stations were damaged, disrupting law enforcement operations and limiting the filing of new crime cases.

Dhaka's disappearing flood-flow zones

FROM PAGE 3

Rajuk has further divided flood-flow zones into "open flood-flow zones" and "general flood-flow zones".

While development is restricted in open zones, conditional development is now permitted in general zones, reducing the total flood-flow area by 23 percent.

"Rajuk has effectively legitimised encroachments and now has the power to alter land use based on individual or other considerations," said Iqbal Habib, vice president of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon.

"This will reduce Dhaka's flood-flow zones to a mere 26 percent of their original size."

CONSEQUENCES FOR DHAKA'S ENVIRONMENT

The gradual loss of flood-flow zones has dire implications for the city. Without sufficient floodplains, rivers like the Buriganga face reduced inflows, endangering their ecological health.

"When houses are built on elevated flood-flow zones, roads are also raised, creating low pockets that trap water," explained Iqbal Habib. "This leads to severe waterlogging in areas like Kalabagan, Kathalbagan, Rayerbazar, Matikata, and the DND region."

Mohammad Azaz, chairman of the River and Delta Research Centre (RDRC), highlighted how Dhaka has transformed from a wetland city into a

concrete maze.

"Dhaka should have been a sponge city, retaining water during rains. But unplanned urbanisation and inadequate town planning have buried natural water channels and wetlands, leaving the city defenseless against flooding."

Adil Mohammad Khan, president of BIP, added, "Flood-flow zones were once restricted for farming and water retention, ensuring natural flood mitigation. Now, the absence of penalties for encroachments has made the current DAP toothless."

Iqbal Habib warned, "Without sufficient flood-flow zones, Dhaka will face increased flash floods and river flooding. Vulnerable areas along the Buriganga's banks and other low-lying pockets will suffer the most."

HOUSING PROJECTS: GOVT, PVT CULPRITS

Government agencies have played a leading role in this crisis by developing large housing projects on wetlands, such as Uttara phases 1, 2, and 3, Purbachal, Jheelmil, and Baridhara J Block, according to experts. Private developers followed suit, with Jahirol Islam's Banasree and Eastern Housing becoming models for indiscriminate wetland encroachment, said Azaz.

"Even local housing societies are now filling wetlands and flood-flow zones for new projects," added Iqbal Habib.

The Drainage Masterplan 2016 by Dhaka Water Supply

and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) revealed that many back swamps, depressions, and natural channels have already been filled in Dhaka, exacerbating the city's drainage issues.

THE WAY FORWARD

Experts emphasise that protecting flood-flow zones require strict enforcement of existing regulations and meaningful penalties for encroachment. Developing Dhaka's town planning with a focus on ecology and sustainability is also crucial.

"The government must prioritise ecological and social considerations over mere land use," said Azaz. "Dhaka's survival depends on its ability to balance urbanisation with environmental preservation."

Stressing the need for proper protection of flood-flow zones, Adil said any type of development should be completely restricted in the flood-flow zones around Dhaka.

He said main flood-flow and sub-flood flow zones should be merged in the DAP to prohibit any types of development in these areas as they are imperative for water retention and protecting biodiversity, he added.

"Vested interest groups that were involved in the destruction of flood-flow zones for housing, industry, or other activities, should be identified and penalised accordingly. Culpable officials of Rajuk, DoE, water development board, DC office, and other

Teenager

FROM PAGE 3

is abroad, and my brother had gone to pray at a nearby mosque," she said.

"Arman and three accomplices broke into our room and tried to stab me in the neck with a knife. When my mother rushed to save me, she was injured as the knife struck her hand. Then they stabbed my mother several times in the abdomen. After that, they stabbed me three times in my back," she said.

"When we started crying, they left us," she added.

Raisa's paternal uncle Majid* said he was at the mosque with her brother that night.

"Hearing their cry, we rushed to the home and found them bleeding profusely. Later, we took them to Gopalganj Sadar Hospital, but due to the severity of their injuries, they were referred to Dhaka Medical College Hospital," he said.

"They were in no condition to survive. Raisa's mother suffered three perforations in her intestines. Emergency surgery was performed at DMCH. Meanwhile, Raisa had a punctured lung that doctors initially missed. When we brought her home after a week, complications reappeared, and we had to take her back to Dhaka. One surgery has already been done, and another is still pending," he added.

"We informed his family many times about the harassment, but no one took any action. Since no one stopped them, they gained the courage to carry out such a brutal attack," Raisa said.

"We demand exemplary punishment for this injustice so that no stalker dares to break into someone's home and attack like this," she added.

Following the attack, Raisa's uncle, Majid, filed a case at Gopalganj Sadar Police Station.

However, the accused have yet to be arrested, while the perpetrators have been issuing threats to force them to withdraw the case.

Sajedur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Gopalganj Sadar Police Station, said, "The accused are absconding, which is why we haven't been able to arrest them yet. However, we are trying to apprehend them as soon as possible."

*Names have been changed to protect the identities of the victims.

government offices should be punished as well for their misconduct," Adil said.

Adil said environmental laws should be modified and amended to increase the punishment for encroachers of flood-flow areas.

"Connectivity between different canals, waterbodies, and water channels should be restored. Appropriate demarcation of flood-flow zones is necessary as well and community engagement is also required to conserve these areas," he said.

Unless urgent action is taken, the city risks losing its remaining flood-flow zones, leaving its population exposed to unmanageable water crises in the years to come, experts warned.

NSU 25th

FROM PAGE 3

Azim Uddin Ahmed, chairman of the NSU Board of Trustees, congratulated the graduates. NSU Vice-Chancellor Prof Abdul Hannan Chowdhury also addressed the gathering. The convocation was attended among others by Prof AKM Waresul Karim, dean of the School of Business and Economics; Prof Md Rizwanul Islam, dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences; Prof Shazzad Hosain, dean of the School of Engineering and Physical Sciences; and Prof Dipak Kumar Mitra, dean of the School of Health and Life Sciences.

Hasina is a 'pathological killer': Sarjis

STAFF CORRESPONDENT,
City

Sarjis Alam, general secretary of the July Shaheed Smriti Foundation, yesterday



accused former prime minister Sheikh Hasina of being a 'pathological killer'.

"If Hasina were not a pathological killer, she would not have committed 2,000 murders. If she had any compassion for human life, she would not have taken so many lives," he said.

He made these remarks while speaking at a programme at the Primary Teacher Training Institute, Chattogram organised to provide financial assistance to families of those killed in the July Revolution.


"We are ready to take to the streets again and sacrifice our lives to ensure justice for the murderers and counter all conspiracies. Those who support or rehabilitate Hasina will be identified and held accountable," Sarjis said.

The event distributed Tk 5 lakh to each of the 105 families of martyrs in the Chattogram division.

Many family members were seen breaking down in tears as Sarjis consoled them during the event.

The programme was attended by Khan Talat Mahmud Rafi, co-coordinator of the anti-discrimination student movement, among others.

PRAYER TIMING DECEMBER 8



	Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN	5-15	12-45	3-45	5-19	7-00
JAMAAT	5-50	1-15	4-00	5-22	7-30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION



PHOTO: TITU DAS

On a misty winter morning, a group of fishermen heads out in small boats into the Kirtankhola river. Despite the chilly weather, they will spend hours trying to catch various types of fish like pangas and shrimp. The photo was taken in Charbaria area of Barishal Sadar upazila yesterday.

Govt-distributed onion seeds fail to germinate

9,200 farmers suffering in Rajbari, Faridpur

SUZIT DAS, Faridpur

Around 9,200 onion farmers in Rajbari and Faridpur are suffering after onion seeds that they received from the government failed to germinate. As a result, onion farmers are anticipating that onion production will fall across these two districts, which are known for being the top producers of onion in the country.

According to sources of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in Faridpur, a total of 5,200 farmers received onion seeds of the Taherpuri, Bari-4 and Bari-6 varieties as government incentives this year, along with 20kg of fertiliser per farmer. Out of 5,200kg of onion seeds, 4,000kg of Taherpuri variety and 1200kg of Bari variety have been distributed.

On the other hand, according to sources of DAE in Rajbari, a total of 4,000 farmers got Taherpuri, Bari-1 and Bari-4 varieties under the same project.

Speaking to farmers, this correspondent learned that not even five percent of these seeds germinated.

Sanjit Mondal, an onion grower of Bastuti village under Nagarkanda upazila in Faridpur, said the government gave him only one kg of Bari-4 variety seeds. He then sowed

these seeds on 45 decimals of land, but most of the seeds did not germinate.

Ahsan Molla, a farmer of Kagdi village under Saltha upazila, said he received only one kg of Taherpuri variety seeds as a government incentive. To cultivate onions on 105 decimals of land, he also purchased an additional one kg of seeds from the market. But the



seeds received from the government did not germinate. However, the seeds purchased from the market are germinating well.

Nazrul Mia, a farmer from Kaichail village in Nagarkanda upazila, along with Muktar Hossain, a farmer of Madhupur village under Balikandi upazila in Rajbari, echoed Ahsan and Sanjit.

Rafiqul Islam, sub-assistant agriculture

officer in Baliakandi upazila, said, "Onion seeds were provided by Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC). Under this incentive scheme, BADC procured onion seeds from their own farmers and other sources. However, the seeds are distributed through sub-assistant agriculture officers from the sub-district agriculture offices under the Directorate of Agriculture Extension. But most of the seeds did not germinate."

Tilok Kumar Ghosh, sub-assistant agriculture officer in Nagarkanda upazila, said their work was only to distribute. BADC (seed marketing) officers are responsible for seed testing.

"We have come to learn that out of the seeds distributed by the government, only 10 percent germinated."

Syed Kamrul Haque, deputy director of BADC (seed marketing) in Faridpur, said, "We collect these seeds through our designated farmers. A farmer is given one kg of seeds as an incentive. This is insufficient for them. Farmers buy seeds from the market and sow them. Farmers bought seeds from the market on their own initiative and sowed them in the lands where seedlings did not germinate."

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

Bottled soybean oil disappears from Munshiganj markets

TANJIL HASAN, Munshiganj

Bottled soybean oil cannot be found on the shelves of markets in Munshiganj. There has been a shortage of the product for the past two weeks.

However, this situation has become severe over the last one week. Buyers are returning home without getting bottled soybean oil when they come to the shops. A visit to various markets in the district revealed that most of the shops do not have any soybean oil.

Earlier, bottled soybean oil of various brands was available in these shops. However, now there is no oil of any brand.

A visit to Swapna Super Shop in Munshiganj city revealed that there is no soybean oil there. One sales person said that bottled soybean oil has not been available for quite some time.

Pappu Saha, a trader in the district's traditional Munshirhat market, said, "There has been a shortage of soybean oil for the past two weeks. Companies have reduced their supply. However, oil supply has totally been stopped for the past one week. To meet customer demand, some traders buy oil from Narayanganj at a higher price. Although the price is Tk 167 per litre, they buy it at Tk 172. Then they sell it for Tk 180. They buy 5-litre bottles for Tk 835 despite the label price being Tk 818. They then sell it for Tk 850."

We have found out that this is not happening only in Munshiganj. There is a shortage of bottled soybean oil across the country. There is nothing we can do about it. However, if it is sold at a price higher than the price written on the bottle label, so we will take legal action.

ASIF AL AZAD
Assistant Director, The Department
of Consumer Rights Protection

The trader said, "No monitoring has been done in the market regarding this."

The owner of Abul Hossain Store in Munshiganj market said, "Maybe the price will increase. That's why the companies are not supplying soybean oil. They are not saying when the supply will normalize."

Haliz, a staffer of a soybean oil brand company in Munshiganj, said, "We have a short supply now. Therefore, the oil supply to the shops is not being met."

Manzil, a dealer of one of the major brands in Munshiganj, said, "Due to the short supply, we are supplying 5-10 cartons of bottled soybean oil to the shops that require 50 cartons. The company has said that the situation will be normal after a week."

