



Nowfel gained from illegal tobacco trade

Finds NBR probe

MOHAMMAD SUMAN

Former education minister Mohibul Hassan Chowdhury Nowfel received at least Tk 3 crore from a tobacco company, known for years for illegal cigarette production and marketing including some counterfeit foreign brands.



He also co-owns a piece of land on which the cigarette company, Bijoy International Tobacco, used to operate, documents show.

The Daily Star has copies of the Tk 3 crore cheque and the land-ownership document.

The findings come six months after an investigation by The Daily Star established initial links between Nowfel and illegal tobacco production. The story titled "A councillor and his illicit tobacco trade" on June 1 this year did not mention Nowfel's name, because he sold his share of that company in 2020.

Only five months after we ran the story, he received a check worth Tk 3 crore in favour of his family-run Premier University based in Chattogram, Nowfel's hometown.

Before we published the story on June 1 this year, Nowfel at a meeting with The Daily Star insisted that he



Trainee doctors block Shahbagh intersection yesterday afternoon, demanding a rise in their monthly stipends to Tk 50,000 from Tk 25,000. Their demonstration sparked traffic jams that spilled onto other streets in the capital.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

POST OF DEPUTY SECY Admin officials protest notion to promote more from other cadres



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Administrative cadre officers staged a demonstration at the Secretariat yesterday, protesting a notion to reduce their promotion opportunities to the post of deputy secretary, and have more non-administrative cadre officers in the position.

Hundreds of officers marched to the public administration ministry in the morning, where a delegation met Senior Secretary Mokhles Ur Rahman, who also serves as the member secretary of the Public Administration Reform Commission, to present their demands.

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NBR has found that there are 20 companies that make counterfeit cigarettes in Bangladesh and Nowfel along with Abdus Sabur Liton, a former councillor of Chattogram City Corporation, used to control the market.

sold his share in the illegal tobacco company and that he did not receive any financial benefits from the company.

But NBR's Central Intelligence Cell (CIC) has now found that there are 20 companies that make counterfeit cigarettes in Bangladesh and Nowfel along with Abdus Sabur Liton, a former councillor of Chattogram City Corporation, used to control the market.

The report says Nowfel invested in Liton's tobacco business, and parts of the returns were deposited to the accounts of Premier University.

Nowfel is the chairman of the university's trustee board. His mother Hasina Mohiuddin and younger brother Borhanul Hasan Chowdhury are members of the board.

The former minister could not be reached for comments. He is thought to have fled the country.

Liton owns licenced tobacco businesses, but the cigarettes his firms produce are knock-off versions of widely sold brands, including some foreign brands such as

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CJ appointment shouldn't be left at president's discretion

Judiciary reform commission says in primary report

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

The Judiciary Reform Commission recommends a constitutional amendment with a provision to appoint the senior-most judge of the Appellate Division as chief justice, curbing presidential discretion in the matter.

To make the judiciary independent, impartial and effective, the commission's preliminary report makes elaborate recommendations about appointing judges of the Supreme Court's Appellate Division and High Court Division.

It suggests constituting a nine member commission led by the chief justice for the

Formation of 9-member commission to appoint SC judges recommended

Draft ordinance on appointment commission already sent to Law and Justice Division

appointment of SC judges to ensure the selection of duly qualified people.

The Appellate Division currently has five judges, including Chief Justice Syed Rezaat Ahmed. The reform commission proposes to set the minimum number of Appellate Division judges at seven.

The president raised the number of Appellate Division judges from seven to 11 in July 2009 before the disposal of major cases — the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the 15th amendment to the constitution, among others.

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Commission to pitch for new law to protect journalists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Media Reform Commission plans to recommend a new law to protect journalists. It will also recommend amendments to 32 laws that hinder press freedom.

Kamal Ahmed, head of the commission, revealed the plans at a dialogue on democratic reconstruction from the mass media perspective organised by the Centre for Governance Studies at the Cirdap Auditorium in the city yesterday.

"We've found a list of 32 laws that hinder press freedom," he said.

Kamal said the commission will hold a national media survey, the first by any government body, from January 1 to 7, 2025, to assess public trust in media. The survey will reach 48,000 households and 842 surveyors will be involved.

"We have also surveyed media owners to understand their motivations for running media businesses. We tried to understand which organisations are profitable. If a media organisation is a loss-making project, then why are the owners still operating it? Is it because of political reasons? Is it to protect their own business interests? We are trying to understand these," said Kamal.

The commission chief also stressed the need to ensure financial

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A retailer loads his van with heaps of coriander leaves bought from a wholesale kitchen market in Barishal city. The prices of this popular spice, very commonly used in local cuisine, fall during winter seasons due to an abundant supply. Wholesale prices now range from Tk 30-40 per kg, while retail prices are Tk 50-60 per kg.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

the BUSINESS

A wake-up call for health sector

India's visa restrictions on Bangladeshi nationals could serve as a wake-up call for Bangladesh to strengthen its healthcare system and regain the confidence of its patients. The restrictions offer a unique chance for local providers to address systemic issues and retain patients who would otherwise travel abroad.

STORY ON B1

ACC to probe Hasina, Joy over laundering of \$300m to US

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission has decided to launch an investigation against former prime minister Sheikh Hasina and her son Sajeeb Wazed Joy on allegations of laundering \$300 million to the United States.

The ACC took this decision in a commission meeting yesterday, said Akhtarul Islam, deputy director of the anti-graft body.

According to an ACC source, the Federal Bureau of Investigation



conducted a preliminary investigation into Hasina and Joy, whose name first came up in the US vs. Rizvi Ahmed case in 2014. The FBI's investigation uncovered a "serious financial scandal" involving Joy.

