

# City dwellers on edge as mugging runs rampant

Beefed-up patrolling hardly making any difference

RAFIUL ISLAM

A young man slips between vehicles stuck in traffic at night and snatches a phone through an open car window with astonishing swiftness at the capital's Asad Gate.

As he steals the phone, two other men, one of them holding a machete, stand nearby. And the three of them disappear within seconds.

Video footage of the incident on December 16, filmed by someone in a nearby car, went viral on social media.

According to police, incidents of mugging and snatching have significantly increased in recent months, with commuters feeling concerned about their safety.

Home Adviser Lt Gen (retd) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury and Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner SM Sazzat Ali have ordered increasing patrols and setting up checkpoints. But these measures are hardly making an impact.

According to the police database, at least 22 cases were filed with Dhaka metropolitan police stations over mugging in September, 43 in

**At least 11 people have been killed allegedly by muggers since August 5.**



Cars torched at the Department of Disaster Management during the July uprising lie abandoned on the Mohakhali-Gulshan Road, obstructing vehicular and pedestrian movements. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

## Police listing extortionists, planning drive against them

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Commissioner SM Sazzat Ali has said the police are making a list of extortionists and will soon launch drives to arrest them.

He made the announcement during a meeting with police

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# No place for Islamic extremism in Bangladesh

Says Yunus in an interview with The Economist

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Islamic extremism will never find a place in Bangladesh again, said Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus recently.

"I can assure that's not taking place at all. These are very enthusiastic young people -- they are very neutral about their religion," Yunus told the weekly British magazine The Economist's foreign editor Patrick Foulis in an interview recently.

Yunus's response came when Foulis mentioned both American and Indian officials have warned that there is some risk of Islamic extremism coming back in Bangladesh.

The interview was taken on the occasion of Bangladesh being selected as The Economist's country of the year for 2024, an accolade that the influential magazine hands out every year to a country it deems to be the most improved country in the world.

"But for toppling a despot and taking strides towards a more liberal government, Bangladesh is our country of the year," The Economist said.

In response, Yunus said: "Oh, we are delighted. We feel very proud that we made a big change because of the student uprising that took place. And from then on, we are saying we are creating a new Bangladesh."

The youth want to build a new Bangladesh, he said.

"Young people can change the whole world. It's not about changing one country or another country. What Bangladesh has done is one example of how powerful this young generation is. Let's pay attention to the young people."

He said particular attention must be given to the young women.

"Young girls played a very important role in the Bangladeshi uprising. They were on the frontline just like any other young person in the country. We should be paying attention to the young girls, young boys and make sure they can fulfil their dreams. If they have the opportunity, they have the capacity to do that."



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# Top officials face off over promotions

BAHARAM KHAN

Top government officials are at odds over promotions, positions and associated privileges, with a section announcing a pen-down strike to press home their demands.

Yesterday, officers from the 25 cadres announced a pen-down strike for December 24 from 11:00am to 12:00pm and also planned a rally in Dhaka on January 4.

Although the administration cadre has not announced any formal programme yet, their junior officers are pressing for tougher measures, including work abstention.

Meanwhile, District Commissioners (DCs) from all 64 districts have issued statements opposing the movement.

Administrative experts, however, argue that such actions are against the conduct rules for government employees.

"Government employees cannot stage pen-down or work stoppage programme -- such actions, especially during a national crisis, are unacceptable," said AKM Abdul Awal Mazumder, a former secretary.

The reality is that actions by admin cadre employees following political changes in the past have set problematic precedents, including physical altercations and sit-ins, even at the highest levels, he said.

In the past, the discriminatory quota system meant many top scorers in the BCS exams were unable to secure their desired cadres.

"Hence, the 25 percent quota for other cadres in the Deputy Secretary post was logical. However, with

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

# Has IMF experiment delivered?

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and AHSAN HABIB

Two years after Bangladesh turned to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a \$4.7 billion bailout to address its worsening macroeconomic pressures, the nation stands at a crossroads. While the programme has provided some respite, the question remains: Has it steered the country away from the brink of financial crisis, or merely postponed a reckoning?

The economic turbulence began in earnest after the Covid-19 pandemic when the Russia-Ukraine war sent shockwaves through global markets. Bangladesh's foreign exchange reserves began to deplete rapidly, and inflation surged, squeezing

millions of low- and fixed-income households. As regional neighbours Sri Lanka and Pakistan raced to the IMF for assistance, Bangladesh initially resisted. In July 2022, AHM Mustafa Kamal, the then-finance minister, dismissed the need for an IMF bailout. Yet, within days, he reversed course, appealing to IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva for emergency financial support.

By January 2023, Bangladesh had formally entered the IMF's loan programme, committing to a series of structural reforms. Two years later, the depletion of foreign exchange reserves slowed and eventually stabilised at around \$20 billion, yet the country's

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



- ➔ Bangladesh stabilises foreign reserves around \$20b
- ➔ Continues to grapple with inflation
- ➔ Progress in transitioning to market-driven interest rates
- ➔ Broader tax reforms remain inadequate

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## Hassan Ariff will be remembered thru his works

Say colleagues while paying tribute

BSS, Dhaka

Colleagues, friends and well-wishers of late Civil Aviation and Tourism Adviser A F Hassan Ariff paid rich tribute to his memory yesterday.

In their immediate reaction to BSS, they said the late Supreme Court lawyer will be remembered forever through his works and ideals.

The country had lost an eminent lawyer and an excellent human being at his death, they added.

They made the remarks following his Second Namaj-e-Janaza held at Bangladesh Supreme Court premises yesterday morning.

Hassan Ariff died of a cardiac arrest at the capital's Labaid Specialized Hospital yesterday at the age of 83.

Eminent Jurist and Constitution expert Dr Kamal Hossain expressed deep shock at the demise of his close friend and long-time colleague Hassan Ariff.

"We have lost an experienced lawyer and a good friend. His loss has created

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Naripokkho received the "2023 Ruby Ghuznavi Award for Social Justice" yesterday, in recognition of its long-standing work with the Biranganas, the war heroines of Bangladesh's Liberation War in 1971. The award was presented at a ceremony held at the BRAC Centre in the capital.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

## SOCIAL JUSTICE Naripokkho gets 2023 Ruby Ghuznavi Award

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Women rights organisation Naripokkho received the "2023 Ruby Ghuznavi Award for Social Justice" in recognition of its long standing work with the Biranganas, the war heroines of Bangladesh's Liberation War in 1971.

The award was presented at a ceremony held at the BRAC Centre in the capital yesterday, according to a media release.

The award was introduced in 2023 by the Board of the AF Mujibur Rahman Foundation to commemorate the life and work of its late chairperson Ruby Ghuznavi.

Ruby devoted a great deal of her life to public service, inspired by her two great passions -- the protection of the rights of marginalised groups and the preservation of Bangladesh's craft heritage through support for its craftspeople and traditions.

She served in a variety of organisations working on human rights, women's empowerment, and child protection and also spearheaded efforts to support the Biranganas.

The award is intended as a recognition of exceptional work by individuals and organisations that exemplify the values that Ruby Ghuznavi held dear.

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## Jamaat ameer calls for national unity

OUR CORRESPONDENT,

Moulvibazar

Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman yesterday called

for national unity and condemned the interference by India in Bangladesh's internal affairs.

"You [India] should remain in peace, and let us remain in peace. We don't want to intrude into your private matters, so please don't interfere with ours," Shafiqur said while speaking as chief guest at a Jamaat conference held at Moulvibazar Government High School grounds.

Pointing at India, he said, "You speak to us about communal harmony, but take a good look at your own reflection. How do you treat those

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

# Political will key to police reforms

Speakers tell CGS event

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

During the 15 years of Awami League rule, police promotions heavily favoured high-ranking officials close to power, leaving lower-tier officers neglected, experts said at a dialogue organised by the Centre for Governance Studies (CGS) in Dhaka yesterday.

Zarif Rahman, a member of the Police Reform Commission, presented data from the police headquarters showing disproportionate promotion rates between 2009 and 2024.

Deputy Inspector General (DIG) positions saw a 200 percent increase, Additional DIG positions 491 percent, and Additional Superintendent of Police positions 332 percent.

Meanwhile, promotions for constables were just 32 percent, while sub-inspectors saw just over a 100 percent rise.

**The police have transformed into a power-centric force rather than being public-centric."**

ZARIF RAHMAN  
Police Reform  
Commission Member

**Public servants must not be turned into private servants of political parties.**

MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA  
Former IGP

"These figures show how the police have transformed into a power-centric force, prioritising political interests over public service," Zarif said.

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The dialogue, held at CIRDAP, was part of the CGS's "Dialogue for Democratic Reconstruction" series. Munira Khan, chairperson of CGS, presided over the event, while Executive Director Zillur Rahman moderated.

Speakers said that political will is key to effective police reform.

Maj Gen (ret'd) ANM Muniruzzaman, chairman of the Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS), stressed the need for broader security sector reforms.

"Reforms will not happen without engagement from political parties. Current commissions lack sufficient consultation with political stakeholders," he said.

He also urged periodic declassification of police records and implementation of oversight mechanisms, including a comprehensive code of conduct.

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## Amar Desh relaunched

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The daily Amar Desh is set to return to circulation today, according to the announcement of its publisher and editor Mahmudur Rahman.

At a press conference at the Jatiya Press Club on Friday, Mahmudur said the newspaper will not support any particular political party.

"We never gave any special coverage to any party... We will support parties that will support Bangladesh, stand against domination, and stand by democracy," he added.

The daily was first published in 2004.

On April 11, 2013, it was shut down by the then Awami League government. Earlier in June 2010, it remained shut for 10 days. Its Editor Mahmudur Rahman was arrested both times.

During the second time, after spending over three and a half years in

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## Beximco workers block road for 5hrs

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Workers of 16 factories owned by Beximco blocked the Nabinagar-Chandra highway in Gazipur yesterday for five hours, demanding the reopening of the factories.

Witnesses said the demonstration started around 9:00am in the Chakraborty area and continued till 2:00pm.

They said during this time workers engaged in chases and counter-chases with the joint force. The workers also vandalised several vehicles.

Shahidul Islam, sub-inspector of Naojor Highway Police Station, said traffic was halted for five hours. To manage the congestion, long distance vehicles travelling from North Bengal to Dhaka were redirected through Gazipur and the Kaliakoir-Dhamrai regional roads, he added.

Assistant Superintendent of Police of Gazipur Industrial Police Abu Taleb said vehicle movement started around 2:00pm after joint forces drove away the protesting workers from the highway.

Talking to reporters, the agitating workers said they had received their salaries and allowances on time until August 5.

However, the factory closures have left thousands of workers unemployed. This situation has left thousands of workers struggling to cover daily necessities, fund their children's education, and repay debts to local shops.

However, this correspondent could not reach the factory authorities for comment.

## ATTACK ON SUNAMGANJ HINDUS

# Security beefed up yet fear persists

DWOHA CHOWDHURY, back from Dowaabazar, Sunamganj

When a mob of at least a hundred locals was about to attack Minoti Rani's house on the night of December 3 at Manglargaon village in Sunamganj, she grabbed her child and ran to the riverbank, leaving her home and belongings behind.

She heard from afar the roar of the mob as they pillaged her neighbourhood. Minoti spent the entire night by the river.

"They vandalised our home and looted valuables, including the gold my parents gifted me during my marriage," Minoti added.

Her house was among at least 40 houses, one temple, two family temples, and four shops attacked that night, as per the count of this correspondent who visited the area lately.

The attack took place after local Muslims said a 21-year-old Hindu man, named Akash Das, posted an image on Facebook and it hurt their feelings, said Zahidul Haque, officer-in-charge of Dowaabazar Police Station.

Akash was detained by the police earlier that evening (December 3) and transferred to the district headquarters for his safety.

"As locals demonstrated, saying they were outraged by the Facebook post, we took the man in custody for his safety. The mob attacked our team and tried to snatch him. They then vandalised the houses of the man and several others and shops owned by Hindus," said the OC.

Akash was later shown arrested in a case filed under the Cyber Security Act and sent to jail.