In this regard, Asif Al Azad, assistant director of the Department of Consumer Rights Protection of Munshiganj, said, "We have found out that this is not happening only in Munshiganj. There is a shortage of bottled soybean oil across the country. There is nothing we can do about it. However, if it is sold at a price higher than the price written on the bottle label, so we will take legal action."



Salesmen at DC Market in Barishal city are busy showcasing blankets of various colours and styles to customers throughout the day. As winter drives temperatures lower, the demand for blankets is on the rise. Depending on size and quality, blanket prices start at Tk 600 and go up to Tk 6,000. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Six killed, 3 hurt in road accidents

Five die in Cumilla alone

STAR REPORT

Six people were killed and three others injured in road accidents in two districts yesterday, according to reports from our correspondents.

In Cumilla, five persons were killed and three others injured in two separate accidents in Daudkandi upazila on Saturday.

Three persons -- two women and a child -- were killed and three others injured as a CNG-run auto-rickshaw collided with a Dhaka-bound bus on Dhaka Chattogram highway at Daulatpur near Eliotganj around 7:00am.

Doli Akter, 30, died on the spot and Jahanara Begum, 60, and Jiyana, 11, were declared dead at Dhaka Medical College

Hospital, said Dewan Koushik Ahmed, in-charge of Eliotganj Highway Police Outpost.

The injured were undergoing treatment at various hospitals, said police.

In another accident, two labourers were killed as a brick-laden tractor overturned and fell into a ditch beside Amirabad Sachar Road at Mahanando village, said police.

The incident happened around 10:30am while the tractor was trying to avoid a collision with a passenger bus, said Aminul Islam, in-charge of Gouripur police.

The deceased were identified as Burhanuddin, 18, from Gouripur in Daudkandi; and Md Ali Alias Sohel, 32, from Jamalpur. The two had died

before they were taken to Daudkandi Upazila Health Complex, said duty doctors.

In Jamalpur, an 11-year-old boy died after a battery-run auto-rickshaw hit a roadside tree in Melandah upazila.

The accident happened at Adyarpara area around 2:30pm.

The deceased -- identified as Reduan Islam, son of Sirajul Islam of Dilalerpara village -- was a student of Dilalerpara Government Primary School. Quoting the locals, Rasheduzzaman, officer-in-charge of Melandah Police Station, said Raduan was returning home on his father's auto-rickshaw from a local market. When he reached Adyarpara, the vehicle hit the tree.

Five more die of dengue

STAR REPORT

At least five dengue patients died and 562 others were hospitalised in the last 24 hours till yesterday morning.

Of them, three were reported from Dhaka South City Corporation. One death each has been reported from Dhaka and Chattogram divisions.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), with the new deaths and cases, the total number of deaths rose to 522 while a total number of cases rose to 95,632.

Currently, 2,408 dengue patients are undergoing treatment in hospitals across the country, of which 1,412 are from outside Dhaka. A total of 92,702 patients have been released till yesterday.



9.9°C in Naogaon, season's lowest

STAR REPORT

Winter has firmly set in across Naogaon, the northern district of Bangladesh, as the temperature dropped to a biting 9.9 degrees Celsius at 9:00am yesterday, marking the coldest day of this season.

Mizanur Rahman, an official from Badalgachhi Agricultural Meteorological Observatory Centre, confirmed the reading at Badalgachhi. This marks a sharp decline of 2.1 degrees Celsius compared to yesterday's 12°C in the upazila.

"The cold wave is intensifying due to chilly winds blowing from the north," Mizanur added.

Thick fog enveloped the area from early morning, compounding the discomfort of local residents. Swapna Ahmed, a resident of Naogaon town, said, "The cold wind has made the weather feel even colder. People started wearing warm clothes. Fog covers the area from night until dawn. The sun came out at 10:00am. Nights feel so cold that wearing a coat is necessary."

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16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Reclaiming the stories of women on screen

ZAREEN NAWAR

The intransigent and often vicious treatment toward women across the board, the world, and our very existence is a debilitating fact that indisputably remains more pronounced for some than most. One can imply that it is less normalised in the context of the broader, more enlightened community. Still, there is no question that gender-based violence seethes and thrives around junctures where people, especially women, are at their most vulnerable.

However, the worst of it all is the perpetual implementation of violent acts against women in more ways than one—with voices raised against such atrocities almost always falling short in number.

Let's take a look at Bangladeshi filmmakers employing their work to voice the need for victims of gender-based violence to own their narrative.

The depiction of violence against women through varied mediums, including films or shows, plays a pivotal part in people being able to analyse and assess the assortments of brutality—even more so for those who fail to recognise the undue tribunals whilst experiencing it for themselves. These scathing punches are not just delivered physically but

‘Meherjaan’, ‘Rising Silence’, and ‘Narir Kotha’ have particularly been credited as being bold by audiences and critics alike. This, in hindsight, can be attributed to women being either in charge of the production or co-directing them.

verbally, psychologically, sexually, and even socioeconomically. Then again, the depiction of raw or perceivable violence is not always capitalised perhaps because of the existence of strict censorship policies against showcasing such representations



VISUAL: DOWEL BISWAS

worldwide; not wanting to receive backlash from conservative groups; not having sufficient insight, grasp, or sensibility on the portrayal of violence against women; and the unfathomable stigma associated with being victims of violence.

The frameworks of portrayals of gender-based violence in our local productions can easily be said to have been birthed from the need to give voice to the oppressed *Biranganas* (war heroines)—as portrayed through several films or dramas throughout the years.

The late pioneering filmmaker Tareque Masud inevitably has become one to be named when mentioning the portrayal of the everyday woman in films. The documentary *Narir Kotha* (Women and War) from the year 2000, directed by Tareque Masud and his wife Catherine Masud, is a mouthpiece for women who

were subjugated to dual oppression during the Liberation War—providing weight to a second wave feminist theory that rings true to date.

Another documentary, *Rising Silence* (2018) by Leesa Gazi, tells of rape survivors still struggling to fight to obtain dignity. In times of war or unprecedented chaos, women are inevitably and doubly subjugated—by the patriarchal system and men's individual treatment of women.

Films like *Meherjaan* (2011) by Rubaiyat Hossain and *Shongram* (2014) by Munsur Ali, among others, play a landmark role in representing women who were once victims of war crimes. The women in these films navigate the trenches of both love and war, while becoming sufferers themselves.

Meherjaan, *Rising Silence*, and *Narir Kotha* have particularly been credited as being bold by audiences and critics alike.

This, in hindsight, can be attributed to women being either in charge of the film production or co-directing a documentary.

The representation of marital woes experienced by victims of domestic violence is a monumental aspect that requires awareness. Local productions like *Haldaa* (2017) by Tauquir Ahmed, *Made in Bangladesh* (2019) by Rubaiyat Hossain, *Kuhelika* (2023) by Samiur Rahman, and *Sabrina* (2022) by Ashlaque Nipun, among others, take the plunge to address varied forms of subjugation of women within the supposedly safe confines of being married.

Kuhelika, directed by a male director, displays a rather vengeful take on a victim of domestic abuse. The character Nandini (Nazia Haque Orsha) in *Kuhelika* ends up murdering her abusive husband while she attempts to protect herself. This stance, however, reinvigorates her desire

to live peacefully with her brother and his daughter. The man she had chosen to marry turned out to be duplicitous in nature, and she suffered the consequences of having married him in spite of knowing him as a different man before their marriage.

Sabrina, on the other hand, is the story of a conniving, pathetic, and desperate man who became the reason behind the incidental raping and then burning of the character *Sabrina* (Nazia Haque Orsha). Although *Sabrina* ends on an incomplete note, the task of finding out the true identities of the culprits behind Sabrina's inception is undertaken by her namesake, played by Mehazabien Chowdhury. The constant vilification of your average woman is a towering aspect of this series.

Films like *Made in Bangladesh* and Abdullah Mohammad Saad's *Rehana Maryam Noor* (2021) flaunt the value of sisterhood and support victims inevitably need in order to sustain their emotional and mental health. The respective main characters, Shimu (Rikita Nandini Shimu) and Rehana (Azmeri Haque Badhan), innately support victims in need of assistance. They do so for their need to demand justice, regardless of the costs, and their personal lives often take the toll of their actions. Shimu ends up having to fight with a loving husband to run to do right by the side of her colleague sisters who work alongside her at a garments factory. Rehana, on the other hand, fights the institutional system and deceitful allegations to stand for her beliefs.

Interestingly, director Saad takes the help of publicly shaming the central character to illustrate her devotion to the cause, while Hossain relies upon the central character eagerly seeking support for the betterment of every other woman being oppressed by the capitalistic system of extortion.

When all is said and done, representations of victims of gender-based violence need to be heard, acknowledged, and seen on all fronts. Regardless of the gender of filmmakers or creators, the especially true stories of victims need to always be out there—to give them the dignity of knowing that it was never their fault.

NEWS

Daring to dream

FROM PAGE 12 resumed her education.

"I was told I'd only stay here for a month. But one month turned into six, and then a decade. This place became my home."

Consumed by the fears for her safety and of judgment from others, it took her years to begin her schooling again. "My life had barely begun, but all I wanted was for it to end. I kept asking, 'Why me?'"

Her encounters with the justice system only deepened her trauma. "When I was questioned at the police station, I felt so embarrassed. I didn't even understand what a court was or why people went there. But I had no choice — I had to relive that horrific moment over and over in front of strangers.

"In court, they questioned me so harshly, as if I was lying, I felt nervous, threatened, and completely defeated. Once, they even said I was making it all up. I wanted to give up.... I hated myself and wanted to get away from it all. But for the sake of justice, I had no choice but to keep enduring the same unbearable trauma."

During this time, Ritu's mother was forced to leave her maternal uncle's home as threats from her father escalated. He relentlessly harassed and beat her, ultimately forcing her to quit

her job.

Struggling to survive, Ritu's mother began selling flowers and later worked as a day labourer.

A year after moving to the safe home, Ritu lost contact with her mother.

"She started suffering from psychological issues and hasn't been in regular contact with me since then. She had to leave my younger brother with my father, and we lost communication," Ritu said.

Ritu later found her mother, whose psychological condition prevented her from further pursuing the case. The last time they met was over two years ago and last they spoke was around two months ago.

Despite repeated attempts, Ritu's lawyer could not be reached for comment. However, according to the Bangladesh Mahila Lawyers Association, the case remains at the evidence-gathering stage. Progress has stalled as Ritu's mother continues to be absent from court proceedings.

BNWLA lawyer Fahmida Akhter informed this correspondent that when a plaintiff misses several court dates in a row, the court typically acquits the accused.

In 2018, Ritu was granted self-custody due to her mother's condition. However, she remains in the shelter as she has nowhere else to go. "If I

leave, I'd end up on the streets like my mother."

Ritu passed her SSC exams this year and is now focused on pursuing nursing.

"I've always wanted to help people, but more than anything, I want to support my mother and give her the life she deserves.

"Worrying about my safety and future, my mother has become mentally unstable and now lives on the streets. For her sake, I need to quickly become self-sufficient.... That's why, I've decided to get into a paramedical nursing course to start working as soon as possible. I'll also continue my HSC and later pursue a full nursing degree," she said.

With no family or friends to support her, Ritu's only hope is BNWLA.

Advocate Salma Ali, president of BNWLA, said that despite financial challenges, they are trying to secure Ritu's admission to a nursing institution, where she can enroll in a paramedical nursing course.

Over the years, Ritu's resilience won everyone's heart at the safe home.

Its admin officer and house mother said, "Ritu's determination is extraordinary. She is focused on becoming self-reliant and supporting her mother. I'm confident she'll go far."

[Sunday]. The oil and LNG import process is also open to all," he added.

Badrul Imam, honorary professor of geology at Dhaka University, said like Nigeria, Bangladesh is rich in gas resources.

"In terms of gas resources, we have enormous potential. But we have always leaned towards imports."

Ijaz Hossain, a former faculty member of Buet, suggested that industries and businesses focus on building their resources by installing rooftop solar panels or waste-to-energy as alternative power sources to mitigate energy shortfalls.

DCCI President Ashraf Ahmed delivered the welcome remarks.