"In particular, information emerged that money was being laundered from various bank accounts in his name in Hong Kong and the Cayman Islands to various bank accounts in Washington DC, New York and London through a local money exchange. The

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চলছে... রিহাব ফেয়ার ২০২৪
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MY DHAKA

DHAKA IN MOTION

Views from a Metro Ride

JANNATUL BUSHRA

Have you ever felt a sense of stillness when riding the metro in Dhaka? No, not the kind that implies silence or rest — Dhaka doesn't allow for that — but a quieter hum, like the city holding its breath? I am sure you did, if you somehow managed to take a ride during a less crowded hour, since it's hard for anyone to even breathe inside during the rush hour!

From the elevated tracks, you will see Dhaka's contrasts coming alive. This chaotic city goes silent inside the metro couches. The noise of the streets fades behind the glass, and all that remains is a quiet theatre of sights — a sprawling megacity revealing itself in fragments, each more vivid and contradictory than the last.

From Motijheel to Uttara North, the first thing you might notice is the majestic Baitul Mukarram National Mosque, standing there as a timeless sentinel of a bygone age on one side. On the other, you may see the glinting high-rises heralding the city's aspirations for the future.

The juxtaposition is striking — a reminder that Dhaka's soul resides in its ability to embrace the old and the new with equal fervour.

As the train glides past Sochibalay (Secretariat), your gaze is irresistibly drawn to the Chummary House and then the bold red Curzon Hall, commanding attention with its unique charm and profound historical significance.

Further along, the lush canopy of trees in Suhrawardy Udyan offers a soothing contrast to the urban hustle, while the solemn Mausoleum of Three Leaders stands



quietly among the greenery, reminding of the sacrifices that shaped the nation. Swadhinata Stambha (Independence Monument) says hi to you in between, another poignant reminder of our independence. The Mukta Mancha seems actually mukta (free) from above here. The journey will start feeling like a theatre show at this point.

But the clatter of steel wheels against tracks and the sudden screech as it slows into the station, along with the occasional announcements, might pull you out of your thoughts. And when another metro rushes past on the opposite track — a sudden blur of motion — it can make your heart skip a beat. So be aware!

As the metro snakes through Shahbagh and beyond, you will see the new, well-furnished corporate or commercial high-rises adjusting with the old ones. The city seems like a jungle of concrete here.

However, before you reach Bijoy Sarani, the Parliament House's stunning greenery — neatly kept parks and manicured lawns — will surely calm your eyes, offering a brief

reprieve from the urban sprawl. The landscape views shift from here to Uttara North, much like the traditional bioscope imagery. You will see a series of buildings, new and old, then a series of plains; especially after crossing the Pallabi station, the tight embrace of concrete loosens here, and you might feel like crossing the middle of nowhere.

As you can see, the Dhaka metro doesn't merely traverse geography; it encapsulates time. The stations, with their clean lines



PHOTO: JANNATUL BUSHRA

and utilitarian designs, speak of an attempt to order a city that resists neat narratives. Outside, the city is a storyteller — its rooftops hung with laundry, its streets alive with people and traffic, its walls splashed with murals, graffiti, and posters proclaiming political manifestos. Even the passing skies play their part. In this elevated world, Dhaka seems gentler.

The Metro here is more than its architecture of steel and concrete. It is a mirror, reflecting a city that is never still, never silent, always in motion.

Nowfel gained

FROM PAGE 1

Esse and Oris, investigations by both The Daily Star and NBR found.

Mohammad Fakhru Alam, head of the NBR investigation, submitted a 111-page report on his findings late last month.

Of the 20 firms making counterfeit cigarettes, Bijoy International Tobacco and Tara International Tobacco are by far the biggest, says the report submitted to NBR Chairman Abdul Rahman Khan.

The firms — both owned by Tara Group — import raw materials by lying on documents and produce counterfeit cigarettes in their factories in Kishoreganj and Chakaria Upazila of Chattogram, says the report.

This newspaper previously found that counterfeit cigarettes made by these companies were sold in different parts of the country.

Liton and his brother Abdul Mannan Khokon are owners of Tara Group.

Although the company's sales were reported in audit reports at Tk 48.48 crore from July 2020 to June 2024, the CIC found evidence suggesting that the amount is 802.17 crore. This was done to evade taxes.

The investigators analysed nine bank accounts of the group.

Mohammad Fakhru Alam, convener of the probe committee, said, "A few individuals control the market. They make fraudulent documents about shell companies to conceal their activities."

"We looked at bank transactions of all these [20] companies and discovered

that the Tara Group was linked to at least 10 of them. The former education minister, a councillor, and his brother are involved in illegal cigarette distribution."

He added that Bijoy International Tobacco's factory in Chakaria was built on land owned by the three of them.

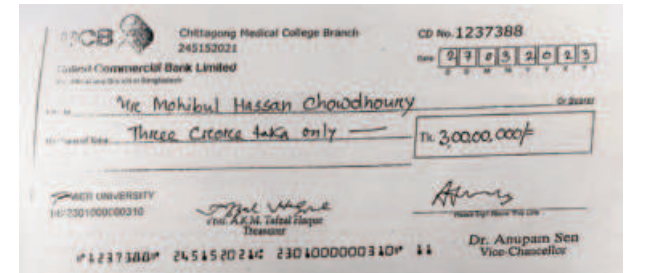
"We have found evidence of illegal cigarette production and marketing. We saw suspicious transactions at Tara Group's bank accounts. The former education minister used Premier University's bank accounts to receive his cuts.

Chowdhury withdrew Tk 3 crore in cash for development work of the university. However, he deposited the same amount of money from an account of Tara Group to the university's account as the work was not completed."