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Workers at the bee farm of young entrepreneur Pavel Hossain in Madankhali union, Sreenagar, Munshiganj. Continuing a family tradition dating back to 1862, Pavel has modernised the 65-year-old business. With 130 bee boxes, he aims to collect 60 maunds of honey this year -- 20 maunds each from three fields. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN





# 'I don't see films through a gender-biased lens'

SHARMIN JOYA

“Planning a cinema outing can feel like an all-day affair. Moreover, attention spans have shortened, but I'm hopeful that viewers will find the experience rewarding.”

On December 20, *Priyo Maloti* graced 20 cinema halls nationwide. Featuring Mehababien Chowdhury in the titular role of Maloti Rani Das, the film marks a significant milestone for both the actress and its director, Shankha Dasgupta, as their silver screen debut.

Shankha, who began his career as a journalist, transitioned into the entertainment industry and eventually established himself as prominent director of television commercials (TVCs), and later OTT platforms. Reflecting on this journey, Shankha shares, “The best feeling a director can have is when the audience experiences your story on the big screen. Witnessing my project screened at an international festival, where the language and context were foreign to the audience, yet

was a pivotal phase in my growth.”

Determined to delve into long form narratives, Shankha ventured into OTT projects like *Boli*. While visually striking, the project faced criticism for its screenplay and storytelling. “The mixed reception taught me invaluable lessons, which I applied to my next project, *Guti*. I implemented everything I'd learned in my career, and that success inspired me to take the next big step, thus making a feature film,” reflects Shankha.

The journey to create *Priyo Maloti* began with a clear vision. “I was certain that this story deserved the silver screen. When I proposed the idea to stakeholders, including Frame Per Second, Chorki, and Mehababien, everyone believed in its potential,” says the director.

The film serves as a philosophical reflection of Shankha's own societal and political views. It addresses pressing issues and flaws within society, layered with a deeply personal and universally echoing narrative. Despite initial concerns about censorship, the film received uncut clearance.

Shankha notes, “Members of the censor board personally called to congratulate me, acknowledging the importance of the issues addressed. Such support might not have been possible during the previous regime.”

*Priyo Maloti* has already earned acclaim on the international festival circuit. While ‘festival films’ often struggle to attract local audiences, Shankha is confident this project will resonate widely. “We've crafted a simple yet powerful story that connects

with ordinary people. It's not about traditional entertainment or item songs; it's a story about life—a tale that educated and progressive audiences will appreciate. I believe that word of mouth will work in our favour,” he adds.

Shankha acknowledges the challenges of drawing audiences to cinemas, particularly with the limited number of halls and the logistical hurdles audiences face. “Planning a cinema outing can feel like an all-day affair. Moreover, attention spans have shortened, but I'm hopeful that viewers will find the experience rewarding. They won't leave disappointed; the film will leave them with something to reflect upon.”

Breaking stereotypes, Shankha's debut centres on a female protagonist, risky in a film industry where male-centric narratives dominate. However, the director dismisses the notion of risk. “I've never viewed stories through a gender-biased lens. This could have been about a male character or a transgender individual—what mattered was the story itself. When envisioning Maloti, I immediately thought of Mehababien. Her passion, talent, discipline, and dedication made her the perfect fit.”

Shankha is effusive in his praise for his leading lady. “Mehababien is an exceptional artiste. I'm incredibly fortunate to have her in my debut film and to witness her own silver screen debut through this project. From day one until now, her contribution has been tremendous. I have no regrets about casting her or preferring to produce a female-centric film for my debut.”



PHOTOS: COURTESY

being applauded for its visual storytelling, was surreal. It reinforced my confidence for presenting the film to our local audience.”

Shankha describes his career as a steady evolution. “In my early days on television, I often felt like I underperformed, believing I wasn't producing work matching the calibre of my contemporaries due to various limitations. Transitioning to TVCs changed my perspective. It demanded a process-oriented approach, allowing me to work with some of the best resources in the industry. Between 2013 and 2018, I honed my skills as a TVC director, which



## Aurthohin's former guitarist Piklu no more



Minhaz Ahmed Piklu, former guitarist of iconic Bangladeshi bands Rockstrata and Aurthohin, passed away last Friday at around 9pm. He was 56.

Piklu fell ill during a performance in Rampura and was rushed to a nearby clinic, where he was pronounced dead, his close friend Sifat Altamus told The Daily Star.

Piklu, a student of legendary guitarist Niloy Das, started his musical journey in the mid-1980s, playing with hard rock bands like Rockstrata, Jolly Rogers, and briefly with Warfaze in the early 1990s.

In 1999, he joined Aurthohin, contributing to several of the band's timeless tracks, including *Odbhut Shei Chaleti*, *Shurjo*, *Rater Train*, and *Guti from Hell*.



## Payal Kapadia's 'All We Imagine as Light' to compete at Oscars

Co-producers Slideshow announced yesterday that Payal Kapadia's debut feature, *All We Imagine as Light*, will independently compete in the 97th Academy Awards across all categories, including Best Picture, Director, and Original Screenplay, despite not being India's official entry.

The Film Federation of India chose Kiran Rao's *Laapataa Ladies* over *All We Imagine as Light* as its Oscar submission. Still, Rao's satire on rural patriarchy failed to make the Oscar shortlist revealed last week.

This recognition adds to the growing list of accolades for Kapadia's film. *All We Imagine as Light* was named the best international feature film at several film festivals worldwide.

# COUNTRYWIDE

## Mustard cultivation in Aman fields

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Farmers in different upazilas of the district are busy sowing mustard seeds in their standing Aman paddy crops, applying relay method.

Using this unusual method, farmers will get the opportunity to produce an additional crop, alongside Aman or any other Rabi crops, in same land, without spending any additional cost.

Patuakhali Agriculture Department has set up 347 demonstration plots – 100 in Bauphal, 60 in Galachipa, 40 in Dashmina, 30 each in Kalapara and Dumki, 22 in Rangabali, 20 in Mirzaganj and 45 in Sadar upazila – to motivate local farmers to cultivate mustard using relay method.

Meanwhile, many farmers are now showing their interest in cultivating mustard using this unusual method in order to meet the demand of edible oil.

Local farmers said Aman is their main crop. After harvesting Aman paddy their land remain fallow for about two and a half months as nothing can be grown in this period.

Dashmina Upazila Deputy Assistant Agriculture Officer Robi Faisal said in relay method farmers have to spray mustard seeds prior to harvesting their Aman paddy when the land remains much soft.

One kilogramme of mustard seed is required for one bigha of land, he said, adding that relay method offers farmers the opportunity to harvest an additional crop within a short time.

Usually, farmers have to plough their land before sowing mustard seeds, which would cost them Tk 3,000 to Tk 3,500 per acre.

Moreover, sometimes farmers have to irrigate their mustard field at least once that would cost them another Tk 1,000 to 1,500.

But, farmers does not require such extra expenses if they apply the relay system in their standing crop fields, Robi said.

Farmer Majnu Pyada of Gachani village in Dashmina upazila said it costs at least Tk 5,000 to cultivated mustard in one acre land, but since he is applying the relay method this year he doesn't required any extra money.

Sadek Matbor, another farmer of the village, said earlier they used to keep their land fallow for several weeks in order to prepare it for another crop. Patuakhali Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) Deputy Director Mohammad Nazrul Islam said they have set up a total of 347 demonstration plots in all the upazilas of the district with the goal to motivate more farmers to cultivate mustard, applying relay method.



A farmer in Patuakhali's Dashmina upazila spraying mustard seeds in his standing Aman field, using relay method. PHOTO: STAR

## Political clout intertwined with chaos on roads

from page 12  
Nahid stressed the need for institutional and structural reforms to restore order in the transport sector, reports UNB.

“Political influence is intertwined with the chaos on our roads. Resolving this issue will not be easy,” he said.

The adviser urged political parties to take an active role in tackling corruption, noting that many of the issues involve their leaders and activists.

## Education disparities

FROM PAGE 12  
growth rates, high per capita incomes and the most impressive human development indicators, Prof Sobhan said.

He said that the distinguishing feature of the educational system in many European countries was the move to universalise the provision of quality public education. Children from working class families, if they are talented, could enter well-known universities, whatever may be the economic circumstances of their parents. The offspring of a prime minister and business elite or workers and schoolteachers attend a common school system in these countries.

In countries like China, Vietnam, Japan, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan, a common school system is the preferred mode of choice for public education. But in Bangladesh, the education system is trifurcated between private, public, and religious school systems catering to different social and economic classes.

Prof Sobhan said English medium schools in Bangladesh have proliferated. International English medium schools,

He also criticised previous governments for their failure to prioritise public focused development.

“Development under past governments was not centered on the people. As a result, the public did not benefit. Future government policies must prioritise inclusive development that addresses the needs of the population.”

Mohammed Yasin, chairman of the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority

(BRTA), emphasised the need to modernise the transport sector and outlined steps to improve the system.

“Old buses will no longer be allowed to operate. A timeline has been set, and necessary measures must be implemented within this period.”

Yasin also highlighted the importance of a long-term plan to clear roads and footpaths of encroachments, pointing out that temporary

solutions such as evictions are insufficient. “The solution must be well-planned and sustainable.”

PIB Director General Faruk Wasif, Road Safety Foundation Vice Chairman Syed Jahangir, Executive Director Saidur Rahman, and several other stakeholders from the transport sector also addressed the programme, which was chaired by Road Safety Foundation Chairman Mahub Uddin Ahmed.

The governance failures in the public universities, politicisation of the administration and teaching faculties, and the domination of the students' bodies have corrupted the higher education system to a level where surgical intervention may be needed to restore both administrative discipline and quality education, he said.

“Today Bangladesh's ruling class no longer have any stake in improving the quality of public education because their children or grandchildren have been, are being, or will be expected to be educated in quality English medium private schools and universities.”

Prof Sobhan proposed making it mandatory for all candidates of the national polls to demonstrate their children are being educated in Bangla medium schools.

He recommended setting a goal to re-build the public education system that provides quality education at least to the level of cadet colleges.

He also recommended raising the number of seats in the cadet colleges as well as top state and private schools to allow entrance of children of low-income

households through scholarships.

He proposed to bifurcate one high-quality secondary school in every upazila into general and technical sections which would exclusively cater to lower income households.

Furthermore, he suggested tripling the allocation for education in the national budget to at least 5 percent of the GDP.

However, this large investment in education would only be meaningful if there is a quantum advancement in the quality of governance in the education system, Prof Sobhan added.

Prof Abu Sayeed said it is hard to have democracy in the society and state if the education system is not democratised.

Unfortunately, politicians do not listen to what educated people say and expert opinion does not have any place in politics, he added.

Prof Rounaq Jahan, distinguished fellow of CPD; Prof Mustafizur Rahman, executive director of CPD; Dhaka University Prof MM Akash; Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star; and Ala Uddin Ahmad, CEO of MetLife Bangladesh also spoke at the programme.

## 12-party

FROM PAGE 12  
“We have initiated the dialogue, and the parties have assured us of their continued support, as they did during the anti-Awami League movements.”

He added that the meeting focused on the country's current political and economic situation, with further discussions planned with other like-minded parties. “We will make decisions after these talks conclude.”

Mostafa Jamal Haidar, chairman of Jatiya Party (Kazi Zafar), noted that the meeting also addressed the possibility of organising joint programmes between the BNP and its allied parties.

“The need for unity remains. We must strengthen this unity moving forward. We will announce our joint programmes soon,” he said.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, Bangladesh LDP Secretary General Shahadat Hossain Salim, Bangladesh Jatiya Dal Chairman Syed Ehsanul Huda, Bikalpadhara Bangladesh Chairman Nurul Amin Bepari, and Jatiya Ganatantrik Party President Rashed Pradhan, among others, were also present at the meeting.

## 150 broadcast

FROM PAGE 12  
minority of the channels – only about 20 percent provide this benefit, while 72.4 percent do not provide any life insurance.

Only about a quarter of the channels provide provident fund, while 10 percent provide gratuity.

Additionally, 90 percent of the channels do not have regular annual increments, and as many as 72.4 percent do not pay for overtime when workers are on duty on government holidays.

## INTERNATIONAL

## Pak military courts convict 25 PTI men

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan military courts have convicted and sentenced 25 people for involvement in pro-Imran Khan unrest last year, the armed forces said yesterday, with the majority handed decade-long prison terms.