BSRM's Head of Corporate Affairs Saumitra Kumar Mutsuddi, DFDE's partner Barrister Shahwar Jamal Nizam, President of Bangladesh Solar and Renewable Energy Association Md Nurul Aktar, and Vice Chairman of Confidence Group Imran Karim also spoke, among others.

Tigers look to extend streak

FROM PAGE 12 "Whenever I play, I always try to give my best for the team. I'm happy that I could deliver my best," Nahid said in a video message, adding that he got tips from legendary pacer Courtney Walsh after the Jamaica Test.

"He told me to take care of myself and work on fitness. He told me to learn new things as there is no end to learning," he concluded.

Meanwhile, a Bangladesh Cricket Board official confirmed that the three Bangladeshi cricketers —

Soumya Sarkar, Afif Hossain and Rishad Hossain — who played in the final of Global Super League for Rangpur Riders on Friday night (Guyana time), are expected to join the Tigers in St Kitts on Saturday, ahead of the series opener.

West Indies, meanwhile, recently beat England in a three-match ODI series — their first series win in this format this year after defeats to Australia and Sri Lanka.

They lost Matthew Forde and Shamar Joseph due to injuries,

replacing them with Marquino Mindley and Jediah Blades.

"We look at any home series (with the aim to) win. However, we understand the opposition that we will play against, and we will not take them for granted. I love to focus on what we can do and what we have to do. I'm pretty sure we can do that," Windies head coach Daren Sammy said.

The match is scheduled to start at 07:30 pm (Bangladesh time) and will be telecast live on T Sports.

Faulty media reports portray Bangladesh unfairly

FROM PAGE 12 top investigative website, which built its reputation by covering some of the biggest corruption and human rights violation stories in Bangladesh," Shafiqul Alam said.

The press secretary said the Netra News report claimed that nearly all nine Hindu deaths, which the minority council attributed to communal hatred-related violence, were linked to other factors such as political, personal, and other reasons.

"Our expectations were that the unity council would respond to the Netra News report, for it raises serious questions about the way the council collects and files reports on violence against minorities in Bangladesh," he said.

He also said the unity council also made a similar controversial report on the attacks on minorities in Bangladesh in July this year.

"It said in the 2023-24 financial year, beginning on July 1, 2023, at least 45 people of minority faiths — mostly Hindus — were killed in the country. Again, Bangladeshi newspapers carried the story on their front and back pages. And not a single media outlet challenged the report despite there being serious questions about the veracity of the unity council's claims," Alam said.

However, according to the Ain o Salish Kendra, the country's largest human rights group, no one was killed in anti-minority violence in 2023 and only two persons were killed this year (January to October), he said.

The ASK is a secular group headed

by human rights defender ZI Khan Panna. He has told local media that he would be interested in defending Sheikh Hasina, the ousted prime minister in the July uprising, in trials.

Claiming that the Bangladesh Hindu Buddha Christian Unity Council's reports have a far-reaching impact, the press secretary said when a British MP recently spoke about the attacks on minorities in Bangladesh, he quoted the Council's report.

The report on the post-revolution attacks on Hindus was cited more than 11 million times in social media, he said.

"What I've learnt is that the powerful and deep-pocketed Hindu American groups, Indian national and regional newspapers, and top Indian commentators cite its report to portray the state of minorities in Bangladesh. Experts told me the Unity Council's reports have been the single biggest source of misinformation on anti-minority violence in Bangladesh," he added.

Alam said, "Violence against minorities happens in Bangladesh. We are still not the ideal country as far as communal harmony is concerned. We hear reports of discrimination based on religion. There are also regular bouts of violence triggered by allegedly blasphemous Facebook posts. And some fringe groups and figures often spread hate against minority people."

In recent weeks, he said, there have been greater efforts by the interim government, political, religious, and civil society leaders urging people to

stay calm during religiously tinged incidents.

Some of them have shown extraordinary political maturity in these events, he said.

However, he claimed, the Unity Council's reports have systematically exaggerated the violence perpetrated against the minority people.

"We hope top secular and liberal newspapers will do their own probe into the alleged cases of religious violence reported by the council. We also hope international rights groups such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International will also do similar investigations," the press secretary said.

The HRW did an excellent investigation into the massacres of Hefazat activists in 2013, he mentioned, hoping that the rights group would do a similar probe.

He said if the government does the debunking job, there is a strong chance that its reports will be seen with some sort of scepticism.

"Let the independent newspapers and rights groups probe these incidents. We think it is a serious issue, for Bangladesh has been unfairly portrayed in international media and top parliamentary hearings in influential nations," Alam said.

He said some even call for sending UN peacekeepers to Bangladesh — or intervening in the country — based on these reports, and that is why the interim government wants fair investigations into the alleged cases of minority repression.

WAR ON GAZA

Talks 'likely' to resume in coming week

AFP, Palestinian Territories

A new round of negotiations for a Gaza truce and hostage release deal will "most likely" begin in the coming week, a source close to the Hamas delegation told AFP yesterday.

"Based on contacts with the mediators, we expect a new round of negotiations to begin in Cairo, most likely this week, to discuss ideas and proposals regarding a ceasefire and a prisoner exchange," said the source, who asked to remain anonymous.

Qatar had been mediating ceasefire talks for months alongside the United States and Egypt, but last month it announced it was suspending its efforts, saying Israel and Hamas needed to "show their willingness and seriousness".

On Thursday, a source close to the talks said Qatar had resumed its mediation.

Is it the end of Assad?

Syria rebels say encircling Damascus as govt denies falling back

AFP, Beirut

Rebels on a lightning advance through Syria yesterday said they have begun to encircle Damascus as government forces denied they had withdrawn from areas near the capital.

"Our forces have begun the final phase of encircling the capital, Damascus," said rebel commander Hassan Abdel Ghani, with the Islamist-led alliance that launched the offensive.

The defence ministry flatly denied the army had fled positions near the city.

"There is no truth to news claiming our armed forces, present in all areas of the Damascus countryside, have withdrawn," it said.

It also said the president is working from Damascus denying reports Assad has left the capital.

Earlier, a war monitor and Abdel Ghani said rebels were within 20 kilometres of Damascus as government forces fell back in the face of the offensive gathering even more momentum.

The Syria Observatory for Human Rights said government forces had ceded more key ground, losing control of all of southern Daraa province and evacuating posts in Quneitra, near the Israel-annexed Golan Heights.

The monitor said government forces were also pulling out of towns as little as 10 kilometres (six miles) from Damascus.

Abdel Ghani said earlier that "our forces were able to control the Saasaa (security)



branch in the Damascus countryside. The advance towards the capital continues."

Air strikes and shelling by government forces and their ally Russia killed at least seven civilians near the city of Homs, as the army sought to slow the rebel advance there.

The astounding rebel gains have brought the Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) and its allies to the doorstep of President Bashar al-Assad's seat of power, just over a week into a renewed offensive in a conflict that had long seemed frozen.

As the rebels seize more territory, they have also sought to reassure those living in areas now under their control.

Abdel Ghani in a statement on Telegram Saturday recognised that the rebels had taken areas where "different religious sects and minorities" live.

"We ask that all sects be reassured... for the era of sectarianism and tyranny has gone away forever," he said.

Syria's civil war, which began with Assad's crackdown on democracy protests, has killed more than 500,000 people and forced more than half the population to flee their homes.

3 pro-BNP bodies march

FROM PAGE 1

The meeting also comes at a time when ties between Dhaka and Delhi are under considerable strain over various issues, including allegations of attacks on minorities in Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, Indian Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) on Friday announced that activists from over 200 social and cultural organisations will march towards the Bangladesh High Commission in New Delhi on Tuesday.

The demonstration, coinciding with International Human Rights Day, will be held to protest against "alleged atrocities" on minority communities, including Hindus, in Bangladesh.

Rajnish Jindal, co-in-charge of the RSS Delhi unit's media and communications department, shared details at a press conference where he said the march will include representatives of various social, cultural, and religious groups under the banner of "Civil Society of Delhi".

He added that a memorandum would be submitted to the Bangladesh High Commission and international organisations such as the UN, UNHRC, WHO, Amnesty International, and ADB, urging immediate intervention to halt the "violence".

Former Indian high commissioner to Bangladesh Veena Sikri and ex-director general of the Intelligence Bureau Rajiv Jain also spoke at the event, expressing grave concern over the situation.

"This is the worst situation for Hindus and other minority communities in Bangladesh since the Liberation War of 1971," Veena claimed.

In another development, hoteliers in Barak valley of the north eastern state of Assam have announced that they would not host any Bangladesh national till alleged attacks on Hindus and other minorities in that country stop, PTI reported from Guwahati.

This was announced by Barak Valley Hotel and Restaurant Association President Babul Rai on Friday.

Barak Valley comprises three districts of Cachar, Sribhumi (formerly Karimganj) and Hailakandi and shares a 129km-long border with Bangladesh's Sylhet region.

A PTI report from Washington said a protest march is being organised by "Hindu Action" near the White House tomorrow while another protest would be held by Hindu community leaders in Chicago today.



MARTIAL LAW FIASCO

South Korea president escapes impeachment

AFP, Seoul

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol escaped impeachment yesterday over his brief declaration of martial law, after lawmakers from his ruling party boycotted a vote despite protests outside parliament.

Yoon stunned the nation and the international community Tuesday night by suspending civilian rule and sending troops to parliament, but was forced into a U-turn after lawmakers nixed his decree.

Opposition parties proposed the impeachment motion, which needed a two-thirds majority to pass, but a near-total boycott by Yoon's People Power Party (PPP) doomed it to failure.

"The number of members who voted did not reach the required two-thirds majority," National Assembly speaker Woo Won-shik said, saying that as a result, the impeachment vote was "not valid".

The country -- and the world -- was

watching, he said, adding it was "very regrettable that a vote could not even be held on such a significant national issue".

He said it signified "a failure to engage in the democratic process" on the part of the ruling party.

The PPP claimed after the vote that it had blocked the impeachment to avoid "severe division and chaos", adding that it would "resolve this crisis in a more orderly and responsible manner".

The outcome disappointed the huge crowds -- numbering 150,000 according to police, one million according to organisers -- demonstrating outside parliament for Yoon's ouster.

The opposition has already vowed to try again as soon as Wednesday, and protesters vowed to continue demonstrations.

"I will impeach Yoon Suk Yeol, who has become the worst risk for South Korea, at any cost," opposition leader Lee Jae-myung said.

Arson attack

FROM PAGE 12

The decorations, roof, and idol were damaged, according to the case statement.

Babul said the criminals had fled the scene before he woke up.

Some Indian media outlets reported that the temple was affiliated with the International Society for Krishna Consciousness Bangladesh.

However, Hrishikesh Gouranga

Das, spokesperson of the organisation, told The Daily Star that the temple was not directly affiliated.

"There is an ISKCON-affiliated temple near the family-owned one, and we use it jointly during major events," he explained.

Sub-inspector Saiful Islam told The Daily Star that he visited the site yesterday and spoke with locals.

"We are trying to collect CCTV footage," he said.

Finally begins on Dec 16

FROM PAGE 12

buses instead and started the process of buying 130 electric buses in July 2022.

However, the company changed its mind again and floated a tender to procure 137 diesel-run AC buses for the service last year. But the authorities cancelled the first tendering process over forgery by two foreign companies and started re-tender process earlier this year, sources said.

Md Moniruzzaman, managing director of Dhaka BRT Company, yesterday said the bidding process is now at the final stage and awaits board approval.

Once the contractor is appointed, they would supply the first lot (50 buses) within four months, said Moniruzzaman, adding that they are hopeful of launching the fully-fledged BRT service from June next year.

As the bus procurement process is taking time, the adviser directed them to start the service with BRTC buses, so that the infrastructure does not remain unused, he said.

Ehsanul Hoque, senior secretary of the Road Transport and Highways Division, also talked about introducing the service at an event in Gazipur yesterday.

BRTC, from December 1, with two buses started the test run on the BRT route and will launch the service with 10 buses from December 16, Moniruzzaman told The Daily Star yesterday.