Monir also mentioned that Tara Group and the Premier University are not related.

When contacted, Monir said, "We have no additional comments other than what we have written [to the NBR]."

Liton and Nowfel had gone into hiding after the Awami League government



"We recommend filing criminal and departmental cases against several individuals and organisations."

Premier University's account with United Commercial Bank's Chattogram Medical College Branch received Tk 3 crore from an account of Tara Group with the same bank's Jubilee Road Branch on October 11 last year.

The CIC on October 23 this year wrote to the university's registrar seeking information about this transaction.

Four days later, Registrar Itekharr Monir replied, "University Trustee Board Chairman Mohibul Hassan

fell amid a mass uprising on August 5.

Several officials of Tara Group, requesting anonymity, said Liton was in Dubai and Nowfel in India.

Liton told The Daily Star on WhatsApp in November this year that Nowfel owned 40 percent shares of Bijoy Tobacco in early 2018.

"He sold his shares to me and my brother around 2020. Since then, there has been no further transaction with him. All of this is a conspiracy against me."

When asked about the ownership of the land and transactions in the Premier University's bank account, he said, "If you have documents, why are you asking me?"

CJ appointment

FROM PAGE 1

The reform commission recommends permanent attorney services for moving cases on behalf of the government at the apex and district courts without any political influence, and the formation of an independent investigation body in the criminal justice system. It also advocates swift justice for the common people at a minimum cost.

The government had constituted the eight-member reform commission, headed by former Appellate Division judge Justice Shah Abu Nayeem Mominir Rahman, on October 3 to propose necessary measures.

On December 11, the commission sent a copy of its preliminary report to Environment, Forest and Climate Change Adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan, who is coordinating all the reform commissions, to apprise her of their progress.

The commission will submit its final report by January 15, 2025, its member and senior SC lawyer Tanim Hussain Shawon told The Daily Star on December 20.

A total of 12,721 people, including common citizens, lawyers, judges and court-related support staffers, have given their views to the commission through its website until December 10. A significant number of people also weighed in through emails and letters. Tanim added that the acceptable proposals will be included in the commission's final report after they are examined.

The preliminary report states maintaining the judiciary's independence and impartiality, and ensuring its effectiveness largely depend on the chief justice as the leader and top figure of the judiciary — a reality "partially" reflected in article 48 (3) of the constitution.

This article states the president can take a decision for the appointment of the chief justice alone, without consulting the prime minister or anyone else, according to his own wisdom.

"However, past experience shows that in several cases, the executive authority has exerted influence in various ways on the appointment of the chief justice. As a result, the independence, impartiality and effectiveness of the judiciary have been compromised at various times," the preliminary report says.

"In the above situation,

the commission believes that in order to make the appointment of the chief justice free from the influence of the executive authority, there should be a provision in the constitution to the effect that the president shall appoint the most senior judge in the Appellate Division as the chief justice.

"That is, the president cannot exercise his discretionary power or apply any other method in the appointment of the chief justice," the commission said in its report.

The report says that the number of judges in the Supreme Court remains an important issue in the smooth discharge of judicial and other duties. Therefore, it recommends certain provisions instead of article 94 (1) of the constitution. The proposed provisions stipulate that the "minimum number of judges in the Appellate Division shall be seven and more judges shall be appointed as required as per the requirements of the chief justice". The recommended provisions also stipulate that the "necessary number of judges shall be appointed in the High Court Division from time to time as per the requirements of the chief justice".

About the formation of the "Supreme Court Judges Appointment Commission", the reform commission states that, besides the chief justice, the other eight members will include two most senior Appellate Division judges, the two most senior judges of the High Court Division, one retired judge of the Supreme Court, the attorney general, the president of the Supreme Court Bar Association and another lawyer of the Supreme Court.

The opinion of the appointment commission will prevail in the appointment of SC judges.

The reform commission has already sent a draft ordinance on the matter, prepared in light of articles 95 (1) and (2) of the constitution, to the Law and Justice Division.

The appointment commission will invite applications from candidates with the prescribed qualifications, which the final report will elaborate on, the preliminary report says.

A shortlist of candidates will be prepared based on a review of applications, which

will be made public so that the people may send their objections or reservations. The shortlisted candidates will then be invited for an interview, following which the commission will select candidates through secret ballot after discussing suitability of the candidates. The president will then appoint the judges according to the recommendation of the commission within 15 days.

The proposed provisions state that the president may ask the appointment commission to reconsider nominees, stating reasons for doing so, but the commission will not be obligated to change its list. It may send back a modified list or the original one.

Currently, the president appoints judges of the Appellate Division and the High Court Division in consultation with the chief justice in line with the constitution.

The reform commission has held meetings and exchanged views with diverse stakeholders, including the chief justice, the law adviser and the attorney general, before making the preliminary report.

It also sat with the chairman of the International Crimes Tribunal; public prosecutors and government pleaders of Dhaka district; and representatives from Open Society Foundation, USA; Bangladesh Supreme Court Bar Association; Dhaka District Bar Association; Bangladesh Judicial Service Association; Bangladesh Employees Association; Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industries; United Nations Development Programme; Japan International Cooperation Agency; American Department of Justice; Carter Center; National Bar Association; and Law and Justice Reform Forum.

Besides lawyer Tanim, the members of the reform commission are retired High Court judges Justice Emdadul Haque and Justice Farid Ahmed Shibli; former district and sessions judge and former registrar general of Bangladesh Supreme Court Syed Aminul Islam; former district and sessions judge Masdar Hossain; Dhaka University associate law professor Kazi Mahfuzul Haque Supan; and a representative from students.