Ex-prime minister Khan was arrested in May last year after being ousted from office and mounting an unprecedented campaign of defiance against the nation's powerful military leaders.

His detention over graft allegations sparked nationwide unrest, some targeting armed forces installations, and prompting rare prosecutions of civilians in military courts.

Amnesty International called the move "an intimidation tactic, designed to crack down on dissent".

All of the convicted are men and 14 have been sentenced to a decade of "rigorous imprisonment", the military said with the remaining 11 set to serve lesser prison terms.

"All sentences announced by the military courts are disproportionate and excessive," said a spokesman for Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party. "These sentences are rejected."

The verdicts were announced just three weeks after the capital Islamabad was gripped by fresh unrest, as tens of thousands of Khan supporters flooded in to demand his release.

The government said at least five security personnel were killed whilst PTI allege at least 10 of their own were shot dead by security forces before crowds retreated.



Palestinian women mourn a dead child, killed in an Israeli strike the previous night, at Al-Ahli Arab hospital in Gaza City yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## MYANMAR CIVIL WAR

## Rebels 'capture junta western command in Rakhine state'

AFP, Bangkok

A Myanmar ethnic rebel group has captured a military regional command in Rakhine state, it said, in what would be a major blow to the junta.

The Arakan Army (AA) had "completely captured" the western regional command at Ann on Friday after weeks of fighting, the group said in a statement on its Telegram channel.

Ann would be the second regional military command to fall to ethnic rebels in five months, and a huge blow to the military.

Myanmar's military has 14 regional commands across the country with many of them currently fighting established ethnic rebel groups or newer "People's Defence Forces" that have sprung up to battle the military's 2021 coup.

Fighting has rocked Rakhine state since the AA attacked security forces in November last year, ending a ceasefire that had largely



held since the putsch.

AA fighters have seized swathes of territory in the state that is home to China and India-backed port projects and all but cut off state capital Sittwe.

The AA posted photos of a man whom it said was the Ann deputy regional commander, in the custody of its fighters.

AFP was unable to confirm that information and has contacted the AA's spokesman for

comment.

AFP was unable to reach people on the ground around Ann where internet and phone services are patchy.

In decades of on-off fighting since independence from Britain in 1948 the military had never lost a regional military command until last August, when the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) captured the northeastern command in Lashio in Shan state.

Myanmar's borderlands are home to myriad ethnic armed groups who have battled the military since independence for autonomy and control of lucrative resources.

Last month the UN warned Rakhine state was heading towards famine, as ongoing clashes squeeze commerce and agricultural production. "Rakhine's economy has stopped functioning," the report from the UN Development Programme said, projecting "famine conditions by mid-2025" if current levels of food insecurity were left unaddressed.

## BORDER OUTPOST ATTACK

## Pak Taliban kills 16 Pak soldiers

AFP, Islamabad

The Pakistani Taliban claimed a brazen overnight raid on an army outpost near the border with Afghanistan yesterday, which intelligence officials said killed 16 soldiers and critically wounded five more.

The siege started after midnight and lasted about two hours as around 30 militants pummeled the mountainous outpost from three sides, one senior intelligence official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

A second intelligence official also anonymously confirmed the toll of dead and wounded in the attack in the Makeen area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, 40 kilometres (24 miles) from the Afghan border.

Pakistan's domestic chapter of the Taliban claimed the attack in a statement, saying it was staged "in retaliation for the martyrdom of our senior commanders". The group claimed to have seized a hoard of military gear including machine guns and a night vision device.

## Drone attack hits Russia city 1,000 km from frontier

AFP, Moscow

Kyiv yesterday staged a major drone attack on the Russian city of Kazan, 1,000 kilometres (620 miles) from the frontier, as Moscow's troops captured a new frontline village in eastern Ukraine.

The drones damaged buildings in Kazan, capital of the Tartarstan republic, with a population of more than 1.3 million, but there were no victims, local officials said.

Kazan City hall said some fires had started and were being tackled by the fire brigade. The city's airport was temporarily closed, the Russian civilian aviation authority, Rosaviatsia, said.

Videos on Russian social media networks showed drones hitting high rise buildings setting off firebells.

Russia on Friday staged strikes on the Ukraine capital, Kyiv, that left one dead and 13 wounded, according to the city's authorities. Another five people were killed in a Ukrainian attack on the Russian frontier region of Kursk, the local governor said.

## Devotee killed, valuables looted at Natore crematorium

FROM PAGE 2

The Daily Star.

"A stone statue is also missing. We found that the lock of the temple's storeroom was broken. The iron grill of the window was cut off," he added.

On information, police rushed to the spot and recovered the body, said Shafiqul Islam, inspector (investigation) of Natore Sadar Police Station.

"Primarily, we suspect that the victim was strangled to death as he could identify the criminals. We are investigation the incident to get details," he said.

Talking to The Daily Star, the

victim's elder brother Arun Chandra Dash said, "Tarun used to run a laundry at a local market until 2006. Then he became a bit imbalanced mentally. He often used to stay at the crematorium."

Tarun has a son and daughter. His son Topu Dash filed a murder case in this connection, said Arun.

Contacted, Subrata Sarker, general secretary of Natore district unit of Bangladesh Hindu, Buddhist, Christian Oikya Parishad, said, "The criminals killed Tarun to loot the cash and valuables from the crematorium. We demand a fair investigation into the incident and immediate arrest of the killers."

## Brazil bus accident kills at least 32

AFP, Sao Paulo

At least 32 people died early yesterday when a bus crashed into a truck and then caught fire in southeastern Brazil, officials said.

Around four in the morning, the bus travelling from Sao Paulo blew a tire near the town of Lajinha, in the state of Minas Gerais, causing the driver to lose control of the vehicle and hit a truck, the state's fire department said in a statement.

The bus went up in flames and at least 32 passengers died, the statement said. Another vehicle rammed into the bus from behind, but its occupants survived.

## Uprising leaders drafting charter

FROM PAGE 12

The suggested names will be put to a vote, the sources told The Daily Star.

They are now examining the structure, operation and political practice of some youth-based parties in South Asia, including the Aam Aadmi Party and Lok Janshakti Party in India, and the National People's Power in Sri Lanka.

When asked about the plan to form a new political party, Nasiruddin Patwary, the convener of the Jatiya Nagorik Committee, confirmed to this newspaper that they have not finalised the name yet.

"A draft on the name and other relevant matters is being made now. We hope to reach a decision soon after consulting the stakeholders. After that, we will publicise everything."

The charter will be finalised upon consultation with civil society members and other stakeholders, three leaders of the two platforms told this newspaper.

Although the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement will not be directly affiliated with the new party, many individuals from the platform are expected to take leadership roles in the new party.

Information and Broadcasting Adviser Nahid Islam, who was a key organiser of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, may quit the council of advisers to lead the new party, the sources said.

Akhter Hossen, member secretary of Jatiya Nagorik Committee; its spokesperson Samantha Sharmin; and Sarjis Alam, a key organiser of the movement and general secretary of July Shaheed Memorial Foundation, are likely to be in the forefront of the new party, said sources inside the two platforms.

The plan to form a new party by the leaders of the student-led uprising has been in discussions since the ouster of the Awami League on August 5.

They launched their civic

platform the Jatiya Nagorik Committee in September. According to the leaders of the platform, the foundation for the political party will be established once the civic platform's organisational structure is established at the grassroots level.

Talking to The Daily Star, a key leader of the Jatiya Nagorik Committee said they have expanded their activities nationwide by forming committees in around 100 districts and upazilas over the past three months.

"We believe that we will complete the formation of committees in all possible areas by December. In the next phase, as we expand ward by ward, we can begin the process of creating our political party," said the Nagorik Committee leader, wishing to be unnamed.

The leader also said they did not want to specify a time for the formation of the party, but they are hopeful about the launch within one or two months.

## London to help Dhaka

FROM PAGE 12

legislation and instruments which can be used to support asset recovery requests," said the statement.

"Requests require significant domestic political support, as well as cooperation from law enforcement agencies and the judiciary. We are in discussions with the International Anti-Corruption Coordination Centre hosted by the UK's National Crime Agency and the International Centre for Asset Recovery on how to support the Interim Government of Bangladesh," it added.

The statement went on to say that in October, the UK National Crime Agency visited Dhaka as part of the UK's effort to support Bangladesh in this area.

"We will continue to support these recoveries to the extent that we can," it said.

Hatton's question to the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs is the latest in line of British parliamentarians criticising kleptocracy in Bangladesh.

A newsletter sent on Friday by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on

Anti-Corruption & Responsible Tax said that they have engaged with all 56 MPs representing constituencies where the properties of former land minister Saifuzzaman Chowdhury are located.

On October 15, the group held a parliamentary briefing to discuss how the UK can help Bangladesh recover its stolen money.

The parliamentary group's chair Joe Powell MP posted on his X profile, "We are at the epicentre of the housing crisis and must do what we can to prevent kleptocrats from snapping up London property with illicit wealth."

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পৃথিবী বদলাই

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# The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR: LATE S. M. ALI

## From repression to recognition

### Bangladesh named 'Country of the Year' for triumphing over tyranny

Bangladesh being named *The Economist's* Country of the Year in 2024 is a tremendous achievement for the country—one that all Bangladeshis can be proud of. Each December, *The Economist* awards this title to a country that has made significant progress over the past year. This year, Bangladesh earned the prestigious accolade for "toppling a despot and taking strides towards a more liberal government." This recognition is particularly meaningful for a nation that has recently undergone a major political transition, overthrowing an extremely corrupt and autocratic regime of 15 years through a student-led mass uprising.

The report highlights the remarkable journey of the Bangladeshi people in overcoming political repression and paving the way for a brighter, more democratic future. As the Hasina regime grew increasingly repressive—marked by election rigging, jailing of opponents, and violent crackdowns on dissent—the people united and took to the streets to assert their rights. During the July uprising that ultimately led to the fall of Sheikh Hasina, hundreds were shot dead by the regime, and around 20,000 were wounded. The heavy toll paid to oust an autocratic regime is a rare and profound example of resilience in modern history—even though Bangladeshis are no strangers to demonstrating such resilience in the face of oppression.

While the political transition has inspired optimism both nationally and globally—showcasing the resilience and determination of the Bangladeshi people—the nation now faces significant economic challenges. Rebuilding the country will require addressing the economic consequences of the previous regime. During Sheikh Hasina's 15-year rule, narratives of substantial economic growth were propagated, but these claims have since been exposed as largely illusory. A government-commissioned white paper revealed that an estimated \$234 billion was syphoned out of the country between 2009 and 2023. Additionally, Bangladesh has long struggled with inflation and unemployment, issues that must now be tackled urgently. However, with unity, these challenges can be overcome.

The interim government, led by Prof Muhammad Yunus, has prioritised rebuilding trust and stability. Its initiatives include economic and other reforms, restoring public order, and addressing social grievances. Despite the challenges, the progress made so far has been promising. Moving forward, Bangladesh must establish positive relations with other countries for mutual benefits, ensure judicial neutrality, and organise free and fair national elections. These steps are critical to solidifying the country's progress towards a more liberal democracy.

This is also a time for Bangladesh to correct past wrongs and begin anew—building a nation founded on equity, justice, the rule of law, and human rights. We hope the global community will continue to recognise our achievements and stand by Bangladesh as it strives to fulfil the democratic aspirations of its people.

## Three DSCC hospitals crippled by neglect

### Prioritise recruitment and efficient management

We are appalled by the findings of a report by *The Daily Star* on three hospitals run by the Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC), highlighting an acute shortage of staff and underutilised facilities, which cause unnecessary suffering for patients. In a city where accessible healthcare is increasingly out of reach for ordinary citizens, it is unacceptable that these public hospitals offer substandard services. This is a direct result of neglect and apathy from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) and the Ministry of Health, a situation that has worsened over decades.

These hospitals are vital for low-income and lower-middle-class communities, as they offer subsidised healthcare. However, patients are forced to wait for hours due to the severe shortage of doctors, nurses, and other essential staff. As patient numbers rise, one hospital operates with half the required manpower. For instance, Mohanagar General Hospital, which installed ICU units and high-flow oxygen equipment during the Covid pandemic, cannot use them because there are no trained personnel. The surgery department has been non-functional since 2015, and high-dependency unit (HDU) beds installed in 2021 remain unused. Many posts are vacant, further crippling the hospital's ability to function.