A BRTC officer said the service will have seven stoppages at Gulistan, Shahbagh, Farmgate, Airport, College Gate, Board Bazar, Joydebpur Chowrasta, and Shibbari, and the fare would be Tk 140.

The BRTC buses will use the Dhaka Elevated Expressway, and it would take around two hours to reach Shibbari in Gazipur from Gulistan.

Responding to a question, Moniruzzaman said, "BRTC bus service will definitely not be same as the BRT service."

He, however, said only cars and BRTC buses would be allowed to use the BRT dedicated corridor built on the middle of Dhaka-Gazipur Road, a part

of Dhaka-Mymensingh highway, and other buses will use the existing road.

Formally known as Greater Dhaka Sustainable Urban Transport Project, it was originally planned to be completed by December 2016 at a cost of Tk 2,037.9 crore.

But long delay was caused by issues relating to land acquisition, relocation of utility services, design changes, contractors running out of money, and the pandemic. Moreover, physical work was suspended twice.

As a result, the total project cost is now estimated at Tk 4,268.3 crore and the deadline is December 2024. But the authorities sought one more year to complete the work.

Once the dedicated rapid bus service comes into operation, it is supposed to allow people to reach Dhaka from Gazipur in 35-40 minutes, which now takes between 1.5 and two-three hours.

Till September this year, the project saw 97.14 progress, shows progress report. However, the project got a setback after miscreants damaged 22 escalators to be used for elevated stations on the route during July-August student movement.

Apart from installing the escalators, the authorities will have to do several other works to launch the BRT service completely, including hiring bus operator and installing intelligent transportation system (ITS) service at stoppages for automatic ticketing services and other issues.

BRT Managing Director Moniruzzaman said initially they will hire BRTC as operator, and a memorandum of understanding is getting ready in this regard.

He, however, said ITS system may not be ready even in next June and in that case, they will go for semi-automated ticketing system.

The project is being jointly implemented by the Roads and Highways Department, Bangladesh Bridge Authority, and Local Government Engineering Department, with the lion's share of the fund coming from foreign loan.

From PM to UP member

FROM PAGE 12

"We must ensure accountability everywhere. It's not something that cannot be achieved overnight, but it is possible... If you think about your family, it thrives because of accountability," he said.

The workshop, titled "31-Point State Structure Reform Proposal and Public Engagement," was organised by the BNP Training Affairs Committee at the Faridpur Sadar Upazila Complex.

Tarique said corruption, anarchy, breakdowns in law and order, and other misdeeds occurred during the autocratic regime of Sheikh Hasina due to a complete lack of accountability.

He said the Awami League arranged one-sided elections repeatedly, while its leaders and workers indulged in widespread looting and siphoning off vast amounts of money abroad. All these were possible because there was no accountability to the people.

"So, we aim to address corruption, establish the rule of law, and strengthen the healthcare sector for a better future of the people. We also want to create an environment where students can access quality education in the country. As a political activist, I believe much can be achieved if accountability is established," the BNP leader said.

He said a free and fair election is essential to restore accountability, reclaim people's lost rights, and implement BNP's 31-point proposal for gradually building a new Bangladesh. "It's only natural that a party like the BNP would call for a fair election. To make this happen, everyone has to play their part."

The BNP leader recalled how people from all walks of life united to force the autocratic Awami League regime to "flee the country". "Similarly, we must all unite to establish our rights."

"If we want to achieve our goals, I need cooperation from all leaders and workers. The first condition for this cooperation is maintaining people's confidence. To do that, we must act, speak, and behave according to the will of the people," he said.

The BNP leader acknowledged that some party leaders and activists might be making mistakes. However, he said, this cannot go on. "We must stay alert and warn them. In some cases, we must take strict action."

Tarique said people's confidence is the most precious asset of any political party, its leaders, and its activists. "We will lose everything if we lose people's confidence. So, let's pledge to preserve it. If we sit idle at home thinking BNP has already earned people's trust, that confidence will gradually erode."

Tarique called upon his party colleagues to correct themselves first to gain and retain people's confidence and fight against extortion, corruption and immoral activities.

"Correct yourselves first and then tell others to amend themselves. Otherwise, there's no point in talking big about eliminating immoral activities and extortion," he said.

He said their party is taking organisational actions against party men engaged in such activities. He said the party is even taking extreme measures such as filing written complaints to the administration against the culprits who have broken laws defying party directives.

He said their party wants stability in Bangladesh as soon as possible to address the existing problems properly.

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Prioritise enhancing business environment

Improve law and order, rebuild trust with international partners

Bangladesh's economy is at a critical juncture due to widespread corruption, financial irregularities, and the politicisation of public institutions by the previous Awami League regime. Since the interim government took charge following the fall of the AL on August 5, it has been attempting to restore some stability in the financial and business sectors. However, the efforts being made are not sufficient compared to the damage inflicted on the business environment by ongoing political instability and law and order situation not being fully restored. According to Syed Ershad Ahmed, president of the American Chamber of Commerce in Bangladesh, it is imperative to improve the law and order situation in the country to recover Bangladesh's global image, which was significantly tarnished during the AL's rule. The government must also urgently address issues like political stability and corruption to rebuild the trust of international partners.

Although exports and remittances have increased over the past four months, the ongoing macroeconomic instability, high inflation, and political unrest continue to threaten economic growth and recovery. According to a recently presented government-commissioned white paper on the economy, \$234 billion were siphoned out of Bangladesh between 2009 and 2023, during the AL's tenure. Economic growth has also been overstated since 1995, with the practice of inflating estimates more after the fiscal year 2012-13. Additionally, Bangladesh's net FDI was found to have been overstated by \$5.7 billion between the fiscal years 2019-20 and 2022-23. These issues have significantly dampened our economic prospects, which now requires well-thought-out strategies and plans to recover.

During the reign of the AL, public institutions such as the Bangladesh Bank, the National Board of Revenue, the Election Commission, and the police were heavily politicised. This widespread politicisation has significantly affected the business climate. Moreover, as more businesspeople entered politics, they prioritised their business interests over political commitments, further politicising public institutions for personal gain. For example, according to Shushasoner Jonno Nagorik, two-thirds of the lawmakers elected in January's 12th parliamentary election were businesspeople.

Against this backdrop, the interim government must focus on bringing buyers and investors back to the country by addressing the ongoing political uncertainty and relatively fragile law and order situation. It must implement significant reforms in state institutions to rebuild trust with international partners. Furthermore, it should encourage the creation of new businesses to attract both foreign and local investors. Since business and commerce depends on political stability and the overall situation in relation to law and order, the challenges faced by businesspeople in these regards must be urgently addressed.

Why are food prices not coming down?

Govt must have a multi-pronged approach to curb them

The latest figures on inflation, especially food inflation, are alarming indicators that reconfirm that people from lower and lower-middle-income groups are going through extreme financial hardship. With inflation hitting 11.38 percent—a four months high—and food inflation soaring to 13.8 percent (in urban areas it is 14.63 percent), putting food on the table has become a huge challenge, especially for the poor. This is despite the government tightening the monetary policy and lowering import taxes on essential items. In such a crisis, the government must come up with urgent measures to provide some relief to ease the burden. The suggestions made by various economists must be given importance in order to find a way out of the crisis.

One of the reasons given by economists for the high inflation despite a stringent monetary policy is the central bank's printing of high-powered money to provide liquidity support to distressed banks and protect depositors. Because of the creation of new money, further inflationary pressure is being exerted on the market.

In this situation, the government, as suggested by economists, must adopt simultaneous strategies to bring prices under control. The first task is to identify the factors that are driving food prices up. While the supply of rice and vegetables took a big hit during the floods in August, there are other factors that are also at work. For example, due to the continuation of extortion in the supply chain, prices of goods are getting inflated by the time they reach the market. Additionally, the market is still controlled by a few, and collusion in wholesale markets persists, which is another factor that is driving up prices.

The multi-pronged approach suggested by economists includes better policing of extortion in the supply chain, fostering more competition in the market, and clamping down on wholesalers' collusion to hike prices. The number of Trading Corporation Bangladesh trucks providing subsidised food items must be increased significantly to meet demand, with distribution carried out in a more systematic manner. Improved coordination between the Bangladesh Bank, the National Board of Revenue, Commerce Ministry, and the Bangladesh Competition Commission is also essential.

Inflationary pressures ripple through all aspects of the economy and aggravate social problems such as crime. As such, government control over the prices of essential items must be treated as the most urgent task at hand. It goes without saying that, given the tremendous inflationary pressure people have been suffering for almost two years, their standard of living continues to deteriorate. Unless the government finds an urgent solution to the inflationary crisis, the spillover effects on the rest of the economy will lead to even greater concerns down the line.

How Indian media distorted two interviews with the CA's press secretary



WINKERS AWEIGH

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TANIM AHMED

The *India Today* interview, aired on December 3, of Shafiqul Alam, the chief adviser's press secretary, is a fairly good example of the typical Indian disinformation campaign.

The tone is set right at the beginning when the presenter introduces Shafiqul saying, "...now listen in to how, in fact, this Yunus government insider actually denies Hindu hate" as if that has already been established.

Gaurav Sawant begins by saying that the reports from Bangladesh suggest the situation is rather "grim" for Hindus and minorities in Bangladesh and proceeds to ask Shafiqul, what the government is doing to make Hindus and other minorities feel secure "amid reports that there is a sharp rise in attacks on them." There is no substantiation of the "grim" situation or the "sharp rise," however, as if it is already established.

Shafiqul begins by saying there is an industrial scale misinformation coming out of India and the situation here for Hindus, or other minorities, is not as bad as is being made.

By the time Gaurav Sawant comes back with the question, the screen starts showing a photo of Ramen Roy and another of former ISKCON monk, Chinmoy Krishna Das, with subtitles reading Ramen Roy, Chinmoy *Prabhu's* lawyer, allegedly attacked by Islamists. This is where another layer of disinformation begins.

Ramen Roy is a Supreme Court lawyer who was attacked in Shahbagh on November 25 during a protest by ISKCON supporters. He slipped into a coma for lack of medical attention. A grave misfortune, no doubt, and rather deplorable incident. But the man was by no means Chinmoy's lawyer. In all likelihood, Ramen Roy was caught in a scuffle and the police must find the perpetrators of this senseless violence and ensure justice for the lawyer. As for Chinmoy himself, the monk had to leave (or was let go) ISKCON under very dubious circumstances with grave allegations levelled against him.

Gaurav Sawant then goes on to say, "The manner in which Hindu temples are being burnt, professors are being sacked, police personnel are being sacked...your attorney general is calling ISKCON fundamentalist but Hefazat-e-Islam and Jamaat-e-Islami, they seem to be ruling the roost in Bangladesh... it just seems a little odd for a country



FILE VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

like Bangladesh where India had played a very critical role in the freedom of Bangladesh from Pakistan and it just seems to be becoming another Pakistan." To that, Shafiqul repeated that India was flooded with an industrial scale misinformation campaign and asked Gaurav to send his team to Bangladesh.

The line of questioning brings in too many elements into play which makes it difficult to address the actual question at hand because of the need to set the premise straight—that the fundamentalist Islamists are not ruling the roost. No one from Bangladesh challenges Indian government about why RSS is ruling the roost there. It is a question for the Indians and their journalists to ask but not for outsiders. What the Indian media establishment refuses to accept or acknowledge is that they have a party in power for the last 10 years that aspires to establish a Hindu Rashtra, a Hindu state, which is almost similar to what the Jamaat-e-Islami aspires for—an Islamic state. Also, just because India helped Bangladesh does not mean Bangladesh is a vassal state.