ACC to probe Hasina

FROM PAGE 1

FBI confirmed the matter through their London representative and found evidence that serious financial irregularities and money laundering crimes had been committed there," the source said.

"Linda Samuels, Senior Trial Attorney of the Department of Justice (DOJ), contacted Special Agent La Private and found that \$300 million was deposited from Bangladesh to various bank accounts in the United States," the source added.

Earlier on December 17, the ACC decided to launch an investigation into allegations that Hasina, Joy, Hasina's sister Sheikh Rehana, and Rehana's daughter Tulip Siddiq, a British lawmaker, embezzled Tk 80,000 crore from nine priority projects.

Speaking about this

case in a views exchange programme with journalists at the ACC headquarters yesterday, the commission's Chairman Mohammad Abdul Momen said, "Many of the things we know are true. We will provide more information when we have more data."

ACC BOSS'S ASSETS
In the meeting with reporters, ACC Chairman Momen revealed his wealth statement.

According to Momen, he owns a 1,500-square-foot apartment combining two 750-square-foot units at Bosila in the city's Mohammadpur. He is in the process of acquiring an additional 700 square feet there.

Together with his wife, he has a five-katha empty plot in Purbachal American City.

As a member of the BCS

Administration Committee, Momen was allocated an 1.25-katha share of a 10-katha plot. He has not gained possession yet after receiving the allocation in 2007.

He had deposited Tk 75,000 for a RAJUK plot, but no resolution has been made until now. "For some reason, the government did not allocate it to me. I will apply again. Apart from this, I have no other immovable assets."

Momen's movable assets include 25 shelves filled with books of various sizes, including many valuable ones. He has furniture and electronic items worth around Tk 5 lakh.

He has a five-year savings certificate worth Tk 30 lakh and another three-monthly savings certificate worth Tk 20 lakh. He has

not withdrawn his General Provident Fund money, which amounts to Tk 17 lakh.

Answering to a journalist's question, Momen said, "It is our expectation that corrupt individuals are not spared. But our expectations are often not met for various reasons. Perhaps the cases we file are weak."

"While it's not appropriate to criticise the judiciary here, questions do arise about whether justice is served. However, holding the ACC solely responsible for ensuring justice would not be fair."

ACC Commissioner (Investigation) Mia Mohammad Ali Akbar Azizi said, "The ACC does not yet have its own prosecution rules. During the 1/11 government, I was a deputy secretary in the law ministry. A directive for establishing

a permanent prosecution system and creating a Bangladesh Attorney Service Directory was prepared at that time. The law was drafted as well.

"However, subsequent political governments did not pursue the ordinance, and it remained stuck. Bringing in senior and qualified lawyers into the commission's permanent prosecution would require better remuneration, which will take some time."

ACC Commissioner (Inquiry) Brig Gen (ret'd) Hafiz Ahsan Farid said,

"The ACC's professional foundation is strong. Even after the commission was non-functional for 42 days, its officials and employees worked tirelessly. The ACC is committed to ensuring that it will not be subservient to anyone."

Admin officials protest

FROM PAGE 1

Currently, the promotion ratio between administrative cadres and other cadres for the deputy secretary position is 3:1. However, the Public Administration Reform Commission recently proposed changing this ratio to 1:1, sparking dissatisfaction among administrative cadre officers.

The protesters voiced their concerns to Mokhles,

warning of potential legal action if their demands were not addressed.

Mokhles assured the delegation that the commission would present reasonable recommendations to the government. He also emphasised that further discussions would be held to resolve any confusion over the matter.

Meanwhile, officials from other cadres have announced a one-hour

strike across government offices today in opposition to the commission's proposal. They argue that promotions to deputy secretary should be based entirely on exams and merit, without considering what cadre an official belongs to.

"We want promotions to be solely merit-based. This government came to power through an anti-quota movement, and we don't want another

movement over this issue," said Muhammad Mofijur Rahman, a leader of the "Discrimination Eradication Council" representing 25 cadres.

An additional secretary, speaking on condition of anonymity, stated that a court ruling supports the 3:1 promotion ratio. The officer added that the Bangladesh Administrative Service Association, which represents

commissioners from all 64 districts, would sue the commission for contempt of court if it violates this precedent.

In a statement issued on Wednesday, the Bangladesh Administrative Service Association also protested the commission's recommendations. They argued that the proposed changes would fail to create a "people-oriented, efficient, impartial, and modern administration."

Commission to pitch for new law

FROM PAGE 1

security for journalists. He said there should be a minimum floor wage for all journalists, ensuring fair compensation not just for those based in Dhaka but for professionals throughout the country.

"In many cases, particularly outside of Dhaka, a journalist wears three hats simultaneously — the hat of a journalist, the hat of an advertisement procurer and the hat of a salesperson. But a journalist should not engage in advertisement collection, because that opens the door to corruption," he said.

Shafiqul Alam, the chief adviser's press secretary, also recommended replacing the journalists' wage board with a floor wage.

"Then this needs to be enforced strictly. If an organisation does not pay the journalists the minimum

wage, the organisation will not be allowed to exist," he said.

Miraj Ahmed Chowdhury, the founder of Digitally Right, said, "The labour law needs to be strictly enforced so that journalists are paid duly and on time. If a media organisation is not financially viable and cannot pay its journalists, then it should be allowed to close down. Those who truly want to run a media business for the sake of doing journalism will then thrive."

"Most of the journalists in Bangladesh get less than Tk 10,000 per month. Local journalists often do not get paid at all. How do you expect the highest journalistic standards from journalists who are struggling to survive?" questioned journalist Masud Kamal.

They also spoke about the

failure of journalists' unions in upholding the rights of journalists.