A similar manpower crisis exists at Dhaka Metropolitan Children's Hospital, where the paediatric surgery department has been inactive since 2012, and 40 of the 100 beds remain unused. Nazirabazar Matri Sadan is also grappling with a shortage of doctors and essential medicines.

In all three hospitals, staff are spread too thin, leaving patients without the necessary medical care. Despite repeated official letters sent to the health ministry and DGHS, no action has been taken. These hospitals reflect the dysfunction plaguing public healthcare across the country, with severe staff shortages making them nearly non-functional. The DGHS and health ministry have ignored the needs of these hospitals for years. Why has this been allowed to continue? What happened to the allocated budgets? If they were insufficient, why wasn't more funding provided?

The healthcare system, especially in public hospitals, continues to be marked by gross inadequacies. And the conditions at these hospitals are a perfect example of that. We urge the interim government to immediately investigate these issues and take corrective action. The recruitment of medical personnel should be a top priority, along with the training of staff to operate specialised equipment. Meanwhile, strict management oversight is necessary to ensure that no resources go underutilised. Access to healthcare is a basic right, and the government must restore functionality to these hospitals as soon as possible.

# The path to recovering our stolen assets



## AN OPEN DIALOGUE

Dr Abdullah Shibli is an economist and works for Change Healthcare, Inc., an information technology company. He also serves as senior research fellow at the US-based International Sustainable Development Institute (ISDI).

ABDULLAH SHIBLI

Corruption, embezzlement, and money laundering have been endemic in Bangladesh but reached new heights during the last 15 years of the now-toppled regime led by the Awami League. The recently published "White Paper on the State of the Bangladesh Economy" reported that \$234 billion was syphoned off from Bangladesh between 2009 and 2023. The interim government has promised to work tirelessly to identify the perpetrators of this massive mayhem—to loot and plunder the country and its poor people—and bring back some of the ill-gotten resources.

Tax havens around the globe, particularly in the Middle East, Malaysia, the UK, Canada, the US, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Singapore, provided a golden opportunity for businesses, bureaucrats, and politicians to use a well-crafted system of patronage and crony capitalism to take advantage of the country's incompetent leaders and financial regulators to launder an average of \$16 billion a year.

The White Paper documented the mechanism used for money laundering (ML)—these tricks have been well-known for a long time. The then foreign minister of Bangladesh stated during an interview with *The Daily Star* in 2020 that the AL government had information that politicians, businessmen, and government officials, including some "serving officials," had pilfered and whitewashed money by buying properties in Canada. It is no secret that Bangladesh Bank and the Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU) were fully aware of the scale of ML and the role played by the key protagonists!

The previous government was, on many occasions, alerted by the World Bank, multilateral financial institutions, UN agencies, and national watchdogs about the scope of illicit financial flows (IFF). In 2011, during negotiations with the World Bank to secure financing for the Padma Bridge, the bank provided "credible evidence of corruption" to the government. These were brushed aside and dismissed as "trumped-up" allegations by the former

prime minister.

In my brief discussion on this matter with members of the current administration, it is clear that money laundering and its prevention are among its highest priorities. Last week, the BB governor publicly reiterated his intention to bring back stolen assets from other countries. He chairs a nine-member taskforce with representatives from important state



FILE VISUAL: REHNUMA PROSHOON

agencies, which has been assigned to track down stolen assets abroad and support investigations aimed at their recovery. The taskforce seeks to expedite legal proceedings for asset recovery, identify and address barriers to recovery, manage frozen or recovered assets abroad, and strengthen communication with relevant domestic and international bodies to gather essential information while enhancing internal coordination and capabilities.

While asset recovery is a tough and time-consuming process, it needs to be done, and for many reasons. The money looted from the coffers is now being used to undermine the present government. If we reverse the resource outflow and turn back the tide, that would rejuvenate our economic

development. For example, the ML activities of the owners of the S Alam Group have resulted in the bankruptcy of the various businesses they own. If their overseas resources are liquidated and the proceeds repatriated and invested in their domestic enterprises, the local economy will receive a shot in the arm.

Also, we need to send a message to the culprits. In the language of criminal justice system, the purpose would be "deterrence, retribution, and restoration."

The asset recovery stage encompasses several steps that need to be pursued diligently. To begin, a special sub-unit comprising legal and financial experts could freeze, without delay and much fanfare, the funds or other assets of designated persons or entities. Fortunately, Bangladesh can leverage the goodwill earned

and international.

Why is international collaboration so important? Most of the stolen money is invested overseas or stashed away in foreign banks. The process of identifying these investments and recovering them will be slow and involve tackling the lawyers, trust experts, real estate agents, accountants, and financial institutions representing the individuals—the Saifuzzamans and the Benazirs—who might have already been identified and tipped in advance. The money, once taken out of the country, is most likely to have been invested in real estate or businesses through a process known as "layering," where the ownership is completely fuzzy. We need to hire the best global investigators to trace the money since the beneficial owner may be hidden behind multiple layers of shell companies or a nominee company director.

Since the US, Canada, Singapore, and the UK have some of the strictest anti-money-laundering (AML) legislation and enforcement mechanisms, our embassies or high commissions in these countries must be notified of the business entities or persons of interest. Several newspaper accounts of Bangladeshi residents in Singapore, New York, Toronto, and London have surfaced over the last few years. The taskforce can forward the list of suspects to MLARS and target the three most corrupt sectors identified by the White Paper: financial, ICT, and power.

The ultimate goal of the current administration is to lay the foundation of an anti-ML programme that will prevent future occurrences. A comprehensive ML programme will include investment in employee education, stricter internal controls, accountability, and early detection.

We need to build stronger defences against corruption, money laundering, and fraudulent trading practices. Key sectors like banking should have guardrails against the "bad influence of party politics," to quote Dr Wahiduddin Mahmud. Various policy measures and actions recommended by the Farashuddin Commission, set up after the Bangladesh Bank heist, need to be implemented. A whistleblower programme to reward individuals who provide helpful information on illegal financial activities must be established.

Finally, this most recent money laundering and kleptocracy saga underscores the pressing need for unwavering diligence and proactive implementation of a comprehensive AML compliance framework in Bangladesh to safeguard the financial system.

# The role of CITES in combating illegal wildlife trade



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FARDEEN BIN ABDULLAH

Bangladesh, with its diverse ecosystems, harbours an array of wildlife species critical to global biodiversity. Yet, this rich natural heritage faces immense threats due to the illegal wildlife trade, both as a source and transit route. The role of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), established in 1973, is vital in curbing this alarming trend. However, recent developments have highlighted serious gaps in the country's compliance.

Illegal wildlife trade in Bangladesh encompasses a wide range of species, including Bengal tigers, turtles, exotic birds, and marine life. The country's geopolitical location, bordering India and Myanmar, makes it a strategic transit point for traffickers.

According to field studies, Bangladesh has 16 key trafficking hotspots along its borders, including Teknaf, Benapole, and the Chattogram seaport. Smugglers exploit porous borders and weak enforcement to move wildlife into neighbouring countries such as India, Myanmar, and Vietnam—countries with booming wildlife markets.

Since joining CITES in 1982, Bangladesh has committed to regulating international wildlife trade through strict permits and documentation to protect species from overexploitation. However, in August 2024, Bangladesh faced suspension

from CITES due to persistent failures in enforcement, hindering efforts to protect endangered species such as tigers, elephants, and various marine life forms. Despite this setback, Environment Adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan expressed optimism, citing the government's commitment to stronger compliance and enhanced wildlife monitoring.

Challenges persist due to fake permits and insufficient training among port personnel, allowing smugglers to exploit these loopholes and traffic protected species via air and land routes, notably through Dhaka and Chattogram airports. And while the government has made progress in some areas, wildlife trafficking, especially through less-regulated borders, continues to thrive.

The Wildlife Crime Control Unit (WCCU), established by the Forest Department, has been at the forefront of efforts to combat wildlife trafficking. Recent seizures of animals, such as Hoolock gibbons, fishing cats, and Kalij pheasants, underscore the ongoing struggle to stop wildlife smuggling. According to law enforcement, wildlife trafficking routes often pass through major international ports like Chattogram before moving to destinations such as India and Myanmar.

In March 2021, a significant

operation led to the rescue of seven Patagonian Mara, an exotic species from Argentina, in Satkhira. This demonstrates how international traffickers exploit Bangladesh as a transit point. Similar seizures of zebras, lion cubs, and other species further highlight the scale of the illegal trade operating within the country.

Bangladesh is home to several species listed under the CITES appendices:

**Appendix I:** Includes species threatened with extinction, such as the Bengal Tiger, Indian Elephant, and Red Panda, as well as marine species like the Olive Ridley Turtle.

**Appendix II:** Includes species like the Saltwater Crocodile, Gharial, and Indian Star Tortoise, which are at risk without trade controls.

**Appendix III:** Includes certain mangrove species from the Sundarbans and orchids from the *Dendrobium* genus, protected due to over-harvesting.

Despite these protective measures, enforcing CITES regulations remains challenging. Combating wildlife trafficking in Bangladesh is hampered by weak enforcement, inadequate resources, and insufficient training for the Wildlife Crime Control Unit. Online marketplaces like Facebook and YouTube complicate regulation, while domestic demand for wildlife products exacerbates the issue. Corruption and lack of expertise among port officials and border guards allow traffickers to exploit false declarations and evade detection, further endangering biodiversity.

Wildlife trafficking poses a significant threat to Bangladesh's biodiversity. According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), over 390 species in Bangladesh are at risk of extinction. Poaching, habitat destruction, and trade disrupt ecosystems and push

species towards extinction. Marine life, such as turtles and sharks from the Bay of Bengal, is particularly vulnerable. Bangladesh has already lost 31 species in the last century, and many more are at risk if illegal trade continues unchecked.

The Bangladesh Forest Department, in collaboration with international organisations like Interpol, has intensified anti-trafficking measures. These include:

**Rescue operations:** Seizures of exotic and native wildlife, including endangered species.

**Public hotlines:** Encouraging citizens to report wildlife crimes.

**Legal frameworks:** Enforcing the Wild Animals (Preservation and Security) Act, 2012.

**Capacity building:** Plans for a DNA-based tiger gene bank to strengthen anti-poaching measures.

However, recurring offenders and inadequate market monitoring undermine progress. Given this reality, here are some steps that should be taken to address wildlife trafficking effectively: i) Enhance enforcement through training programmes for law enforcement and customs officials; ii) Use modern technology, such as drones and checkpoints, to deter smuggling; iii) Launch public awareness campaigns to reduce domestic demand for wildlife products; iv) Strengthen international cooperation for intelligence sharing and joint operations; and v) Revise policies to enforce stricter penalties and wildlife trade regulations.

Bangladesh's biodiversity faces significant pressure from illegal wildlife trade. Effective CITES enforcement and collaborative efforts among government agencies, international organisations, and the public are crucial for safeguarding ecosystems and global biodiversity.



# Dhaka is an island



Kazi Khaleed Ashraf is an architect and writer, and directs the Bengal Institute for Architecture, Landscapes and Settlements.

**KAZI KHALEED ASHRAF**

Living within the hullabaloo of the city, in the belly of the beast, so to speak, there is a vital aspect of Dhaka that has become invisible. We can no longer see a city framed and encircled by rivers. How ironic is that! In a *nodī beshitto* landscape, the river has disappeared from view. Not quite literally, but perceptually and ideationally. And, often, quite literally. That is, the river is no longer in our minds and is not accessible either. This is not the case for someone living in Paris, Bangkok, or Kolkata. Think of Buriganga, that is, if you can, the banks of which nurtured the beginning and growth of Dhaka. The river is now polluted beyond repair and its banks are almost inaccessible to the general public.

Once upon a time, rivers, wetlands, flood plains and canals used to completely girdle the city in a beautiful tapestry of green and blue. Now, a short ride on any of the rivers of Dhaka will show how that landscape is being mistreated and abused. A couple of days back, a few of us took a boat ride on the Balu River. Other than one or two leisure boats, 90 percent of boats were sand barges slithering on the darkish water for the purpose of filling up nearby wetlands. We found a few instances where the riverbanks were recognised, but mostly it seemed like a long disowned wasteland. Even such planned enterprises as Purbachal and Jolshiri failed to recognise the beauty of the rivers in their grand plans.