The presenter suggested that hundreds of temples are burning as he speaks, while frenzied mullahs are forcing Hindu teachers and police officers to resign. It is not that it has not happened. It has. But police officers and teachers were made to resign for their political affiliations, not because

they were Hindus, there were Muslims too. In fact, if one were to enumerate them, Muslims would perhaps outnumber Hindus by four to one. It was political retribution. That was also the same case with Munni Saha, which Shafiqul explains as another case of political reprisal, and not a case of religious persecution. There were some temples vandalised in August while in

situation was completely out of control in Bangladesh and Hindus were indeed in grave danger. Except, most of the clips are from July and August where Chhatra League goons were beating up protesters, or where protesters were chasing away policemen and trying to vandalise their cars. Thus, through Shafiqul's insistence that the situation is stable, he comes off as brazenly

Chattoogram, one temple was stoned and its glass door broke down.

But Shafiqul does not get the opportunity to point this out as Gaurav Sawant has begun talking at his interviewee almost goading him, instead of talking to him. Shafiq implores to let him finish before the host begins to shout over him. The interview soon breaks down where both are talking at the same time and it seems to the audience that a government official has been exposed.

In another interview with NDTV (this one with Shafiqul as well, aired on December 4), the anchor points out that the government has not arrested the violence on minorities "given the fact that some of the videos and photos and commentary that's been coming in are actually attacks on minorities that continue unabated." Again, none of this is established or attributed directly. But the question is premised in such a manner that the unabated violence is a universally acknowledged truth.

Shafiqul acknowledges that there were indeed some violence and says there were isolated incidents. While this host continues in a more civil manner, the footage on screen turns aggressive. It shows absolute mayhem in several places, where thugs are beating up young women on the streets, mobs are chasing away police patrol and vandalising a police pickup van. Anyone would agree that the

misrepresenting facts.

Rumor Scanner, a factchecking outfit in Dhaka reported on December 6 that as many as 49 Indian news outlets published 13 fake news items on Bangladesh over the four months that the interim government has been in power. The outlets include reputable ones like Live Mint, *India Today*, *Hindustan Times* and The Print.

This selective choice of half-truths and exaggerating them with meticulous manipulation is repeated so much, especially on social media platforms and television stations, that they have unfortunately come to define the Indian media. There are of course some credible outlets like *The Hindu* and tough, but journalistic interviewers like Karan Thapar. In fact, Rajdeep Sardesai's recent interview by Karan Thapar for The Wire where the reputed journalist expressed his disillusionment with the Indian media establishment bears testimony to its downward spiral.

What is perhaps most worrying is that this unrelenting barrage of disinformation campaign from the other side of the border is not helping cool down temperatures. It is becoming increasingly worrisome for minorities in India as well as those in Bangladesh, sometimes to such an extent that governments are now having to grapple with the issues before they escalate further.

16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The shadows of everyday violence



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NAMIRA SHAMEEM

From misogynistic comments under a woman's post to the quiet suffering of a daughter-in-law behind closed doors, gender-based violence (GBV) permeates all spheres of life, visible and hidden. It is normalised, often overlooked, and tragically unchallenged. Veena Das's concept of "everyday violence" captures this reality: violence is not always loud or overt. It whispers through routines, internalised as inevitable, like the static of a radio or the hum of a ceiling fan.

In South Asia, street harassment—catcalls, lewd remarks, groping—has become as familiar as navigating traffic or bad weather. It's part of the pre-arrival briefing, a tacit agreement society makes with itself to *manage* harm rather than eradicate it. This societal acceptance of public harassment reflects a glaring failure that perpetuates violence.

While "violence" often conjures images of physical harm, "abuse" encompasses a broader spectrum, including emotional, verbal, and psychological dimensions. The leering gaze on a crowded bus, the casual sexist remark in the office, or coercion disguised as consent within relationships are not exceptions but daily realities. These acts, dangerously

invisible in their normalisation, must be acknowledged as abuse to be addressed effectively. It is also important to confront systemic issues, including data vacuum and legal inertia.

There is a dearth of reliable and nuanced data on gender-based violence (GBV) despite decades of advocacy. The 2015 Violence Against Women (VAW) Survey found that over 70 percent of ever-married women in Bangladesh have experienced partner violence. However, the survey disproportionately focused on physical violence within marriage, sidelining the experiences of single women, gender-diverse individuals, and marginalised groups. Additionally, non-partner violence, cyber abuse, and workplace harassment remain underreported. Emotional, psychological, and economic abuse—forms of violence often rendered invisible—are rarely captured. Outdated data, underreporting shaped by stigma and safety concerns, and inadequate disaggregation further distort the picture. Without comprehensive data, policies will continue to fall short. For example, understanding harmful practices like child marriage requires data that goes beyond legal definitions to explore the

lived experiences of child brides.

Even when laws exist, enforcement remains weak. PPRC-led grassroots consultations reveal that legal restrictions such as Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017, for instance, are frequently circumvented through pseudo-registration practices, falsified age declarations and clandestine notary marriages. These loopholes leave girls vulnerable to abandonment, school exclusion, and a lack of legal recourse. Combined with setbacks like prolonged school closures, systemic failures in policy and enforcement exacerbate vulnerabilities and create room for violence.

Disrupting the cycle of GBV requires moving beyond performative outrage to bring about systemic change grounded in evidence-based strategies, beginning with enhanced data collection. Surveys must capture the full spectrum of violence and capture the nuance of what constitutes "abuse" in cyberspaces, public spaces, etc. To ensure targeted interventions, data must be disaggregated by socio-economic, geographic, and demographic factors, addressing the realities of marginalised groups such as unmarried women, gender-diverse individuals, persons with disabilities, and ethnic and religious groups. Quantitative data can be complemented with qualitative research, such as case studies and focus group discussions, to shed light on the lived experiences of survivors, while randomised controlled trials can evaluate interventions. For example, tracking redressal mechanisms sought by survivors or exploring the motives behind abuse can provide critical insights into patterns and triggers

of violence. Together, these methods provide a richer understanding of GBV's systemic underpinnings. While the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics has initiated its work on the VAW Survey 2024, we are yet to find out what changes have been made.

Alongside good data collection, strengthening legal frameworks is equally important. Cyber abuse, for example, must be criminalised with the same rigour as physical violence, and digital literacy should become a key prevention strategy. Robust support systems—including counselling, shelter services, and legal assistance—are necessary to comprehensively address the continuum of harm survivors face.

Accountability and enforcement are critical to ensuring progress. Policy monitoring mechanisms must track the implementation of laws and hold perpetrators and institutions accountable. Collaboration among stakeholders—development organisations, NGOs, and government agencies—can validate and utilise administrative data from helplines, justice audits, and reports to highlight gaps in policy and practice.

Finally, capacity building is a cornerstone of sustainable change. Training enumerators to collect data ethically and sensitively is crucial for accurate reporting. Educating communities and fostering engagement through grassroots initiatives can challenge the normalisation of harm, reshaping cultural narratives around GBV. By combining these efforts, we can dismantle the systemic structures that enable violence and work towards a society where GBV is neither normalised nor invisible.

Post-COP29 environmental challenges for the interim govt



AN OPEN DIALOGUE
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ABDULLAH SHIBLI

Bangladesh is facing several hazards on the environmental front. Some of these challenges are immediate, and others are looming on the horizon. The new interim administration will at some point need to address a few of them and tackle them as soon as the more pressing issues have been resolved. While law and order and stabilisation of the macroeconomic sector must receive the highest priority, environmental catastrophes are only around the corner.

Bangladesh's air quality is among the world's worst. How did we achieve this distinction? Deaths from dengue fever have peaked. As per the Global Climate Risk Index 2021, Bangladesh ranked as the seventh extreme disaster risk-prone country in the world. Our dependence on carbon-generating fossil fuels has worsened in the last 15 years. Buzzwords such as "energy transition," "green energy," and "carbon neutrality" were given lip service, while the ruling class were consolidating their grip on the creaky levers of power and laundering money abroad.

The interim government led by renowned economist and social entrepreneur Prof Muhammad Yunus has promised to look afresh at all the deviant practices and kleptocratic policies pursued by the previous Awami League administration. His adviser in charge of the Department of Environment, Forests and Climate Change is Syeda Rizwana Hasan, a lawyer and environmental activist. She has publicly declared her intention to tackle pollution, protect wetlands, and curb single-use plastics, but the full agenda is yet to be enunciated.

It would not be too much to assert that Prof Yunus is one of the original environmentalists. When I first met him in March, 1976 at the annual gathering of the Bangladesh Economic Association, held at Dhaka University's TSC, he was discussing his ideas on small-scale rural banking, but he also brought up the possible spillover effects of his proposed initiative, particularly the overall health and environmental benefits of his microcredit movement.

Befitting his lifelong commitment to improving the well-being of the masses, Prof Yunus took the time to make an appearance in Baku, Azerbaijan, to advocate for the Loss and Damage Funds for addressing the ill effects of climate change, and to espouse the cause of adaptation and mitigation in developing countries.

Soon after the new government took charge in early August, the flooding in the eastern districts once again reminded us of our dependence on the mercies of nature. Now, we are battling two other environmental and health issues: air pollution in the major cities and the dengue fever epidemic. In the coming weeks, these seasonal curses will affect urban dwellers, particularly the lower-income and other vulnerable groups.

Amidst all these, the environmental adviser recently expressed her confidence that litigation might be an effective tool for reducing global warming and controlling carbon emissions. In an interview with a foreign news outlet, she also expressed her concern about the current state of climate negotiations and the resources available for adaptation and mitigation. While

the adviser rightly expressed concern that global ambition on climate change is regressing, one has to also wonder what went wrong.

The recent setbacks must be assessed in light of the conditions on the ground. Bangladesh might have taken the slippery path of command and control policy in environmental management. This strategy leads to

regulatory fines did not affect technology adoption. In addition, possessing voluntary certifications increased exports while constructing new effluent treatment plants did not. Green finance on the other hand affects the adoption of treatment plants and voluntary certifications.

Therefore, the interim advisers need to optimise the available institutions,

Bangladesh could team up with other smaller nations heavily impacted by global warming and changes in weather patterns. This group would do well to bring its vulnerabilities to the attention of the international agencies that are entrusted with the task of disbursing the new funds. While our country is one of the most climate-sensitive

resilience to climate change, advance the decarbonisation of the economy, and manage transition risks. International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the ADB are part of the various initiatives including the Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF) which offers \$1.4 billion. We also need to tap the Green and Climate Resilient Development Credit (GCRD), a World Bank-facilitated climate funding channel.

Finally, a word on Bangladesh's air quality crisis based on a July 2024 report by the staff at the Atlantic Council Global Energy Center. It labelled our situation as "Bangladesh's air quality trilemma" and went on to add, "There are no easy ways to mitigate Bangladesh's air quality crisis. Bangladesh has little renewable energy potential and faces difficulties in expanding nuclear energy or adopting vehicular emissions programmes given the country's limited financial resources. Moreover, Bangladesh suffers from substantial energy poverty, making improved energy access a top priority."

Undoubtedly, it is extremely difficult to balance these concerns, particularly in the short term. But the interim government could lay the foundations for the longer term. Low-emission fuels and clean electricity can help Bangladesh resolve its trilemma of ensuring clean air, economic growth, and sustainable energy access.

Bangladesh is facing a disaster on the environmental front owing to the severe and ongoing threat posed by climate change. Some of these are man-made while others are natural. Bangladesh's low-lying geography makes it highly vulnerable to rising sea levels, frequent flooding from cyclones, and other extreme weather events. In the final analysis, Bangladesh is considered one of the most climate-vulnerable countries globally, facing potential large-scale displacement and economic disruption if immediate action is not taken.



PHOTO: REUTERS

A recent report labelled Bangladesh's air quality as a trilemma noting that the crisis cannot be mitigated easily.

a dead end if we over-litigate. Our courts and the judicial system are already overwhelmed with cases of criminal and civil law violations. For a cleaner environment, there are more effective and less costly interventions. Some of these policies are better enforcement of existing laws and the use of modern and digital monitoring tools.