The politicisation of unions interferes with their capacity to negotiate with the management of media organisations on behalf of journalists, said Abu Sayeed Khan, advisory editor of the Samakal. "Depoliticisation of unions is a tall order because journalists themselves are politicised."

"The unions used to work as a pressure group at one point, but they fail at their job now," said MA Aziz, former secretary general of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists.

Speakers at the dialogue stressed the need for accountability of the media in Bangladesh and the role of an independent Press Council that is not operated by government puppets.

They said that citizens have a right to seek redressal

for harm caused by predatory journalism.

"The Press Council is a dysfunctional and failed institution. We need to figure out how to enable the Press Council," said Masud Kamal.

Zonayed Saki, chief coordinator of the Ganosamhati Andolan, said, "The Press Council must keep watch on whether standards of journalism are truly being upheld. The Council must be allowed quasi-judicial powers so that justice can be served."

Mahbub Morshed, managing director and chief editor of the state-run national news agency Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha, said that the Press Council must run like a civil court.

Professor SM Shameem Reza of Dhaka University's mass communication and journalism department stressed the need for a

universal code of conduct for journalists and regulation in the industry using methods like accreditation.

Qadaruddin Shishir, editor of AFP Factcheck, said that it needs to be considered whether media houses intentionally spreading misinformation or disinformation can be taken into account without impeding the freedom of expression.

Zillur Rahman, executive director of CGS, said, "In the last few years, journalists have been harassed and the media has become a puppet to the government."

Matiur Rahman Chowdhury, editor of the Daily Manabzamin, warned against excessive government intervention, saying that the fear of media houses being shut down and journalistic voices being silenced in the name of reforms cannot be discounted.

DEMAND FOR STIPEND HIKE Postgrad doctors observe nationwide work stoppage

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Demanding that their monthly stipend be raised to Tk 50,000 from Tk 25,000, around 3,000 postgraduate private trainee doctors yesterday observed a seven-hour work abstinence nationwide.

In Shahbagh, protesters gathered at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University around 10:00am under the banner of "Doctors' Movement for Justice Society (DMJS)."

They later blockaded the Shahbagh intersection, halting traffic and causing commuters to suffer.

Doctors also protested in various healthcare institutions, including at Rangpur Medical College, continuing till 5:15pm.

Five hours after the protest, at 3:00pm, demonstrators announced that senior officials from Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Directorate General of Health Services had assured them of addressing their demands.

However, they stated they would continue their movement until a written notification is issued.

Dr Jabir Hossain, president of DMJS, said, "During
SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



Two children lean out of the window of a moving bus as another bus inches dangerously close. In Dhaka, reckless bus driving is a major cause of accidents, and the lack of awareness or supervision by guardians puts these children at even greater risk. The photo was taken near Science Lab on Mirpur Road yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

BUET STUDENT'S DEATH Three put on remand

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanjanj

A Narayanjanj court yesterday placed the three accused on a two-day remand in connection with the death of Buet student Mohtassim Masud in a road crash in Purbachal upazila of Narayanjanj.

The accused are Mubin Al Mamun, 20, Mirajul Karim, 22, and Asif Chowdhury, 19.

Narayanjanj Senior Judicial Magistrate Kazi Nur Mohsin passed the order in response to a five-day remand prayer for each.

Mohtassim, 22, was killed and two of his classmates were injured when a car hit them and their stationary motorcycle early Friday at a police check post on Purbachal Expressway, better known as 300 feet road.

Mohtassim was a 2nd-year student of computer science. He lived with his parents in the capital's Green Road area.

Police said he died at the scene near Neela Market in Rupganj, Narayanjanj.

Mehedi Hasan Khan, 22, and Amit Saha, 22, also students of computer science at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet), were admitted to hospitals with injuries.

Meanwhile, Mehedi Hasan, assistant sub-inspector of Rupganj Police Station, filed another case against the three accused under the Narcotics Control Act.

Partisanship, merit devaluation cripple univs

Speakers tell conference

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Universities in Bangladesh are on the brink of paralysis due to partisan faculty politics, irregularities in teacher recruitment, and power struggles disguised as student politics, said Education Adviser Wahiduddin Mahmud yesterday.

"Due to partisanship and criminalisation, there is no conducive environment for higher education in public universities. We are actively working to address these challenges," he said.

"That is why we are appointing qualified individuals to key positions, including vice-chancellors. Additionally, efforts are underway to bring back talented

Higher education suffers from inadequate infrastructure and a lack of conducive research environments. The country's partisan and violent politics have harmed institutions, particularly higher education ones.

DU VC Prof Niaz Ahmed Khan

teachers and researchers who have left the country," said the adviser at the "Bangladesh Higher Education Conference 2024", held at a hotel in the capital.

The conference was organised by Daily Bonik Barta with the theme "Global Standards in Higher Education: What Bangladesh Needs to Do".

Attending as chief guest, Wahiduddin Mahmud highlighted the disparity in quality between public and private universities.

"One major concern is that many students opt to study abroad for higher education if they can afford it. Even after completing higher education locally, graduates remain unemployed, and this number is growing alarmingly," he said.

To align higher education with global standards, collaborations with internationally renowned
SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

HASSAN ARIFF'S DEATH One-day state mourning today Advisers' council adopts condolence motion

UNB, Dhaka

In honour of the memory of the late Civil Aviation and Tourism Adviser AF Hassan Ariff, the government has declared a one-day state mourning, which will be observed today.



Adviser Hassan Ariff passed away at a hospital in the capital on Friday. He was 85.

On the day of mourning, the national flag will be hoisted at half-mast at all government, semi-government, and autonomous institutions, educational institutions, all government and private buildings, and Bangladesh missions abroad, a Cabinet Division notification said yesterday.