I describe this phenomenon, in which the rivers have receded from our lived experience, as the vanishing scope of the city. Accelerated by planning priorities and development drives, and a clear disregard for the virtues of rivers, rivers and a whole ecology associated with them are receding from our urban priorities. This is unequivocally disastrous.

Writing in the book *Designing Dhaka* in 2012, I proposed the viewpoint that “Dhaka is an island.” The architect Muzharul Islam made a similar claim in 1993: “Dhaka has rivers on three sides, and lowland on the other, it is extended along the north-south. It is like an island.” The claim is both rhetorical and prospective. It is rhetorical in the sense that Dhaka city is not quite an island but the way it is framed by water on all four sides, it appears to be one. Metropolitan Dhaka and its immediate areas are framed by four rivers—the Buriganga, the Turag, the Balu, and the Shitalakhya. Like a garland or ring, the four rivers encircle a region on which the historic city of Dhaka originated and developed, and where the expanding footprint of the modern city is fast growing. We calculate that the total linear length of the four riverbanks, considering both sides, is 216 kms!

The historical importance of this “ring of rivers” cannot be overemphasised. British cartographer James Rennell’s map of Dhaka clearly showed its location in a riverine geography. Earlier, in the 15th century, the Chinese emissary

Ma Huan and his companions travelled up to Sonargaon and Dhaka in their Chinese junks. At the southern tip, Idrakpur Fort was constructed by the Mughals at the perfect location facing the daunting south that brought in marauders and troublemakers. Birulia village, once a hub of commerce, now sits as a desolate island in the river route

of the Turag. Jute factories on the Sitalakhya led Rumer Godden to write her novel *The River* which became the basis for Jean Renoir’s 1951 film of the same name. It was Renoir’s film that inspired Satyajit Ray. Such is the web of rivers.

Rivers are not just ribbon-like channels. It also suggests a vast water ecology that includes canals, lakes,

wetlands and floodplains that still infiltrate the body of the city. Let us not forget the essence of a river: it is all about flows. The blatant increase in impermeable surfaces and engineered systems has disrupted both flows and absorptions. If we are deleting rivers from our horizon, we are actually nullifying the life-enhancing gift of nature.

Claiming that Dhaka is an island is an earnest call for an ecological and nature-oriented restoration of the city, and to experience, in the words of the Chinese landscape architect and ecological planner Kongjian Yu, the “free, fertile, vigorous and poetic landscape.”

By prospective, I mean how we can erect our buildings, infrastructures and cities, that is, a whole new city form, with the rhythm of the river rings. How can we create an active public realm all along the riverbanks? And how can we experience a passenger river route in the ring? There are a few tasks involved here.

The first task is environmental, that is, to retain the rivers as rivers, by cleaning up the rivers, depolluting them, and maintaining their flow. This is fundamental and there is no two-way about this. The second task is legal, to create distinct policies for the definition and usage of the riverbanks for what happens on riverbanks lead to the eventual deterioration of rivers. Both these tasks are fairly well known in our discourse on rivers, but they have not been able to restore the primacy of those rivers. If policies and outcries will not, what will?

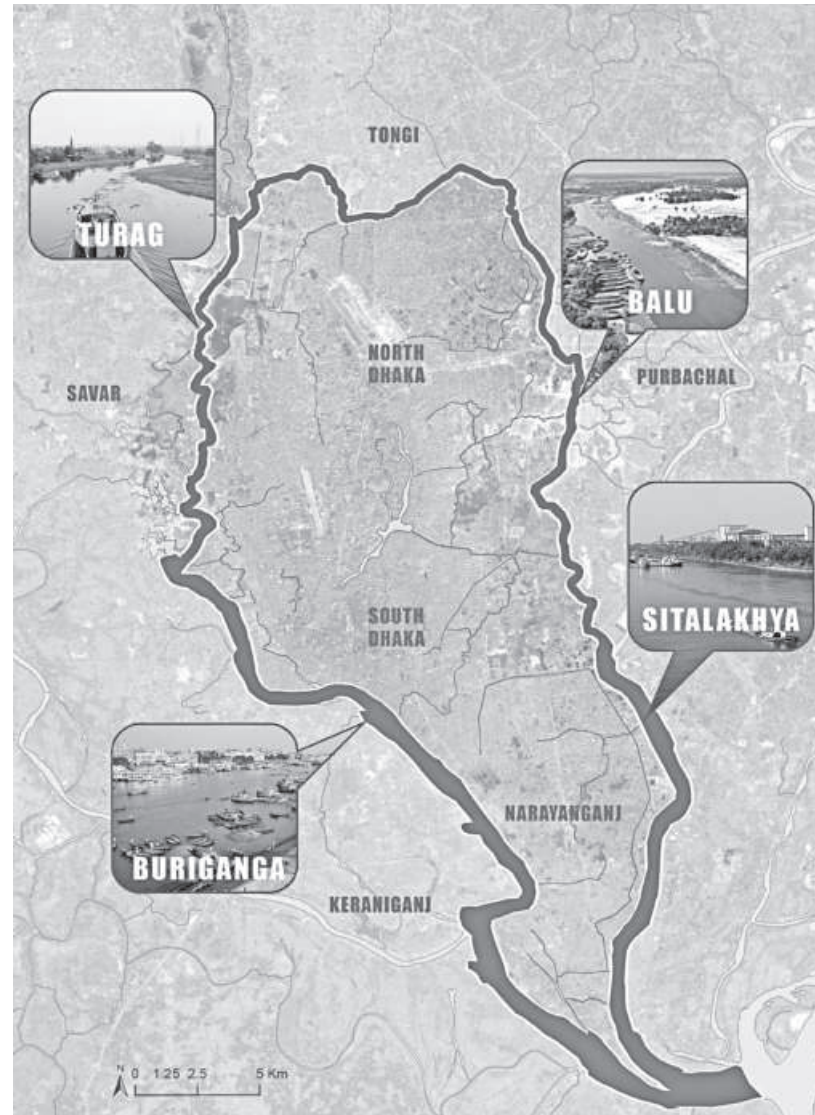
There is a third task that may actually save rivers—we need to show by examples how the rivers and riverbanks can be used. I argue that people abuse the riverbanks when there is no demarcated or defined public realm. Riverbanks are actually a natural public realm. Anyone should be able to reach an

urban riverbank, unfettered and unobstructed. And once there, he or she should be able to take in the full glory of a river. A singular and time-tested way to preserve riverbanks is to create unobstructed walkable public spaces along all the riverbanks. Our rural riverbanks are like that but the moment a river enters or passes by a city or town, it immediately becomes an object of abuse in which encroachment and privatisation turn the rivers black and deny the riverbanks to the wider citizens. If any strategy that will save our riverbanks, it is the publicisation of its banks.

It does not take too much to create public spaces along riverbanks. All that is needed is an attention to public access and making simple gathering spaces such as parks, gardens and pathways. Pathways could be for both walking and biking. Ideally, I should be able to walk from Ashulia along the Turag and the Buriganga and reach the southern tip of Narayanganj (we calculated it would take 9 hours at 10 mins/km).

We need to develop a hydrophilic image of the city, where the rivers are passionately loved and used. A civic activism is needed around the primacy of rivers in the life of a city. A map of a city is often a way to iconise that primacy. Such an iconic map of Dhaka is yet to be drawn. We propose a new visualisation of Dhaka in which the ring of rivers is prioritised.

In Kongjian Yu’s optimistic view, rivers and civilisations are closely bound up in which the big rivers will continue to nourish human civilisations. “No rivers, no dreams,” as he declares. One could add: no dreams, no humanity. In a time of paradoxical development, when industrial growth and technological optimism have wrought havoc on Earth, we need to explore a “nature-based path” for redemption in which the central role is played by the river.



MAP COURTESY: RIDA HAQUE

# July revolution and Prof Yunus: A winning combination



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**MOHAMMAD SHAMSUZZAMAN**

When Prof Yunus was sworn in as the chief adviser of the interim government on August 8 of this year, a feeling of déjà vu consumed me. I was transported back to 2006, when I was a graduate student at a university in California. I was working out at the gym in the morning. The TV right in front of my treadmill flashed Prof Yunus, as the newscaster mentioned that he had won the Nobel Peace Prize. I jumped out of the gym and started running to the office of my course coordinator. Before she could greet me as she suddenly found me next to her chair, I said, “Dr. Yunus, a Bangladeshi won the Nobel Peace Prize this year.” She smiled and said, “We know Professor Yunus. You are the next.” I was so delightfully delusional that I had no idea what she meant. All I knew was that Bangladesh achieved nothing more dignified and desirable than winning the Nobel Peace Prize since our independence in 1971. When I left her office, I realised that Prof Yunus had re-defined Bangladesh, which was off to a new beginning. Unfortunately, nothing apparently has changed since. Politics has swamped everything.

While our political crisis climaxed this past July, Bangladesh has always been politically precarious since its bloody birth in 1971. The lever of political power alternated between demagogues and dictators. Most of them were intellectually half-baked. They understood neither politics, nor economics. All of them were apparently con artists. They attempted to become popular, while their credibility mixed. They rigged elections. They celebrated trumped-up victories. They led without knowing whatsoever how a country runs. The country runs anyway, backward or forward, with or without a leader. A gated community of gonifs (the Hanifs, in our case!) feeds the fantasy of such a leader that she is inevitable and accomplished. While she ensconces herself in power and pride, the carpetbaggers erode the vitals of the country. Mismanagement

metastasises. People feel betrayed and vulnerable. What happens when such political paralysis persists? Hasina happens! Fascism happens! Genocide happens! In a political climate such as this, winning a Nobel Prize is apparently criminal. No wonder that they filed 198 court cases against Prof Yunus, as *Deutsche Welle* claims. Nothing, however, diminishes the fact that Prof Yunus is our one-off achievement. He has the charisma and credibility to help the nation achieve further.

The Hasnats knew it. When the July revolution culminated in Hasina’s flight from the country on the August 5, the architects of the revolution (i.e., the student coordinators) realised that it occasioned an extraordinary opportunity to reclaim and reform the country that the Hasinas continue to own and run and ruin for decades. Unless a comprehensive electoral, judicial, financial, bureaucratic, and constitutional reform is enacted, the Hasinas will continue to kill the Abu Syeds. The nation will continue to barrel backward, when crime, corruption, and injustice mount. Under these circumstances, the country didn’t need a steward, who could smoothly transition power through an election. The country needed a reformer, who would ensure a fair and participatory election having undertaken some fundamental reforms. The country needed someone, who was authentic and exemplary. Only Prof Yunus seemed to have the sentimental and professional capital to fill the slot. Hasina’s government was so disconnected from the people that they didn’t realise that the more they disgraced Prof Yunus, the more love and respect and empathy hemmed around him. Add to that his accomplishments, global connections, and reputation. When he consented to become the chief adviser of the interim government, the most critical foundation of the July revolution was laid.

As we started to look forward when the interim government took over, the

forces of the fallen regime threatened to push us backward. Movements erupted. Law and order deteriorated. The country seemed volatile and unpredictable. People started to feel hopeless and helpless. The interim government looked severely strained. Such a situation was very unfortunate but was never unexpected. Hasina flooded the country with illegal arms

anything but a magician.

A transition from a dictatorial regime to democracy is almost akin to breathing life into a corpse. Dictators are addicted to killing. They kill people. They kill institutions. They kill courage and conviction. Along the way, they massively infiltrate the members of incestuously interconnected families into a system

unemployment, and zero net carbon emissions. He is deeply invested in making the world a better place. Besides, he has aged gracefully. He is never publicly angry or annoyed. He maintains a low-key demeanour. A personality of his stature doesn’t fit in the political mess that Hasina’s Bangladesh was. It’s, however, no longer Sheikh Hasina’s Bangladesh,

\$17 billion was syphoned from the country’s financial system in the 15 years of Hasina’s regime. The country is apparently cash-strapped now. When the country reels under heavy foreign loans incurred by Hasina’s government, the interest rates continue to spike, adding further financial burden to the interim government. Inflation increases and the prices of commodities spike. It’s a vicious cycle the interim government is trapped in, which seriously threatens its popularity and capacity. Policing would have contributed to streamlining commodity prices to some extent. The police department has crumbled under its own crime and corruption, thanks to Hasina. While considerable improvement is visible on these fronts, I apprehend that these problems might linger a little longer.