In a research paper, "Regulatory or market pressures: What promotes environmental grandstanding in Bangladesh?" published in June 2024, quarterly data from official sources show regulatory fines were found to have no significant effect on the adoption of effluent treatment technology. The study also shows

both national and international. At the recently concluded COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan, an additional \$300 billion commitment was made for developing countries. Bangladesh is a rightful claimant to this new funding, but "to date, climate financing from external sources to Bangladesh is yet to come in size despite significant global commitment," says an Asian Development Bank (ADB) report. The private sector is still in the early stage of engagement, especially in climate adaptation. Increased domestic resource mobilisation will be essential to increase fiscal space for climate finance, as well as for other development priorities, such as human resources development.

ones, we have to be constantly on the lookout for issues we need to address as well as innovative ways to finance them. The previous government, fostered by some close cronies of the former prime minister, funnelled money into the Information, Communication and Technology sector. The environmental projects were neglected and left to linger.

Recently Bangladesh launched the Bangladesh Climate and Development Platform (BCDP) to attract private-sector investment for adaptation and mitigation. This collaborative effort, in partnership with international financial institutions, bilateral donors, and private sectors will attempt to strengthen Bangladesh's

Bangladesh needs to strengthen its political leadership



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NAWSHAD AHMED

The role of honest and committed political leadership is paramount in a modern democratic polity. In a democratic system of governance, a party in power can fulfil people's desires and aspirations only if it properly follows democratic processes, starting with supporting free and fair elections, ensuring a functional parliament, promoting good governance, and guaranteeing the optimal utilisation of national resources. Without capable and strong leaders, a political party cannot be steered in the right direction to achieve national development goals.

Bangladesh faces a number of challenges today, but despite having the technical knowledge to address them, weak leadership remains a hindrance to their effective resolution. The crisis of political leadership in the country has reached such a level that people now desire reforms in all areas of politics, including electoral reform, constitutional reform, administrative reform, local government reform, and anti-corruption system reform. The interim government has formed separate reform commissions in these areas to offer recommendations for improvement.

One vital question is, why have we not developed a culture of honest political tradition? There is no easy or straightforward answer to this question. In different countries—particularly our next-door neighbour India, where democracy



PHOTO: CA PRESS WING

Top political leaders in Bangladesh must play a dominant role in changing the political culture for the better.

has thrived for the last 77 years without interruption—political tradition has matured and has been sustained without major shifts in social structure. Bangladeshi politics could have matured in the three and a half decades since 1991, following the departure of the last military ruler, President HM Ershad. By then, Bangladeshi society was believed to have become more open to change, less tradition-bound, and ready to embrace democratic values. In rural areas, the power structure was becoming less rigid, with traditional landowner-peasant relationships breaking down, creating room for the growth of other non-land-based power centres. This was an opportune time for grassroots democratic openings in Bangladesh. However, political

caretaker governments. However, in 2011, the Awami League abolished the caretaker government system, sparking widespread protests by other political parties, particularly the BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, and the Communist Party of Bangladesh. These protests have continued for the past 14 years, weakening the political process in the country.

Bangladesh, in its 54 years of history, has experienced a lot of political turmoil and frequent power struggles. These are due to weak political culture, a winner-takes-all tendency among parties, corruption, the use of government machinery for political gains, and harassment of opposition party workers and leaders. An idealistic attitude at all levels of political leadership has been lacking.

Although two female prime

ministers have ruled the country since 1991, women's roles in politics have hardly strengthened during this period. Out of 300 seats in the national parliament, only 20 women were directly elected in the 12th general elections held in January 2024. Including the 50 reserved seats for women in parliament, women make up just 20 percent of the total MPs.

But what qualities should political leaders possess? Robert B Denhardt has identified five characteristics of effective leadership based on studies in the US, Canada, Great Britain, and Australia—commitment to values, service to the public, empowerment and shared leadership, pragmatic incrementalism, and dedication to public service. These leadership qualities are equally applicable to Bangladesh.

Bangladeshi politics has been dominated by national-level politicians over the years. In mature democracies, local leaders can rise to the national level through their performance. In Bangladesh, however, local leaders lack such opportunities due to increasing marginalisation by national leaders, who extend their power

bases to the local level. For instance, members of parliament are often involved in local government activities, dominating local leaders and blocking their chances to demonstrate their capabilities. This tendency creates a leadership vacuum at the mid-level. Therefore, national-level political actors must cease their control over local government institutions.

Political parties should establish institutional frameworks with built-in restraint mechanisms to prevent leaders from becoming authoritarian. As Bertrand Russell noted, some political leaders are intoxicated by power. However, great leaders in various countries have set examples by retiring from politics early. In some countries, such as the US and the UK, term limits for heads of state or government allow other political leaders to rise to top positions, helping to avoid conflicts within party hierarchies. Top political leaders in Bangladesh must play a dominant role in changing the political culture for the better.

Another essential role of senior leadership is grooming young and emerging leaders towards a just and ethical path, rather than encouraging unhealthy political engagements, patronage, and graft. Top party leaders should monitor and screen out party members involved in violence, coercion, and oppression. They must also adopt objective mechanisms to select and nominate candidates who are seen as clean and accountable to the public. Political parties should instil ethical and moral values in their members. Since political power has a natural tendency to corrupt, parties must develop institutional mechanisms to weed out corrupt elements. Such discipline will restore public confidence in political parties.

Like careers in the corporate or public sector, political careers

require capacity-building. National-level leaders need specialised knowledge and skills in areas like economic policymaking, environmental management, health service delivery, and education. Local leaders aspiring to rise within the party must train themselves for higher responsibilities. High-level positions, such as cabinet posts, should be awarded to deserving and knowledgeable individuals who demonstrate credibility and competence.

Although there are training programmes for government officers, bank employees, doctors, and engineers, there is no dedicated institution for training political leaders. Political parties should arrange lifelong training for their members, and politicians should undertake self-learning. This will enable them to become independent decision-makers when in government, without overly relying on bureaucracy. Politics, by definition, is the art of solving societal problems, and politicians must acquire the necessary skills to fulfil this role.

Effective political leadership is essential for achieving democratic governance. Politicians should operate selflessly for the benefit of the masses and dedicate themselves to fulfilling people's rights. Top leaders must implement government policies honestly to achieve national and international goals, such as poverty alleviation, reducing inequality, addressing environmental concerns, and fostering social development. The current reform proposals being developed by the interim government will only succeed if elected political leaders implement them with sincerity, dedication, and honesty. Therefore, political parties must participate in the ongoing reform process and prepare themselves to shoulder this responsibility.



The hidden link between sleep and blood sugar

We all know the importance of exercise and a balanced diet for a healthy lifestyle, but sleep—often overlooked—is just as vital. Sleep quality does not just determine how refreshed you feel in the morning; it directly impacts your risk of life-threatening conditions like diabetes, obesity, and heart disease.

Sleep and blood sugar share a fascinating connection. During the night, your body's circadian rhythm naturally causes blood sugar levels to fluctuate. For most healthy people, this is perfectly normal. But what happens when sleep becomes irregular or insufficient? The results are not pretty. Poor sleep disrupts the body's ability to regulate glucose, leading to elevated blood sugar levels and, over time, an increased risk of diabetes.

In fact, studies reveal that even small disturbances in sleep can wreak havoc on insulin production and glucose regulation. Early or late bedtimes, coupled with sleep deprivation, can throw blood sugar levels off balance. Insulin secretion and glucose use by the brain and body tissues are significantly affected when normal sleep patterns are disrupted.

Interestingly, during the first part of the night, blood sugar levels remain steady. But as the night progresses, without sufficient rest, levels drop unpredictably, highlighting the crucial role sleep plays in managing blood sugar.

While the relationship between sleep and blood sugar is complex, one thing is clear: prioritising consistent, high-quality sleep is essential. So, the next time you think about your health, remember—sleep is not just rest; it is a critical part of the equation. Sweet dreams could mean sweeter health outcomes!

HIV/AIDS in Bangladesh: A growing concern

DR NASREEN NAHAR

Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) are global public health challenges, with millions affected worldwide. Though Bangladesh remains a low-prevalence country, HIV/AIDS has steadily emerged as a concern due to various socioeconomic and health factors.

As of the latest reports, Bangladesh has an estimated 14,000 to 16,000 people living with HIV, with around 1,300 new infections annually. The prevalence rate remains below 0.1%, making it a low-prevalence country by global standards. However, certain key populations, such as intravenous drug users (IDUs), men who have sex with men (MSM), transgender communities, and sex workers, show higher infection rates than the general population.

Causes and transmissions
High-risk behaviours, such as unprotected sex and shared needles, contribute significantly to the spread of HIV in Bangladesh. Lack of awareness about safe sex practices, coupled with limited access to sexual health education, increases the vulnerability of certain communities. Migrant workers, who often face challenging conditions abroad and engage in risky behaviours, are another vulnerable group.

While HIV transmission from mother to child remains relatively low, it is an area of concern. Without proper medical interventions, the risk of transmission during pregnancy, childbirth, or breastfeeding can be significant.

Efforts in prevention and control
The government of Bangladesh, in collaboration with international agencies like UNAIDS, WHO, and UNICEF, has implemented several measures to curb the spread of HIV. Bangladesh's national AIDS/STD program (NASP), established in 1985, plays a pivotal role in prevention, awareness, and treatment initiatives. They include:

- HIV testing and counselling (HTC):** Expanding access to HIV testing services across the country is critical. NASP has increased testing facilities, particularly targeting high-risk populations.
- Needle exchange programmes (NEPs):** NEPs are crucial in reducing transmission among IDUs. By providing clean needles and syringes, the risk of infection through shared equipment is significantly reduced.
- Education and awareness campaigns:** Numerous campaigns have been launched to increase awareness of HIV/AIDS. Public health messages are spread through mass media, social media, community outreach programs, and workshops targeting at-risk groups.



Antiretroviral therapy (ART): ART is available free of charge through government-supported facilities. Early initiation of ART has been instrumental in reducing morbidity and mortality rates among people living with HIV (PLHIV).

Collaboration with NGOs: Organisations like Save the Children, BRAC, and Marie Stopes International are integral in reaching marginalised communities with prevention, care, and treatment services.

Challenges
Despite these efforts, several challenges continue to hinder the effectiveness of HIV/AIDS programs in Bangladesh:

- Social stigma:** A significant obstacle is the stigma attached to HIV/AIDS. Many individuals avoid getting tested or seeking treatment due to fear of societal backlash.
- Limited resources:** While international agencies provide support, Bangladesh's healthcare infrastructure lacks the necessary resources to adequately address the growing number of HIV cases. There is a need for more funding to expand HIV prevention, treatment, and education programmes.
- Migration and mobility:** Bangladesh has a large population of migrant workers, particularly in Middle Eastern countries. Many of these workers return home with HIV, contributing to the rise in cases. Comprehensive programs to target migrant populations are still underdeveloped.
- Access to services:** Geographic disparities in healthcare access are a major concern. While cities like Dhaka have better HIV-related services, rural areas often lack the necessary infrastructure to provide proper care.

The road ahead
To address the HIV/AIDS situation in Bangladesh effectively, there needs to be a multi-faceted approach. Continued collaboration between the government, international agencies, and local NGOs is essential for scaling up prevention and treatment programs. Expanding ART access, reducing stigma, and increasing awareness about HIV transmission and prevention are critical steps to curbing the spread of the virus.

Moreover, integrating HIV/AIDS services with other healthcare services, such as maternal health programs, will be crucial for reaching broader populations and reducing mother-to-child transmission. With sustained efforts and comprehensive strategies, Bangladesh has the potential to manage its HIV epidemic and improve the quality of life for those affected by the disease.

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How to stop people-pleasing

Being nice is a wonderful trait, but when it turns into people-pleasing, it can leave you drained, stressed, and disconnected from your own needs. People-pleasing is not just about being helpful; it is about bending over backward to keep others happy—even when it costs you.

People-pleasing often means altering your words and actions to avoid upsetting others or gain their approval. While it might feel good in the short term, over time, it can take a toll on your mental health and relationships.

Signs you are a people-pleaser
Still unsure if this describes you? Here are some red flags:

- You say “yes” when you want to say “no.”
- You apologise constantly—even when it is not your fault.
- You agree to things just to avoid conflict.
- You crave validation and feel uneasy if someone does not like you. You rarely make time for yourself.
- Be kind with intention: Help when it feels good—not when you feel pressured.