Additionally, special prayers will be held in all
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IJTEMA GROUND MURDER Leader of Saad faction remanded

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

A Gazipur court yesterday placed Muaz bin Nur, a leader of the Tablighi Jamaat faction loyal to Maulana Saad Kandhalvi, on a three-day remand, in connection with a case filed over the killing of three devotees at the Biswa Ijtema ground in Tongi.

The court of chief metropolitan magistrate issued the order, said Habibullah Raihan, media coordinator of Shurayez Nazam (Zubair faction).

Tongi West Police Station Officer-in-Charge Iskandar Habibur Rahman also confirmed it.

Police arrested Muaz at Uttara in Dhaka in the early hours of Friday.

Muaz, 40, known as a spokesperson for the Saad faction, was accused in the murder case filed by SM Alam Hossain, a follower of rival Tablighi leader Maulana Zubair Ahmed.

Alam of Kishoreganj filed the case on Thursday, naming 29 Saad supporters and hundreds of unidentified others.

A clash, which broke out early Wednesday over control of the Ijtema Maidan, left four dead and 50 injured. Both factions later blamed each other during separate press conferences in Dhaka.



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Postgrad doctors

FROM PAGE 3
our protest, we met with officials from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. Additionally, the BSMU Vice Chancellor has assured us that our demands will be met soon. Therefore, we are giving an ultimatum until 5:00pm Thursday for the allowance increase and are withdrawing today's (yesterday) protest. However, our work abstention will continue during this period."

Around 5:00pm, Sarjis Alam, coordinator of Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, arrived at Shahbagh. Speaking to the protesters, he said, "We fully support the demands of the postgraduate doctors. This movement is entirely justified."

"If no announcement is made by Thursday 5:00pm, we will join the doctors on the streets," he

added.
Mamsad Shanjary Khan, a student of the 47th batch of the MPH course at the National Institute of Preventive and Social Medicine (NIPSOM), said, "Our families can't survive on a salary of Tk 25,000. We demand that the allowance be increased to Tk 50,000. Even before the anti discrimination movement, we have been struggling for this raise. In this new Bangladesh, we no longer want a place for discrimination. We will not leave the streets until our demands are met."

DMJS General Secretary Md Nurun Nabi said, "We have been forced to take to the streets. The authorities are asking for more time. How much more time should we give? We have been waiting for the past two years. The allowance was supposed to be increased last January."

One-day state

FROM PAGE 3
placed the condolence motion proposal in the meeting, which was unanimously adopted.
At the beginning of the meeting, one minute of silence was observed paying respect to Hassan Arif.
Meanwhile, Hassan Arif will be laid to rest at the Martyred Intellectuals Graveyard in Mirpur today, next to the grave of Bir Shreshtha Sipahi Hamidur Rahman.
The burial will be held at 10:00am, according to a notification issued by Cabinet Secretary Sheikh Abdur Rashid yesterday.

mosques and other religious institutions for the peace of his soul.
At the same time, the Council of Advisers yesterday formally adopted a condolence motion on the death of Hassan Arif, recalling his contributions and paying deep respect to him.
The condolence motion was adopted at a special meeting of the Council of Advisers with the Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus in the chair, held at the Chief Adviser's Office.
Environment Adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan

EVMs won't be used in future

FROM PAGE 12
be placed before the Election Commission.
"Several things will happen in the future. First, the verdict of the High Court regarding the election will be moved before the Supreme Court and we hope the Supreme Court will uphold the verdict. Second, we have approached the court regarding the verdict of Justice Khairul about the caretaker government system. Third, the Constitution Reform Commission will place its recommendations.
"To incorporate its recommendations into the constitution, a bill will have to be placed in parliament ...," he added.
He said, "We will place recommendations regarding reform of our electoral system. There are strong proposals both in favour of and against proportional representation.

particularly higher education ones, he said.
He also said if the goal of higher education is to truly shape students into human beings, then there is no difference between public and private institutions.
Daffodil International University VC M Lutfar Rahman pointed out that many teachers fail to conduct classes properly, which must be addressed.
Prof Abdur Rob, VC of International University of Business Agriculture and Technology, said insufficient funding and lack of interest among teachers hinder research.
For world-class research, teachers need adequate time, training, and financial support, he added.
United International University VC Abul Kashem Mia said strengthening primary and secondary education is crucial for improving higher

We are considering all of them... these decisions are not entirely ours. To implement these changes, the constitution needs to be amended. Therefore, the commission formed for constitutional amendments must make recommendations on these matters."
Commission members Tofayel Ahmed and Jesmin Tuli, along with Chattogram DC, were present during the meeting.
PhD and postgraduate opportunities should depend on a university's quality rather than its public or private status, he said.
North South University VC Prof Abdul Hannan Chowdhury noted that government control over both public and private institutions has stagnated educational culture.
UGC research funding should be awarded based on merit, regardless of a university's status, he added.
The panel included JU VC Prof Mohammad Kamrul Ahsan, UGC member Prof Mohammad Tanzimuddin Khan, Umama Fatema, spokesperson of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, and Ishtiaq Abedin, secretary general of the Bangladesh Private University Association, among others.