Under any circumstances, though, nothing can fracture Prof Yunus’s fortitude. He is focused on and heading steadily towards the goals of the Tabassums, along with the rest of the people of this country, want him to accomplish. Never before has so much possibility beckoned Bangladesh. Never before have so many problems beset Bangladesh. The country is hollow at the core. Conspiracies and propaganda brew constantly. Neighbourly knavery flares up. We are in an extraordinary phase of our national history. If we don’t move ahead cautiously, tomorrow’s Bangladesh is anyone’s guess. Arundhati Roy reminds us in her *Boston Review* interview, “How to Think About Empire,” what Prof Yunus reiterates since he took over that we must not fool ourselves into believing that the change we want will come with fresh election as the “old bastards” are out of office. They will bounce in if we renew the politics of voting with the same old system in place. That’s not an option for the new Bangladesh that emerged following the July revolution.

It was a goosebump moment for me when Prof Yunus won the Nobel Prize in 2006, and the same feeling renewed in 2024, when he was sworn in as chief adviser. I’m persuaded to think that no one is more poised to embody and draw from the unity and harmony that the July revolution built across Bangladesh. We needed a stalwart, who is above partisan interest and material greed, for Bangladesh to emerge anew. We have it now.

Relax, Bangladesh!



Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus is pictured during a press briefing as he arrives at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, in Dhaka, Bangladesh, August 8, 2024.

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

and money. The country was already massively insecure and explosive. The agents of anarchy stalked all around the country. They resisted, as Hasina suddenly sneaked out of the country. And their resistance was not political; it was existential, instead. They stood exposed and felt endangered, as Hasina’s regime fizzled. They wanted her back for their survival. Hasina has been a textbook example of a dictator, like the Peruvian dictator, Óscar R Benavides, who famously said, “For my friends everything, for my enemies the law.” She changed the political culture and calculus of the country so irreversibly during the last 15 years that a quick fix is unlikely. However, the “reset button” is already set. As things gradually continue to fall on the right track, we must remember that Prof Yunus is

that thrives in isolation, intimidation, and pessimism. Resistance and unity dwindle. Stupidity becomes strength. Arrogance becomes a virtue. In the meantime, some bridges, flyovers, and tunnels happen. The cronies besetting the dictator construct a grand narrative of development claiming, “She has shown us out of pobeti [sic].”

Hasina’s Bangladesh was a political circus. She had “LOL” models to rule the country, who were devoid of brainpower, integrity, and patriotism. Prof Yunus exists at the opposite end of such a political spectrum. He is an intellectual, who is worldly. He knows how politics functions. His vision of the world is not romantic or reconditte. He wants the political system re-shaped around the economics of zero poverty, zero

as our Law Adviser Asif Nazrul said.

Therefore, Prof Yunus becomes critical to guiding and transforming the nation to a new height. The nation wants to get out of the politics of bullshitting and blood-shedding. However capable Prof Yunus potentially is, we must not forget that he has inherited bankruptcy. Hasina left the country shattered. Hasina was psychologically unhinged. She was a narcissistic megalomaniac. She was always smut and huffy, when she pretended that she was above human follies. She never confessed to have erred. For example, she bragged about her zero-tolerance policy to corruption, when she claimed that her peon scrounged around Tk 400 crores. Citing the governor of Bangladesh Bank, *The New York Times* reported recently that about

## Combating oral diseases through tobacco harm reduction

Leading international health experts unveiled a pioneering four-point plan to address the global crisis of oral diseases, which afflict more than 3.5 billion people worldwide.

Their landmark report, launched at a conference of highly regarded health professionals in London, provides a bold vision for reducing tobacco-related oral diseases by promoting safer alternatives and integrating tobacco harm reduction (THR) strategies into public health frameworks.

The report, Transforming Oral Health for All: The Case of Tobacco Harm Reduction, sets out four strategic objectives.

**Encouraging risk-proportionate regulation:** Governments should revise regulations and tax policies to increase access to safer, smoke-free nicotine alternatives while restricting combustible tobacco products, encouraging people who smoke to switch, and reducing the global burden of tobacco-related oral diseases.

**Activating oral health professionals:** Oral health professionals, especially dentists and hygienists, are crucial in educating patients about tobacco harm reduction. Providing them with proper training enables them to guide patients away from smoking-related oral diseases.

**Strengthening alliances and consumer representation:** The report advocates for forming science-based consumer groups and collaborations among healthcare providers, NGOs, and the private sector to amplify voices affected by tobacco-related diseases and support evidence-based policy reforms.

**Investment in research and local science:** The report urges increased investment in research to understand tobacco harm reduction's impact on oral health, advancing knowledge on safer smoke-free nicotine products while protecting youth from tobacco use.



# Mental health disorders should not be stigmatised or seen as a curse

SALMA AKTAR PRIYO

Mental health disorders affect millions of people worldwide, yet they remain one of the most misunderstood aspects of human health. Too often, these conditions are stigmatised or dismissed as curses, leading to discrimination, neglect, and a lack of proper care. Such perceptions not only harm individuals but also hinder societal progress. The time has come to address this stigma and view mental health with the same importance as physical well-being.

Neglecting mental health carries dire consequences. Individuals who suffer from untreated mental disorders often experience declining physical health, as chronic stress exacerbates conditions like diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. Social isolation is another significant outcome, as stigma prevents people from seeking help, leaving them alienated and hopeless.

This neglect also contributes to the high global suicide rate, with nearly 800,000 deaths annually, many of which could have been prevented with timely intervention. In Bangladesh, suicide remains a pressing issue, with a rate of 7.8 per 100,000 people. Beyond the personal toll, the neglect of mental health imposes significant societal and economic burdens, including reduced workplace productivity, increased crime, and strained family dynamics.

One of the greatest barriers to addressing mental health issues is the persistence of cultural myths and superstitions. In many parts of South Asia, mental illnesses are still viewed as spiritual punishments or signs of moral failure. People often turn to

traditional healers instead of seeking professional care, resulting in harmful practices that delay recovery or worsen the condition. Education and awareness campaigns are essential to dismantle these harmful beliefs and encourage communities to embrace evidence-based solutions.

Research and policy advancements provide a glimmer of hope. Globally, initiatives like the Lancet Commission on Mental Health in 2023 have called for increased

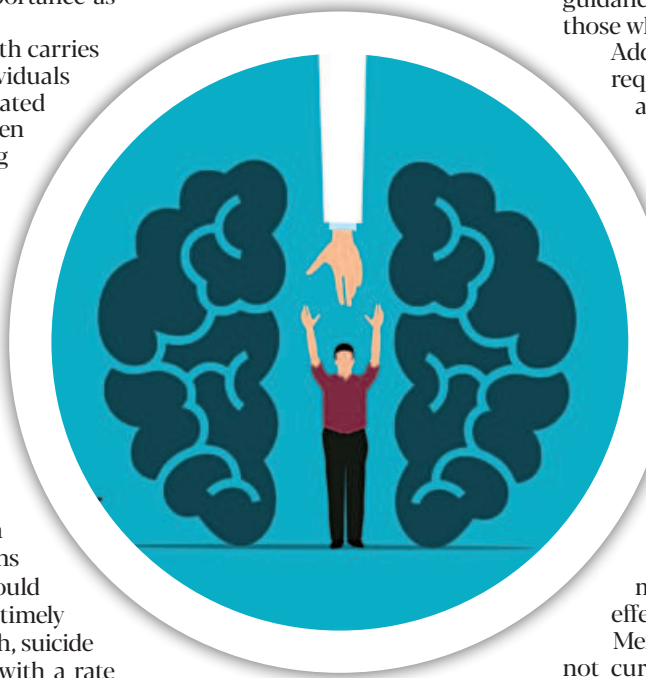
inhumane treatment and promote the dignity of those affected. However, gaps in implementation, resource allocation, and workforce availability continue to pose challenges.

Technology offers new opportunities to bridge these gaps. Digital platforms like Moner Bondhu are expanding access to counselling services, particularly for rural and underserved populations. Telemedicine and artificial intelligence-powered tools can also provide preliminary assessments and guidance, ensuring that help reaches those who need it most.

Addressing mental health requires a multifaceted approach. Family and community support are crucial in breaking the silence and encouraging affected individuals to seek help. Schools and workplaces must also play their part by promoting mental health awareness and creating inclusive environments. Governments must prioritise mental health in national budgets, increase the number of trained professionals, and ensure that laws protecting mental health rights are effectively enforced.

Mental health disorders are not curses or weaknesses; they are health conditions that demand understanding, compassion, and action. By normalising conversations around mental health and dismantling the stigma, we can create a world where seeking help is seen as a sign of strength rather than shame. Mental health is a shared responsibility, and addressing it is essential for building a healthier, more inclusive society.

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## Alternative treatments for anxiety



Anxiety disorders are common worldwide. While therapy and medication are traditional treatments, alternative therapies can be a valuable addition for managing mild anxiety. These methods aim to reduce anxiety symptoms with fewer side effects and can complement standard treatments when approved by a healthcare professional.

**1. Reduce caffeine and avoid alcohol and nicotine:** Excessive caffeine intake can worsen anxiety, even in amounts as low as 200 mg per day. Reducing caffeine consumption may help minimise anxiety. Similarly, while alcohol and nicotine might temporarily ease symptoms, they often make anxiety worse in the long run.

**2. Eat a nutritious diet:** A healthy, well-balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, and healthy fats supports mental health. It is also important to avoid processed foods and high sugar intake, which can trigger anxiety symptoms. Staying hydrated by drinking enough water is equally important for managing stress levels.

**3. Engage in regular physical activity:** Exercise, particularly cardiovascular activities, is proven to reduce stress and anxiety. Even a short burst of activity, like a brisk 10 minute walk, can provide hours of relief. Regular physical activity not only alleviates anxiety but also promotes overall well-being.

**4. Prioritise sleep:** Quality sleep plays a crucial role in reducing anxiety. Aim for 6-8 hours of sleep each night, and establish a consistent sleep schedule.

**5. Practice relaxation techniques:** Techniques such as meditation, yoga, and deep breathing exercises are effective in managing anxiety.

**6. Consider supplements and essential oils:** Herbal supplements like chamomile, passionflower, and L-theanine may help alleviate mild anxiety.

## Understanding high arches: causes, symptoms, and treatment options

High arches, or cavus foot, occur when the arch of your foot is raised more than normal, creating a structural issue that can lead to foot pain and discomfort. Unlike flat feet, where the arch is low, high arches cause the middle part of the foot to be excessively elevated. This condition can affect your posture, skeletal structure, and overall comfort while walking or standing.



**What causes high arches?** High arches can be caused by genetics or neurological disorders. Conditions such as spina bifida, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, and stroke can lead to cavus foot. Inherited high arches typically remain stable over time, whereas those caused by neurological issues tend to worsen as the individual ages.

**Common symptoms of high arches:** Individuals with high arches often experience symptoms like: foot pain during walking, standing, or physical activities; difficulty finding properly fitting shoes; claw-like, bent toes when standing; heel tilting inward, causing instability; calluses on the foot's ball, side, or heel.

If you suspect you have high arches, you can perform a simple test at home by stepping on a piece of paper with wet feet. If you see little or no imprint of your foot's arch, it may indicate high arches.

**Treatment and management:** Treatment for high arches depends on the underlying cause and the severity of the condition. Non-surgical options include: Orthotic devices for added foot support; Corrective shoes that provide stability and reduce pain; Braces for additional ankle support.

In severe cases, surgery may be needed to improve foot stability, reduce pain, and prevent muscle imbalances. If the condition is genetic, one surgery is typically enough, but for neurological causes, multiple surgeries might be required.

Consult with a healthcare provider to determine the best treatment plan based on your individual case.

## T-BOOSTER A revolutionary step in immunity enhancement

DR MD ARIF SHEIKH

The journey to restore immunity and reverse age-related decline has taken an exciting leap with the development of T-BOOSTER. This groundbreaking natural food supplement is poised to address a critical issue: thymic involution, a process where the thymus gland shrinks with age, leading to a decline in T-cell production and a weakened immune system.