Sound familiar? These habits can lead to burnout, resentment, and unfulfilling relationships.

Why it is a problem?
People-pleasing is not inherently bad—considering others' feelings is part of any healthy relationship. But when you prioritise others at the expense of your own needs, you are left feeling unappreciated and exhausted. Over time, this dynamic can strain relationships and leave you feeling like you are living someone else's life.

Breaking free from people-pleasing

- **Put yourself first:** Prioritising yourself is the key.
- **Set clear boundaries:** Before saying “yes,” ask yourself: Do I really want to do this?
- **Hold back:** Instead of rushing to fix every problem, pause and wait until someone asks for help.
- **Get support:** A therapist can help you understand the root of your people-pleasing tendencies and offer strategies to shift your mindset.

True kindness comes from a place of balance—where your needs matter just as much as everyone else's. So, take a step back, set boundaries, and remember: your happiness deserves just as much attention as theirs.



DHAKA FLOW FESTIVAL Embrace the wellness movement

STAR HEALTH REPORT

Dhaka Flow Festival of Yoga & Wellness—a vibrant celebration of health, wellness, and community, was organised at the Gulshan Society Lake Park in Dhaka on December 6 and 7.

Designed for anyone seeking balance, vitality, and connection, the festival offered two days filled with transformative experiences to enhance the lifestyle and rejuvenate spirit of city dwellers.

The event's highlights included a diverse lineup of wellness sessions such as yoga, meditation, sound healing, and dance therapy. From dynamic flow classes to grounding breathwork, there was something for everyone—whether you are a seasoned practitioner or just beginning your wellness journey.

One of the standout sessions, Yoga Beats, combined the soulful lofi + ambient sounds of BOFA's DJ OMDG with an invigorating yoga flow led by Shazzy Om, creating a truly unique fusion of music and movement. International yoga guru Vari Morales also led two sessions on Awakening Your Body.

Adding to the festival's immersive appeal was the experiential space inspired by Attar's Conference of the Birds, guiding participants through the symbolic journey of self-discovery. People explored the seven valleys as they reflected, reconnected, and found inspiration for personal transformation. Other features included the Our Planet zone and the Art & Soul zone, as well as the Basecamp adventures and rock climbing.

The Dhaka Flow Festival promised more than just activities—it was a space to connect with like-minded individuals, nurturing well-being, and reigniting passion for a healthier, more harmonious lifestyle.

A breakthrough in managing obesity and preventing type 2 diabetes

Obesity, a chronic disease linked to numerous health complications, is a significant risk factor for developing type 2 diabetes. Excitingly, a new study highlights the potential of tirzepatide, a once-weekly medication, to help people with obesity lose weight and reduce their risk of diabetes over a three-year period.

In a clinical trial involving over 1,000 participants with both obesity and prediabetes, tirzepatide demonstrated remarkable benefits. The medication not only helped participants achieve significant weight loss but also delayed the onset of type 2 diabetes in most cases.

Participants received different doses of tirzepatide or a placebo for 176 weeks. At the end of the study,



those taking tirzepatide experienced dramatic weight loss, while those on the placebo saw minimal changes. More importantly, fewer participants who took tirzepatide developed type 2 diabetes compared to those on the placebo.

Even after stopping the medication for 17 weeks, tirzepatide's protective effects against diabetes remained evident, proving its long-lasting impact.

The treatment was generally safe, with the most common side effects being mild to moderate gastrointestinal issues, particularly during the initial weeks.

These findings mark a promising advancement for people struggling with obesity and prediabetes. Tirzepatide offers hope for effective long-term weight management and diabetes prevention, significantly improving quality of life and reducing the burden of chronic disease. Always consult a healthcare provider to understand if such treatments could be right for you.

Source: The New England Journal of Medicine

FOR AN INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Amplifying the leadership of persons with disabilities

DR ABDULLAHEL AMAAN & DR KHAINOOR ZAHAN

More than 1.3 billion people worldwide experience significant disability, representing 16% of the global population. Many persons with disabilities face higher mortality rates, are at increased risk of various health conditions, and encounter greater limitations in everyday functioning compared to others. These poorer health outcomes are termed 'health inequities' because they are largely avoidable and driven by unjust factors both within and beyond the health sector.

These inequities stem from unjust and unfair conditions, including stigma and discrimination, poverty, exclusion from education and employment, and barriers within health systems. Factors contributing to this include societal discrimination, inequitable policies, social determinants of health, inadequate access to or quality of care, and negative attitudes from health workers, among others. These inequities serve as a stark reminder that persons with disabilities are too often left behind. Achieving good health and well-being for all, as outlined in Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG-3), necessitates the meaningful participation and empowerment of persons with disabilities. Disability inclusion must be central to health system planning, development, and decision-making. Effective health systems also underpin robust management of health

emergencies.

Failing to address health inequities for persons with disabilities denies them the universal right to the highest attainable standard of health. The World Health Organisation (WHO) is committed to tackling these inequities through innovative and transformative approaches to health systems. SDG-3 cannot be achieved unless health equity for persons with disabilities is at the forefront of efforts.

Regardless of context and available resources, governments and health sector partners must prioritise health equity for persons with disabilities. This includes empowering and involving persons with disabilities in health sector initiatives and monitoring the impact of these actions. Striving for health equity for persons with disabilities is a step towards achieving 'Health for All.'

The achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals for, with, and by persons with disabilities is more attainable than ever if we work together.



In 2019, UN Secretary-General António Guterres launched the Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS) to embed disability inclusion into every core function and activity of the UN system.

December 3 is the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD). On this day, WHO collaborates with partners globally to advocate for action towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals for, with, and by persons with disabilities.

The theme for this year is 'Amplifying the Leadership of Persons with Disabilities for an Inclusive and Sustainable Future.' This theme highlights the pivotal role of persons with disabilities in creating a more inclusive and sustainable world. It also underscores the importance of their participation in decision-making processes that impact their lives.

This year's theme aligns with the current international political and policy landscape, particularly the Pact for the Future and the upcoming 2025 World Summit for Social Development. It aims to build momentum for achieving the 2030 Agenda. By amplifying the leadership role of persons with disabilities, these efforts—from global to local levels—can drive meaningful change.

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Vitamin K2: A promising remedy for nighttime leg cramps

Nocturnal leg cramps, those sudden and painful muscle spasms that often strike at night, are a common issue for older adults. Unfortunately, effective treatment options have been limited. However, a recent placebo-controlled trial from China offers hope with the use of vitamin K2 (menaquinone).

In this study, 200 adults aged 65 or older who frequently experienced nighttime leg cramps participated. All had reported more than two episodes of cramps in the two weeks before the trial began. Importantly, individuals with health conditions or medications linked to muscle cramps were excluded.

For eight weeks, participants were



randomly assigned to take either 180 µg of vitamin K2 or a placebo daily. The results were impressive: those receiving vitamin K2 experienced significantly

fewer cramps, averaging just one episode per week compared to 3.6 episodes in the placebo group. Additionally, the cramps were shorter in duration and less severe for those on the active treatment.

Notably, no side effects were linked to vitamin K2, highlighting its potential as a safe and effective option for managing nocturnal leg cramps.

These findings suggest that vitamin K2 could become a valuable tool in alleviating the discomfort and disruption caused by nighttime leg cramps, especially for older adults. If you or a loved one struggles with this issue, consulting a healthcare professional about vitamin K2 might be worth considering.



Time to step out of stalwarts' shadows

SHABAB CHOWDHURY

There is little room for Bangladesh's young players to hide behind the curtains, with the majority of their stalwarts out of action for the three-match ODI series against the West Indies, starting today in St Kitts. There is no escaping the limelight now, as the Tigers' new breed must step up without relying on the likes Shakib Al Hasan, Tamim Iqbal, Mushfiquir Rahim, or Mustafizur Rahman -- all of whom were instrumental in Bangladesh's 2-1 ODI series win in St Kitts during their last Caribbean tour. While most of these senior players are expected to return for the ICC Champions Trophy next year and

remain primary options in their respective positions, a few spots in the batting department are still up for grabs. The absence of seniors has created an excellent premise for the likes of Tanzid Tamim, Parvez Hossain Emon, Jaker Ali -- or even for the experienced yet unpredictable Soumya Sarker -- to seize the initiative as the build-up to the marquee event heats up.

The positive thing for the Tigers is that, in trying to perform without the 'Big Five', they do not have to look too far back for inspiration. Bangladesh's series levelling win in the second and final Test against the Windies in Jamaica last week saw several young players refusing to assume sidekick roles.

Bangladesh's fastest bowler, Nahid Rana, who is also in the ODI squad, cracked the game wide open with his maiden five-for, while Jaker Ali Anik, batting down the order, took the

attack to the opposition with some swashbuckling gusto, just missing out on his maiden Test ton.

Middle-order batter Shahadat Hossain Dipu also made a valuable contribution, and the leader of the pack, stand in captain Mehedi Hasan Miraz, displayed genuine bravado. What makes the fightback even more remarkable is that it came at a time when the Tigers were hammered in the first Test in Antigua and were on the edge during the initial stages of the second.

The burning question has been whether these cricketers have what it takes to step out of the shadows of their senior compatriots. Regardless of the outcome of this Caribbean assignment, a golden chance to show their mettle is there for the taking. Can the young guns back up their promise with initiative and execution?

HEAD-ACHE

returns to haunt India

REUTERS

Australia's Travis Head has been a perennial thorn in India's flesh and it was more of the same on Saturday as the left-hander produced a match-defining hundred to deflate the tourists in the day-night second Test in Adelaide.

Head produced match-winning hundreds on both occasions when Australia beat India in the finals of the World Test Championship and the 50-overs World Cup last year.

The 30-year-old reprised the India tormentor's role at the Adelaide Oval where he wowed 51,642 fans with a breakneck 140 that put Australia on the verge of a series-levelling victory.

"It was a tough wicket to bat on and at certain stages, they bowled really well," the middle order batter said after the second day's play.

"Nice to take my luck where I got it and put the guys in a really good position fast-forwarding the score.

"At the moment, the game's got moving pretty quickly, but feels like we're in a great position."

Head got two reprieves in his entertaining knock - Mohammed Siraj spilled a tough chance in the deep and one of his edges flew between the wicketkeeper and the fielder at first slip.

The feisty southpaw particularly targeted Ravichandran Ashwin, hitting India's premier off-spinner for three sixes in what he later called a calculated move. "When they've got the quality of quicks that they've got, I guess you've got to target something," Head said of his approach. "I felt like I navigated through his spells really, really well, and was able to get the quicks back at certain stages into that new ball."

Head took a single off Ashwin to bring up his hundred at his home ground and gestured to his wife, daughter Milla and newborn son Harrison in the stands.

"I did it when Milla was born so I would have got a bit of stick from the missus if I didn't do that when Harrison was born," Head said of his rock-the-baby celebration.



PHOTO: AFP

ACC MEN'S U-19 ASIA CUP

India stand between Jnr Tigers and title defence

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh U-19 team will aim to retain the ACC Men's U-19 Asia Cup title as they take on their Indian counterparts in a potentially engrossing final at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium today (11:00 am, Bangladesh time).

The young Tigers, who tasted maiden glory in the competition last year after defeating hosts UAE by 195 runs in the title decider at the same venue, have enjoyed excellent form this time as well.

Having started the campaign with back-to-back wins over Afghanistan and Nepal before losing to Sri Lanka, Bangladesh finished as Group B runners-up to progress to the last four.

In the semifinal, the defending champions outplayed Pakistan in all departments, securing a seven-wicket victory to qualify for the final for the second consecutive time.

Skipper Azizul Hakim Tamim has been leading from the front, amassing the third-highest 224 runs in four



innings at an average of 112, which includes one century and two fifties.

On the bowling front, the pace duo of Al Fahad and Iqbal Hossain Emon have been outstanding throughout the competition's 12th edition, jointly leading the wicket-takers' chart with 10 scalps each.