Partisanship, merit devaluation

FROM PAGE 3
universities are essential, he said, adding, "We can work to enhance the quality of education by involving Bangladeshis who are part of these institutions."
He also said partisan politics among teachers is one side of the coin, while the devaluation of merit is the other.
Teachers must also possess administrative skills, as VCs provide both academic and administrative leadership, he added.
Speaking as a special guest, UGC Chairman Prof SMA Faiz said universities must reduce dependency on the government.
Both the government and UGC must support research.
At the programme, DU VC Prof Niaz Ahmed Khan said higher education suffers from inadequate infrastructure and a lack of conducive research environments.
The country's partisan and violent politics have harmed institutions,

60 in Galachipa, 45 in Sadar upazila, 40 in Dashmina, 30 each in Kalapara and Dumki, 22 in Rangabali, and 20 in Mirzaganj.
Farmers participating in these demonstration plots were given 1kg of mustard seeds for free. Additionally, 1,500 other farmers received 1kg of seeds and fertiliser at no cost.
He said with this system, it is possible to produce 700kg of mustard per acre, with a market value of approximately Tk 50,000 (Tk 70 per kg).
As mustard is an additional crop, farmers are showing significant interest in adopting the relay system.
He also said the district has set a target of cultivating mustard on 490 hectares of land this year.
Due to the rising price of edible oil in the market, farmers are increasingly interested in mustard cultivation. Mustard was grown on 478 hectares last year and 352 hectares in 2022.
Majnu Pyada from Gachani village in Dashmina cultivated mustard using the relay system on one acre of land last week.

education quality.
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Farmers reap benefits

FROM PAGE 5
He said, "Every year, I till the land and sow mustard, which requires irrigation later. It costs at least 5,000 taka per acre. But with the relay system, I have no expenses - it's all profit."
Another farmer from the village, Sadek Matbar, said after harvesting Aman, the land is typically left fallow to dry for a few days.
By cultivating mustard, however, an additional crop is obtained on the same land, which helps farmers financially, he added.
"By growing mustard, I can meet my family's edible oil needs for the entire year. I no longer need to buy oil from the market. That's why many farmers are now turning to mustard cultivation," he added.
AL won't be

FROM PAGE 5
Alamgir Nayan and Ariful Islam, as well as district, metropolitan, and divisional leaders of the platform.
Akhtar stated that the Awami League has made no effort to free itself from the genocide, crimes against humanity, and grievous actions the party has committed.
"The Chhatra League terrorists continue to threaten our comrades and have been involved in murders across the country. They have not been held accountable yet," he remarked.
He warned that if the Awami League attempts to participate in the upcoming elections, students are prepared to take drastic measures. "If necessary, students will shed blood again to prevent their participation in the elections," he said.
Furthermore, Akhtar suggested that if the police fail to restore order, educated youths who were part of the July uprising might need to be incorporated into the police force to ensure law and order is maintained.

Strengthen security

FROM PAGE 5
or the collaborators of Awami Fascist of the previous regime in the "secret killings and attacks" on students.
Students across the country are suffering from insecurity due to recent "secret killings and attacks," they said.
The committee should be formed within 48 hours, and the report should be published within seven working days, they added.
They also demanded that each police station should have at least five patrol vehicles 24/7, which will continue patrolling. Special surveillance should be kept around educational institutions, they said.
The third demand reads that a platoon or team with at least four members of non-lethal weapons should be deployed at important junctions in each ward area, and they will be in charge of guarding that particular area. The team should get an allowance from the government.

Finally, they demanded that a task force be formed under the Home Ministry to eliminate all BCL leaders and activists, and their associates who are active online and in the field.
All the intelligence agencies of the state will have to play an active role to accelerate the activities of this task force.
It is also mentioned in the memorandum that these demands should be accepted within 48 hours and necessary steps need to be taken.
Meanwhile, Inquilab Mancha, a non-political cultural organisation comprising former and current students of Dhaka University, staged a sit-in outside the residence of the chief justice yesterday.
They staged the sit-in to press for their three-point demand, including ensuring the safety of protesters and activists of the July uprising.
A group of leaders and activists from Inquilab Mancha gathered in front

of the National Museum in Dhaka's Shahbagh area and held a brief rally around noon. Afterwards, they brought out a protest procession that marched towards Kakrail Mosque and Matsya Bhaban.
Police intervened as the protesters attempted to proceed to the chief justice's residence.
Despite police obstruction, the protesters staged a sit-in on a one-way road in front of the CJ residence, vowing not to leave until their memorandum is accepted.
Sharif Osman Bin Hadi, spokesperson for Inquilab Mancha, placed their demands, which include prompt cancellation of the registration of Awami League, saving patriotic students and citizens from the "secret killings" carried out by AL, and arrest of all criminals in the AL committees from the central level to the union level and to ensure complete security for those who participated in the July uprising.

TENDER NOTICE FOR VARIOUS CATEGORIES OF SUPPLIES, WORKS AND SERVICES UNDER FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT

ITB Ref. No. icddr,b/SCM/OTM/2024-10-17 Date: December 23, 2024

Sealed bids are invited from reputed firms having at least 3 years work experience in the relevant field with large organizations like UN agencies, diplomatic missions, international organizations, Large Corporate Office, Hospitals etc. for the following categories under Framework Agreement:

Serial No	Name of Category	Pre-Bid Meeting Schedule
I	Supply of Office, Stationery and Hospital Materials	Tuesday, January 7, 2025 11:00am - 12:00pm
II	Supply of Building Materials	
III	Supply of Electrical Materials	
IV	Supply of Printing Materials	
V	Supply of Toner Cartridges, Printers, Scanners, IT Accessories, TAB, Mobile, Photocopier Toners, Offline UPS and UPS Batteries	Wednesday, January 8, 2025 11:00am - 12:00pm
VI	Supply of Tyres, Tubes and Batteries for Vehicles	
VII	Supply, Testing, Commissioning and Installation of different types of Air-Conditioners	
VIII	Hiring of Labour for Civil Works with Supply of Materials and Services	

Interested bidders may download Bid Documents from icddr,b website, link: <https://www.icddr.org/work-with-us/tender-notices>. Bid document will be available from December 23, 2024 to January 16, 2025. Bidders must submit bid document with a Pay Order amounting BDT 2,000 (Taka two thousand only) as price of Bid Document (non-refundable) in favour of "icddr,b". Without pay order bid will be considered as non-responsive.