**The role of the thymus in immunity:** The thymus gland plays a pivotal role in the body's immune defence, producing T cells that combat infections, cancer, and autoimmune diseases. However, thymic involution significantly reduces its effectiveness over time. Factors such as stress, infections, and cancer treatments can temporarily shrink the thymus, but research has shown that it has the potential to regenerate. Leveraging this capability, the creators of T-BOOSTER have formulated a supplement that aids thymus regeneration, enhancing immunity and unlocking youthful vitality.

**The science behind T-BOOSTER:** T-BOOSTER is a blend of 18 clinically proven compounds, including vitamins, minerals, and natural food extracts. Using artificial intelligence and advanced computational tools, the team has ensured that each ingredient interacts optimally with the thymus. The supplement targets multiple mechanisms to support thymus health, such as:

- Protecting the gland from oxidative damage using antioxidants.
- Balancing gut flora to reduce inflammatory signals.
- Preserving vital thymic cells and boosting T-cell functionality.
- Mitigating age-related inflammation, restoring a youthful immune response.

Manufactured in the UK by G&G Vitamins, T-BOOSTER adheres to the highest safety and quality standards. It is free from artificial additives, GMOs, and allergens, making it suitable for vegetarians, vegans, and halal consumers.

**Clinical trials: a commitment to validation:** To back its claims, T-BOOSTER has undergone rigorous scientific evaluation. A double-blind, placebo-controlled clinical trial involving 240 participants is currently underway. This study aims to evaluate its efficacy in enhancing immune function over four months, using advanced DNA-based analysis to assess thymus health.

**A vision for the future:** T-BOOSTER's developers, led by Dr Md Arif Sheikh, a molecular and structural biology expert, have an ambitious roadmap. The supplement is set for a global launch in 2025, targeting markets in the UK, Europe, Bangladesh, and the USA. With a focus on direct-to-consumer and retail channels, including e-commerce platforms like Amazon, T-BOOSTER aims to make its mark on the burgeoning health and wellness industry.

The project is supported by a distinguished team, including advisors and co-investigators with expertise in clinical trials, drug discovery, and business strategy. Together, they are working to ensure the product not only delivers health benefits but also meets the regulatory standards required for its international rollout.

**Empowering consumers for a healthier tomorrow:** T-BOOSTER is designed for individuals seeking to enhance their immunity and overall health, from seniors aiming for rejuvenated immune function to wellness enthusiasts and biohackers. Through a combination of robust research, innovative marketing strategies, and a consumer-centric approach, T-BOOSTER aspires to become a trusted name in immunity enhancement.

This innovative supplement underscores the potential of science and natural compounds to address pressing health challenges. With T-BOOSTER, the promise of longevity, vitality, and robust immunity is closer than ever.

The writer is the founder and CEO T-BOOSTER Limited United Kingdom. Email: arif@t-booster.co.uk

funding, integration of mental health into primary healthcare, and the use of community-based care models.

In Bangladesh, the enactment of the Mental Health Act, 2018, marked a significant step forward. This legislation guarantees the rights of individuals with mental disorders, prohibits discrimination, and mandates the establishment of mental health facilities. Sections of the act specifically criminalise

# STOPS: A revolutionary treatment for low back pain

DR MOHAMMAD ALI

Over 80% of people worldwide experience low back pain (LBP) at some point in their lives. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), LBP is the leading cause of disability globally. LBP is typically classified into three categories: acute, subacute, and chronic. Pain lasting three months or longer is termed chronic low back pain (CLBP). Identifying the exact cause of CLBP is challenging, with WHO data suggesting that 90% of CLBP cases lack a specific cause and are referred to as nonspecific low back pain (NSCLBP).

Traditionally, treatments for LBP have included pain medications, electrotherapy, and steroid injections. However, extensive research published in The Lancet in 2018 declared these conventional treatments ineffective for long-term management. Instead, the study emphasised the importance of a biopsychosocial approach to treatment.

**What is STOPS?**

STOPS, or Specific Treatment of the Problems of the Spine, is an innovative treatment method developed by Australian researchers. Its core principle is precise diagnosis. Since chronic LBP often lacks a single identifiable cause, STOPS focuses on identifying multiple contributing factors. These factors may include:

**Physical:** Conditions like PLID (prolapsed lumbar intervertebral disc).

**Psychological:** Issues such as depression.

**Socioeconomic:** Stressors like family discord.

The treatment process begins with a detailed assessment of these factors. A personalised plan is then created to address the obstacles the patient faces in recovering from pain. Additionally, the patient's profession and daily activities are analysed to devise a fitness program tailored to their post-recovery lifestyle. As a result, the treatment approach varies for each patient,

based on their unique contributing factors.

**Effectiveness of STOPS**

Extensive clinical trials have demonstrated that STOPS is significantly more effective and cost-efficient than conventional treatments. In Bangladesh, LBP treatment is often prohibitively expensive, with hospitalisation costs frequently escalating to many times the initial expense. In contrast, STOPS emphasises reducing treatment costs, even for spinal pain conditions like neck pain.

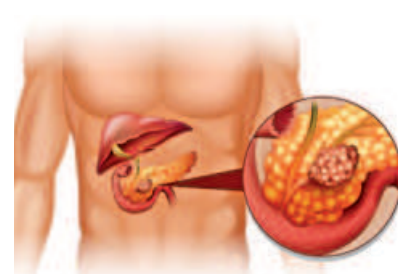
Patients typically undergo therapy once or twice a week, minimising hospital visits. Consequently, STOPS is recognised globally as an affordable and highly effective treatment option.

The writer is a back pain researcher at La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia, and a Doctor of Physical Therapy student at the University of Montana, USA. Email: hprc2005@live.com

## Early surgery vs. endoscopy for painful chronic pancreatitis

Chronic pancreatitis, marked by persistent abdominal pain and compromised quality of life, is commonly treated with surgery or endoscopy. A randomised trial, initially conducted in the Netherlands, compared these two approaches in 88 patients (mean age 54) with chronic pancreatitis, dilated ducts, and chronic pain. The trial found that after 18 months, surgery provided slightly better pain relief than endoscopy, though the difference was not significant.

In the latest follow-up, with a median of 98 months, surgery continued to show greater pain relief and higher patient satisfaction compared to endoscopic treatment. However,



overall quality of life and disease progression markers were similar between the two groups. Notably, about half of the endoscopy-first patients eventually crossed over to surgery due to inadequate pain relief, and these patients had worse outcomes than

those who initially underwent surgery. Conversely, about one-third of surgery-first patients required endoscopic interventions during follow-up.

These findings suggest that surgery may offer more durable pain relief, but the decision should be individualized. While surgery appears more effective in the long term, endoscopy can still be a viable first option for some patients, especially those seeking less invasive treatment. A stepwise, flexible approach that adapts to patient response may provide the best outcomes. Further research is needed to refine treatment strategies and better understand the long-term impact of both methods.

Source: JAMA Surgery

### Women's BCL kicks off

SPORTS REPORTER

Left-arm spinner Nahida Akter shone on the opening day of the Women's Bangladesh Cricket League - the first-ever three-day women's first-class competition -- as the Central Zone player returned seven wickets for 48 runs against North Zone at the Shaheed Kamruzzaman Stadium in Rajshahi yesterday.

North Zone declared their first innings at 240-9, courtesy of Farzana Haque's 86 and Ritu Moni's 57. Central Zone finished at 29-0 at stumps.

Meanwhile, in the other contest at the Bangla Trac Cricket Academy Ground, Sharmin Akther Supta struck 88 but her side, East Zone, could only manage 193 runs.

Ayesha Rahman made an unbeaten 82 while RH Jhelik scored 38 not out as South Zone finished the opening day at 164-1, trailing by 29 runs.

## Player payment concern looms over BPL

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is facing challenges in obtaining bank guarantees from franchises participating in upcoming Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), raising concerns over players' payments ahead of the T20 competition starting on December 30.

Despite collecting Tk eight crore in guarantees from each franchise in previous years, BCB has struggled to ensure timely payments to players, with several local and foreign cricketers voicing complaints about unpaid dues. Some even reported the issue to the Federation of International Cricketers' Associations (FICA), forcing BCB to step in and settle the payments.

After becoming BCB boss, Faruque Ahmed significantly reduced the bank guarantee amount following requests from franchises. Currently, BCB is asking Tk three crore from each franchise as a bank guarantee, which they wanted to confirm by December 24 after extending the deadline multiple times and reducing the amount on each occasion.

It was learnt that some franchises are unwilling to provide a bank guarantee this year, citing the current financial situation in the country, and have instead promised to clear the payments themselves.



### DECISIONS AT BCB MEETING

Members of the U-19 Men's squad to receive Tk three lakh each as prize money for winning the ACC U-19 Asia Cup.

In addition to central contract, 30 more women's cricketers will be added to first-class contract. Bonus money for winning international matches, ranking-wise, will also be introduced in women's cricket.

Decision regarding captain Najmul Hossain Shanto's captaincy will be taken next month.

When questioned about the matter, it seems the BCB boss is also aware of the situation. "Our country is facing tough times financially now. We all live in Bangladesh, so we know about it. That's why we are increasing

the time (deadline for the bank guarantee)," Faruque told reporters following the board of directors meeting in Mirpur yesterday.

"We want to serve our purpose, and there shouldn't be any extra pressure on BPL teams. We definitely want to confirm the bank guarantee from them as we have increased the time. Apart from that, we reduced the amount due to the financial conditions right now," he said, adding that BCB is also struggling to secure other sponsors.

"It has been challenging for both the board and team owners to get sponsors. We want to make things easier, keeping everything in mind," he said, adding that the board has also started clearing last year's pending payments to players.

"The board has started to pay the local cricketers from those teams that are not participating this year. We have already cleared 25 franchises from last year," said Faruque, confirming that they secured Modhumoti Bank as the title sponsor for the BPL Music Fest, scheduled to be held in Dhaka, Sylhet, and Chattogram on December 23, 25, and 28, respectively.

"Modhumoti Bank has come on board as the title sponsor of the BPL Music Fest. They are kind enough to pay close to Tk five crore, which I think is a good amount," he concluded.

### New lease of life for Jibon at Rahmatganj

SPORTS REPORTER

National discard forward Nabib Newaj Jibon scored in his third successive match in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) to help Rahmatganj MFS register an emphatic 3-1 win over Brothers Union at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Flight Lt Matiur Rahman Stadium in Mymensingh yesterday.



Jibon, who joined the Old-Dhaka outfit this season following a long stint at Abahani, struck in the second half in between a brace from Ghanaian forward Boateng.

Jibon's strike restored Rahmatganj's lead after Brothers' Senegalese recruit Cheikh Sene had cancelled out Samuel Boateng's second-minute goal by converting a penalty in the 70th minute. Boateng scored his second in the stoppage time of the second half.

"I was a victim of bias in Abahani and did not get many matches last season," Jibon told The Daily Star about his goal-less run for Abahani in the BPL last season.

"This season the coach has given me more minutes by drafting me in the starting eleven. I am also more focused on helping my club by scoring goals. That's why I am getting goals regularly," he added.

Jibon came off the bench in their league opener against Fortis FC but could not find the back of the net. He struck twice in the following match against Chittagong Abahani and netted one against Bashundhara Kings before scoring once again yesterday against Brothers.

With four goals, he is now second in the goal-scorer's list this season, one goal behind joint top scorers Al Amin of Police FC and Souleymane Diabate of Mohammedan SC.

"My target is to return to the national football team," said 34-year-old Jibon, adding that age is just a number and only fitness and performance matters.

Meanwhile, Fakirerpool YMC tasted their maiden victory in the professional football league with a 2-0 win over winless Chittagong Abahani in Mymensingh while promoted Dhaka Wanderers Club also secured their first point by playing a 1-1 draw with Fortis FC at Kings arena.

## Rangpur qualify for NCL T20 final

### Khulna, Metro face off in 2nd qualifier today

SPORTS REPORTER

Rangpur Division became the first finalist in the ongoing National Cricket League (NCL) T20 by handing Dhaka Metro a four-wicket defeat in the first qualifier at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Earlier on the day at the same venue, Khulna Division booked a place in second qualifier by knocking Chattogram Division out of the competition with a seven-run win in the eliminator.