India, on the other hand, are back in the final after one edition and will be aiming for a record ninth Asia Cup title this year. Despite losing to Pakistan in their tournament opener, they bounced back with commanding wins over Japan and UAE in the group stage before dominating Sri Lanka in the last-four fixture, registering a seven-wicket victory.

India's 13-year-old batting prodigy Vaibhav Suryavanshi, who has already been picked for next season's Indian Premier League, has impressed with two swashbuckling innings following a subdued start. Neutralising his threat will be a key challenge for the likes of Fahad and Emon in this much-anticipated encounter.

Tigresses pay the price for poor Powerplay batting

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's cricket team had to pay a heavy price for losing too many wickets in the Powerplay, succumbing to a 47-run defeat in the second WT20I against Ireland yesterday and subsequently suffering their first ever series defeat against the Irish side in the shortest format.

Chasing 135, the Tigresses lost four wickets in the Powerplay for just 22 runs. Sharmin Akhter then showed some fight in her 38-run knock, but it proved insufficient as the hosts got bowled out for 87 in 17.1 overs to go 2-0 down in the three-match series.

In comparison, Ireland, opting to bat first, put up 34 runs for the loss of one wicket in the Powerplay.



PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Later, riding on decent efforts from Laura Delany (35) and Orla Prendergast (32), who also took 3-13 and was named player-of-the-match for her all-round performance, they posted 134-5, which proved to be a winning total.

"They [Ireland] lost only one wicket in the first six overs and scored 35 [34] runs. We lost four wickets in the first six overs. I think we lost the contest here," Bangladesh women's team's bowling coach Robiul Islam Shiblu told reporters after the match.

"Their pacers bowled slowly in this wicket. They used leg cutters and off cutters and got success. In the second innings, the ball also turned. I think we couldn't use the wicket," he added.

Suman grabs opportunity in Abahani's 1-0 win

SPORTS REPORTER

National discard Suman Reza started his journey with Abahani with a memorable strike as the six-time champions handed a 1-0 defeat to Dhaka Wanderers Club in their Bangladesh Premier League encounter at the Shaheed Dhirendranath Datta Stadium in Cumilla yesterday.

Suman, drafted into the starting XI for the first time by coach Maruful Haque, brilliantly headed a well-judged corner from Kamal Hossain into the far post in the 58th minute after stepping up from the middle of the box.

Despite no foreign players in the squad, Abahani have now registered back-to-back victories to join leaders Mohammedan and Rahmatganj on six points.

"I am happy to repay the faith of the coach," Suman said, adding that the team's target is to secure full points every match regardless of the margin of victory.

"I want to prove myself with consistent performances. We don't have any foreign players, but the locals have the mindset of playing against 11 foreign players," said Suman, who had scored only three goals for Sheikh Russel last season.

In another match of the day, Bangladesh Police came from behind to thrash promoted Fakirerpool Young Men's Club 4-1, with Al Amin striking twice while Joyonto Kumar and Manik Hossain Molla netting one goal apiece. Akobir Turayev scored a consolation goal for Fakirerpool.

Meanwhile, Brothers Union were held to a 1-1 draw by Fortis FC as Pa Omar cancelled out a first-minute strike from Brothers' Zakaria Darboe in the 18th minute to share points.



Atkinson, the 43rd hattrick man in Tests

Gus Atkinson took a hat-trick as England coasted towards a dominant victory in the second Test against New Zealand in Wellington on Saturday, reaching 378 for five at the close of play on day two with an imposing lead of 533.

He is the 43rd player to get a hattrick in 147 years of Test cricket, the first since 2021 and the first by an England bowler since spinner Moeen Ali achieved the feat against South Africa at the Oval in 2017. Atkinson was the 15th England player to achieve the feat.

"To get a hattrick ends the year nicely," said Atkinson, who took a 12-wicket haul on his Test debut against West Indies in July and scored a century against Sri Lanka in August.



Rangpur Riders players rejoice after the Bangladesh Premier League team defeated Australia's Cricket Victoria by 56 runs in the final of the inaugural Global Super League at Providence Stadium in Guyana yesterday. The Riders secured a hefty cash prize of around Tk six crore (USD 0.5 million) in the tournament, organised by Cricket West Indies, featuring teams from West Indies, England, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Australia.

PHOTO: FACEBOOK



**WITH MORE CAPACITY, WE ARE MORE READY
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**BANGLADESH'S
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From PM to UP member will be made accountable

Says Tarique

UNB, Dhaka

BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman yesterday said that the party's primary objective is to ensure accountability in Bangladesh, where everyone -- from the prime minister to union parishad members -- will be accountable to people for their actions.

"We want to create an atmosphere of accountability in the country. As a political party, this is our main objective... Everyone, from the prime minister to union parishad members, upazila chairman, ministers, MPs, and all other levels, must be accountable to people" he said while virtually addressing a workshop in Faridpur.

He also said everyone at all levels in government and semi-government offices and institutions should be held accountable for their actions.



SEE PAGE 7 COL 5



Palestinians inspect the damage after an Israeli strike on the Nuseirat refugee Camp in the central Gaza Strip yesterday. A new round of negotiations for a Gaza truce and hostage release deal will "most likely" begin in the coming week, a source close to the Hamas delegation told AFP yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Faulty media reports portray Bangladesh unfairly

Says CA's press secretary

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam said yesterday that the minority issue in Bangladesh has been misrepresented in international media and influential nations' top parliamentary hearings due to faulty reports by certain minority groups.

In a statement posted on his verified Facebook account, he urged secular newspapers and international rights groups to open probes into the alleged religious violence cases here to find out the truth.

"When the Netra News debunked the Bangladesh Hindu Buddha Christian Unity Council's report on the attacks on the Hindu community in the post-revolution days, I expected the group to make a statement," he said.

"After all, they were challenged by a



Shafiqul Alam

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'16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM'

Daring to dream

A rape survivor's tale of trials and determination

NILIMA JAHAN

At 20, Ritu (not her real name) is determined to break free from her past and rewrite her life's narrative.

After spending a decade in the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA) safe home -- a haven for survivors of gender-based violence, including rape, trafficking and domestic abuse -- Ritu now wants to become self-reliant.

She wants her dream of becoming a nurse to come true.

"Becoming a nurse has always been my dream -- a dream my mother and I shared," said Ritu, whose mother used to work as a hospital attendant.

However, before Ritu had learned to dream, she had her childhood shattered at the age of 10, when her own father raped her.

"It was overwhelming to accept that something so unimaginable had happened to me -- and even worse, that it was my own father who had done it," she said as her voice trembled.

"It was overwhelming to accept that something so unimaginable had happened to me -- and even worse, that it was my own father who had done it."

20-yr-old rape survivor

The incident happened one night in 2014 when Ritu's mother was working the night shift at the hospital. When she returned home, Ritu gathered the courage to tell her what her father did.

"I still remember the day my mother decided to leave our house for good. She took me and my younger brother to my maternal uncle's home. From there, she started our fight for justice.

"My mother believed me when no one else did and showed incredible strength by filing a case against my father at the local police station."

A forensic examination provided irrefutable evidence, confirming Ritu's account and setting the wheels of justice in motion.

But the ordeal didn't end there. "My father kept relentlessly searching for me, telling everyone I was lying, and even beating my mother when he couldn't find me," she recalled.

Eventually, Ritu was placed in the BNWLA safe home where she received years of psychological counselling and

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

BD-WI 1ST ODI

Tigers look to extend streak

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

It has been nearly six years since Bangladesh lost any 50-over game against the West Indies and the Tigers will be looking to continue that trend when the two sides meet in the opening match of a three-match ODI series at the Warner Park in St Kitts today.

Despite their struggles in Tests and T20s, the Tigers have won four successive ODI series against the West Indies and enjoy a 11-match winning streak over their Caribbean opponents, with the last defeat coming way back in December, 2018 in Mirpur.

The Bangladesh team that travelled to St Kitts from Jamaica feature almost half of the members who were part of the Test squad that salvaged a 1-1 Test series win recently with a 101-run win in the second Test.

Pacer Nahid Rana, who played a crucial role in that Test win in Jamaica, expressed his confidence about giving his best in the limited-overs series as well.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

BRT SERVICE

Finally begins on Dec 16 but with 5-yr-old BRTC buses

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Failing to procure specialised buses for launching dedicated bus service on Dhaka-Gazipur Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) corridor, the authorities are now introducing BRTC buses on the route, a deviation from the original plan.

Officials said the state-run BRTC would start the special service with 10 AC buses from December 16 initially on Gulistan-Airport-Gazipur route, which includes 20 km-long corridor formally known as BRT Line-3.

The move comes over a decade after the project was undertaken in November 2012 to introduce the country's first dedicated rapid bus service aimed at reducing congestion on the busy corridor.

But the project deadline was revised on several occasions, escalating the cost. After 12 years, when the infrastructure

is almost ready, the authorities failed to purchase the buses required for launching the service.

In this situation, buses of Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC), which are already in operation since 2019, are going to be introduced on the route, following the directives of Road Transport and Bridges Ministry Adviser M u h a m m a d Fouzul Kabir Khan, the officials said.

When the government took up a project to construct the 20.50km road dedicated for buses between Dhaka airport and Gazipur's Shibbari, the plan was to operate spacious and comfortable articulated buses.

But Dhaka Bus Rapid Transit Company Ltd (Dhaka BRT), a state-run company formed to provide the service, later decided to operate electric

SEE PAGE 7 COL 3

Arson attack on family Temple in Turag

Idols damaged

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A family-owned temple was set on fire in the capital's Turag area early yesterday, police said.

The incident happened in the Dhour area around 3:00am, when the neighbourhood was fast asleep, said Inspector Nuruzzaman of Turag Police Station, citing a complaint.

Babul Chandra Ghosh, who filed a case with Turag Police Station, wrote in the First Information Report that he was woken up by footsteps on the tin roof of Sree Sree Mohavagya Lakshmi Narayan Mandir which is next to his room.

Upon stepping outside, he saw the temple on fire and put out the flames with water. Afterwards, he found a shopping bag covered in oil and a 2-liter water bottle.

He wrote that it seemed the bottle had been used to

SEE PAGE 7 COL 3

Gunmen kill six Pak soldiers near Afghan border

AFP, Islamabad

Gunmen attacked a Pakistani army base near the border with Afghanistan and killed six soldiers, the army reported yesterday.

The soldiers exchanged "intense fire" with the gunmen at a military base in the Thall district of northwest Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, the army said, without identifying the attackers.

It said the soldiers killed three of the gunmen.

Jihadist and separatist groups regularly target the army and police along the mountainous border with Afghanistan.

In November, at least 20 soldiers were killed in separate incidents over less than 24 hours in the province.

The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), also known as the Pakistani Taliban, claimed responsibility for one of these attacks, which killed eight soldiers and nine militants.



Winter has set in and temperatures are dropping in Thakurgaon. The days are mostly overcast, with dense fog persisting well into the morning. Weather officials say it's expected to get colder in the coming days. The photo was taken last morning in the Chandipur village in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila.

PHOTO: QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT

ENERGY SECURITY

Dependency on imports have to be reduced

Say speakers at seminar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Local gas exploration and production, replacing the furnace oil-based power plants with renewable energy plants, upgrading the national grid, and making all gas connections metered are the prime solutions to the problems plaguing the energy and power sectors, experts said at a seminar yesterday.

They also said reducing import dependency should be the main focus for the country's energy security.

The Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) organised the seminar at its office titled "Predictable Energy Pricing and Supply Stability".

In the keynote paper, Mohammad Tamim, professor of petroleum and mineral resources engineering at Buet, said the devaluation of the Bangladeshi taka against the US dollar increased power generation costs over the last couple of years.

Besides, he also blamed high inflation, system inefficiency, dependency on furnace oil, increasing fuel imports, unnecessary capacity payments, corruption, and international energy price hikes for the high cost.

In 2020-21, the average cost of coal import was Tk 6.5 per kilowatt-hour (kWh) which escalated to Tk 9.17 per kWh in FY23-24 due to taka devaluation.

Prof Tamim presented a comparative analysis of fuel-based power generation cost for 2023-24 fiscal year.

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