In the first qualifier, pacer Robiul Hoque starred with the ball, claiming 3-19 while Alauddin Babu finished with 2-25 as Rangpur restricted Metro to 107-9 in their stipulated overs after they had been sent to bowl first.

Metro, who had won all seven of their league matches, were at risk of getting dismissed below the 100-run mark after opener Imranuzzaman, who made a dogged 30 off 42 balls, departed as the sixth batter in the 15th over with just 66 runs on the board.

But Aminul Islam Biplob's unbeaten 24-ball 23 and Abu Hider Rony's eight-ball 16 pushed their total beyond 100.

Rangpur were also in a spot of bother chasing the meagre target, getting reduced to 62-4 in 12.1 overs. But Tanbir Hayder and Ariful Haque then each scored 22, with the former remaining unbeaten, to take them across the finish line with four balls to spare.

In the day's first match, sent to bat, Khulna had set up the base for a big finish thanks to skipper Nurul Hasan Sohan's 39-ball 52.

But Chattogram pace duo of Ahmed Sharif (4-26) and Fahad Hossain (3-20) spoiled those plans, jointly dismantling Khulna's batting lineup by taking their last five wickets for just nine runs to bowl them out



for 146 in 19.3 overs.

In reply, Chattogram lost half their side for just 64 inside 11 overs before Yasir Ali (37 off 27 balls) and Nayeem Hasan (34 not out off 27 balls) shared a 53-run stand for the sixth wicket to bring their side back in the contest.

But after pacer Mehedi Hasan Rana (2-12) dismissed Yasir, Chattogram could not keep up with the asking rate and despite taking 16 runs in the last over from Al-Amin Hossain, could only manage 139-6 in their 20 overs.

Metro and Khulna will face off in the second qualifier today and the winner will take on Rangpur in Tuesday's final.

### SHORT CORNER

#### Afghanistan take ODI series against Zimbabwe

Teenage spinner AM Ghazanfar took 5-33 as Afghanistan defeated hosts Zimbabwe by eight wickets in the third and final one-day international on Saturday to claim the series 2-0 after the opening game was washed out by rain.

#### World Cup-winning England international Eastham dies aged 88

George Eastham, a member of England's 1966 World Cup-winning squad, has died at 88, his former club Stoke City said on Friday. Son of England international George Senior, midfielder and inside forward Eastham played for Newcastle United, Arsenal and Stoke City in the English top-flight league in a professional career spanning two decades, and earned 19 international caps.

\*Read full stories on The Daily Star website



Bangladesh captain Sumaiya Akter and her Indian counterpart Niki Prasad pose with the ACC U-19 Women's Asia Cup trophy for which the two teams will battle out in the final in Kuala Lumpur today. PHOTO: ACC

## Slot says he is Postecoglou 'fan' ahead of Spurs clash

AFP, London

Liverpool manager Arne Slot says he is a fan of Ange Postecoglou's gung-ho approach to football and hopes he wins a trophy -- just not the League Cup -- after the teams were paired together in the semifinals.

Premier League leaders Liverpool also travel to face Spurs in the English top flight on Sunday, needing to win to keep fast-charging Chelsea at bay.

Tottenham, chasing their first trophy since 2008, beat Manchester United 4-3 in a chaotic League Cup quarterfinal on Thursday.

Postecoglou has been criticised by some for his unwillingness to compromise on his attacking instincts but he gave a passionate defence of his approach after the match, asking: "Are you not entertained?"

And Slot admits he is a devotee of the Australian's methods, saying his team are a "joy" to watch.

"I hope, hope, hope that he wins a trophy," he said on Friday. "Not the League

Cup but I'm completely a fan of his team for the Europa League because people always talk about trophies, trophies, trophies, and that is so important.

"Now, for me, his brand of football, his style of football is so much more important and if he can combine it with something, that would be so good for football in general because then people can stop talking about it as too attacking or whatever.

"How on earth can you play too much attacking football?"

Postecoglou said he appreciated Slot admiring his attacking style and backing

Spurs' bid to win the Europa League, where they are currently ninth in the standings.

"That respect is mutual for me. We've all got really difficult tasks and we go about it in our way," he added.

Liverpool had a nine-point cushion at the top of the Premier League earlier this month but Chelsea could be at the summit when Slot's team kick off in London on Sunday.

Slot said it was too early to make judgements about his team's title chances.



Aston Villa's Colombian striker Jhon Duran sets off in celebration after scoring the opening goal against Manchester City in their Premier League fixture at Villa Park in Birmingham yesterday. Unai Emery's side won the game 2-1, heaping more misery on defending champions City, who are in sixth position with 27 points from 17 matches. Liverpool lead the table with 36 points from 15 matches. PHOTO: REUTERS

## 12-party to back BNP for polls by 2025

### Its leaders hold meeting with BNP liaison committee

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of the 12-party alliance, who previously organised joint movements with the BNP against the former Awami League government, have expressed support for the BNP's position on holding the next parliamentary elections by 2025.

They argue that failing to conduct the elections within this timeframe could lead to further delays. As a result, they have agreed to exert pressure on the interim government to ensure the elections take place by next year.

This stance was shared during a meeting with the BNP's liaison committee at the party chairperson's Gulshan office last evening.

The alliance leaders also reiterated their commitment to supporting the BNP's decisions regarding the national election and the formation of a new political party by student leaders involved in the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement in July and August.

A source from the meeting told The Daily Star that the meeting agreed to demand the election be held by December 2025.

"We heard their [the BNP's] views on the formation of the new political party, which appears to have support from the interim government. While everyone has the right to form a political party, doing so with state backing is unacceptable," the source, speaking anonymously, said.

This dialogue marks the beginning of the BNP's consultations with like-minded parties that stood with them during the anti-Awami League movements. The talks aim to solidify unity among political parties and gather their opinions on the upcoming general election.

After the meeting, BNP Standing Committee member Nazrul Islam Khan told reporters that no final decisions had been made regarding the meeting's agenda.

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Rahat Fateh Ali Khan performs at the "Echoes of Revolution" concert at the capital's Army Stadium yesterday. PHOTO: COLLECTED

## ECHOES OF REVOLUTION A night of unity, music, remembrance

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DESK

Ustad Rahat Fateh Ali Khan yesterday performed at the "Echoes of Revolution" concert, a charity event aimed at raising funds for families of martyrs and those injured during the July uprising.

The legendary musician waived his fees for the event so that all proceeds from ticket sales are donated to the Shaheed July Smriti Foundation, which is providing financial support to the affected families.

The programme was organised at the capital's Army Stadium by the "Spirits of July" platform.

The stellar line-up included prominent Bangladeshi bands such as Artcell, Chirkutt, and Aftermath, alongside the Qawwali group Silsila and rap artists Shezan and Hannan.

The concert, hosted by Dipty Chowdhury and Zulhaj Zubair, was further

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## Political clout intertwined with chaos on roads

### Says Adviser Nahid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 37,000 people have lost their lives and more than 65,000 have been injured in road accidents across the country over the past five years, according to the Road Safety Foundation.

This data, covering accidents from 2020 to November 2024, was revealed during a national dialogue on institutional management and structural reforms aimed at bringing order to the road transport sector.



Speaking at the event, Information and Broadcasting Adviser Nahid Islam highlighted that corruption in the country's road transport sector remains a critical issue. Although its dynamics have shifted, the problem persists.

The dialogue, held at the Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB) in the capital, also pointed out that while public transport carries 53 percent of passengers, private vehicles transport only 11 percent. Yet, private vehicles occupy 70 percent of the road space, leaving less than 30 percent for public transport.

This disparity was described as "grossly unfair" to the general public.

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## Education disparities may cause more social conflict

### Says Prof Rehman Sobhan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Disparities in the country's educational system have widened over the years and more social conflict lies ahead if the gap is not reduced, renowned economist Prof Rehman Sobhan has said.

"Sadly, Bangladesh, notwithstanding the transformative changes which have taken place in our society and economy, has seen disparities in our educational system widen over the years," the chairman of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) said.

This has caused social and political injustices which have disfigured the country's political journey, he said while delivering a lecture in honour of Bishwo Shahitto Kendro founder Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed.

Bishwo Shahitto Kendro Prakton Savya Sangha, an association of the Kendro's alumni, organised the lecture titled "Democratising Education: Pathways to a Just Society" at the Kendro in the city.

"There are many sources of inequality, 'Boishommo' [discrimination], but in my view, the disparities in access to education remain one of the most pernicious factors," said Prof Sobhan.

"... If we cannot close this divide in our education, more social conflict lies ahead of us," he said.

He said many countries, including those in Europe, East and South East Asia, as well as Cuba in the Americas,



**Prof Rehman Sobhan suggests tripling the allocation for education in the national budget to at least 5pc of GDP.**

have built their educational system on more democratic principles.

And these societies have also emerged as more efficient and productive societies, with higher GDP

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## 150 broadcast journos lost jobs this year

### BJC survey finds

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Throughout this year, over 150 broadcast journalists lost their jobs, said a survey by Broadcast Journalist Centre (BJC) released yesterday.

The survey was based on data collected from 30 national television channels. BJC's Executive Coordinator Shahnaz Sharmin revealed the findings at the International Mother Language Institute.

It was also found that at least 48.3 of the channels do not provide termination benefits, while 44.8 do not give any notice period for terminations, which are mandatory by the law.

Meanwhile, less than half of the TV channels pay their workers on time -- at least 20 percent of them keep their workers waiting for several months at a time for salaries and take two to five months to pay arrears.

Salaries are irregular and paid in instalments in 35 percent of the channels. Moreover, more than 82 percent of the channels do not have a sexual harassment prevention committee, BJC found.

This too was mandated by a 2009 High Court ruling, which instructed that such committees be set up in all workplaces and institutions.

Health insurance too is paid by only a

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## Govt updates uprising death toll, it's 858

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has updated its draft list of casualties during the July uprising, putting the death toll at 858 and the number of wounded at 11,551.

The two lists, published on the website of "Special Cell on Uprising Affairs" (<https://musc.portal.gov.bd>) will be continuously updated. The lists will remain open for public review until December 23, according to a press release issued yesterday by the Health Services Division.

The health services division and directorate, 64 district committees along with the uprising cell are working to finalise the list, said Khandaker Zahirul Islam, team leader (additional secretary) of the newly formed special cell, the release said.

The cell urges family members and next of kin to review the lists, which include names and addresses of the martyrs and wounded, and provide their feedback or corrections.

Any opinions or suggestions regarding the draft lists can be submitted via email ([muspecialcell36@gmail.com](mailto:muspecialcell36@gmail.com)) to the Special Cell on Uprising Affairs by December 23.

## Uprising leaders drafting charter for new party

### They're also looking for a name

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Youths who spearheaded the student-led July-August mass uprising have started drafting the charter of their planned political party ahead of the official launch.

They are studying the models of other youth-based parties in South Asia, but have not yet finalised a name for their political party.

They will seek suggestions for the name from the people after completing the formation of ward-level committees, according to sources inside the civic and student platforms: the Jatiya Nagorik Committee and the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement.

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## SAIFUL MURDER

### Ctg Bar probe body members step down en masse

STAFF CORRESPONDENT,

Ctg

Members of the probe committee, formed by Chattogram District Bar Association (CDBA) to investigate the vandalism, clashes and murder of the lawyer Saiful Islam Alif in Chattogram court premises, recommended judicial probe seeking exemption from the probe committee.

The committee's convener, former metropolitan public prosecutor (PP) and lawyer Abdus Sattar, made this recommendation to the CDBA leaders last Thursday and requested to be relieved from the probe committee.

Earlier, four other members, including the committee's secretary, had also sought exemption from the committee.

Abdus Sattar told The Daily Star, "The CDBA

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It drizzled all over Khulna city yesterday because of an active low-pressure system in the Bay of Bengal. On top of the usual challenges of venturing out during winter, the continuous drizzle made the daily tasks of ordinary citizens even more difficult. PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

## London to help Dhaka recover siphoned money

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The British Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office in the UK said that it is committed in helping Bangladesh track down and recover assets acquired in the UK using funds misappropriated by the previous government.

The office made this statement on December 17, 2024 in response to a question asked by a parliamentarian, Lloyd Hatton to the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs.

"The UK is committed to assisting investigative, prosecuting and judicial authorities in combating international crime. We have robust illicit finance

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