Bid should be dropped into the "Tender Box" kept in Supply Chain Management Office, Ground Floor of Chiller Building, Mohakhali, Dhaka up to 03:30pm on January 19, 2025. Bid will be opened by the Sourcing Evaluation Committee members (non-publicly) following icddr,b policy and procedures.

Online / in-person Pre-Bid meeting will be held as per above schedule. Microsoft Teams joining info Video call link: [Join the meeting now, Meeting ID: 444 794 435 455, Passcode: 6wf6Kc3J](https://teams.microsoft.com/join/444794435455). You can share any queries relating to the Bid process and other issues to the email tenderquery@icddr.org which will be discussed in the pre-bid session.

The icddr,b Management reserves the right to accept or reject part/whole of any or all tenders without assigning any reason whatsoever. This tender notice will also form a part of the contract and will be binding upon the bidder.

Senior Manager, Supply Chain Management
icddr,b, Mohakhali, Dhaka-1212
Tel: Phone: +880 (0)2-2222-77001 to 10
Extension # 4405/4406/4400

Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh
Office of the Executive Director
CEMSU, Kurmitola, Dhaka-1229.

Notice for e-GP Re-Tender

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP system portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of following item:

SL No	Tender ID	Method	Package No.	Description of Item	Tender Document Last Selling Date & Time	Last date & Time for Tender Security Submission	Tender Closing Date & Time	Tender Opening Date & Time
I.	1055082	OSTEM	30.31.0000.121.07.002.24.175-b d-23/10/2024	Flight Calibration and Commissioning of ILS-14 for Cat-II at Hazrat Shah Jalal International Airport, Dhaka.	05/01/2025 11.00	05/01/2025 11.30	05/01/2025 12.00	05/01/2025 12.00

This is an Online Tendering System, only e-tender will be accepted in the National e-GP system portal and no Offline/hard copies will be accepted.

To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP system portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP system portal have to be deposited through online to any registered Bank's branches. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP portal and e-GP Help Desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

স্মারক নং-৩০.৩১.০০০০.০৫১.০৫.০০১.২৪/৫৯৭
তারিখ: ২২/১২/২০২৪ খ্রি.

(Signature)
22.12.2024
Md. Rezaul Islam
Executive Director,
CEMSU, CAAB, Kurmitola, Dhaka-1229.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Office of the Project Director
Accelerating and Strengthening Skills for Economic Transformation (ASSET) Project
Directorate of Technical Education
Plot -F-4/B, Agargaon, Sher-E-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207
www.asset-dte.gov.bd

Memo No: 57.03.0000.000.07.801.24-3279 Date: 22-12-2024

Request for Expression of Interest (REOI) for Selection of Individual Consultant (National)
Country: Bangladesh

Name of the Project: Accelerating and Strengthening Skills for Economic Transformation (ASSET) Project
Credit No: IDA 6874-BD
Reference No.: S37A

The Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh has received a credit from the World Bank toward the cost of the Accelerating and Strengthening Skills for Economic Transformation (ASSET) Project and intends to apply part of the proceeds toward payments for consulting services to be procured under the project.

Title	Qualification	Experience	Duration
Selection of Communication Specialist - 1 Nos.	A post Graduate degree from a recognized university is required. Candidates having academic background in Mass Communication / Journalism / Media Studies / Sociology / Public Administration will be given preference.	a. At least ten (10) years' work experience as a communications / public relations / media / journalism professional; b. Should have demonstrated expertise in preparing and implementing communication strategies; c. Prior experience in managing successful communication campaigns in education sector, specifically TVET, will be an added advantage; d. Experience in organizing workshop / training / seminar / fair / competition / media events / programs / discussions etc.; e. Skills in developing communication literature / materials for the media both in English and Bengali, A/V materials, talk shows, social media content and management, advertisements, TV spot etc.; f. Excellent communication skills both oral and written to deal with diverse groups of audience; g. Knowledge of technical education and training systems in Bangladesh will be given preference; h. Experience in projects funded by World Bank, Asian Development Bank or similar development partners will be given preference; i. Candidates having working experience in the public sector will be given preference; j. Strong connection with the mass media community; k. Ability to work both independently and in a team and under strict deadlines; l. Fluency in Bengali and English and proficiency in computer skills on MS Office, Bengali and English typing, Internet (web browsing etc.).	22 months.

- Place of work:** Office of the Project Director, ASSET Project, Directorate of Technical Education, F-4/B, Agargaon A/A, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207
- Commencement of the Service:** 01-02-2025 (Tentative)
- Certificates related with education, training and experiences must be submitted with the application.
- Accelerating and Strengthening Skills for Economic Transformation (ASSET) Project now invites eligible applicants express their interest in providing the services. Applicants are invited to provide information indicating that they are qualified to perform the services (complete CV with other details).
- The consultant will be selected in accordance with the procedures set out in "Procurement Regulations for IPF Borrowers" July 2016 [Revised September 2023] ("Procurement Regulations").
- The Procurement Regulations can be viewed at the World Bank's external website: <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/6c0602876d68949e80820507d90a14ed-0290012023/procurement-regulations-september-2023>
- The attention of interested Consultants is drawn to Section III, paragraphs, 3.14, 3.16, and 3.17 of the World Bank's "Procurement Regulations for IPF Borrowers" July 2016 [Revised September, 2023] ("Procurement Regulations"), setting forth the World Bank's policy on conflict of interest.
- Interested applicants may obtain the Terms of Reference (TOR) from the office of the ASSET Project during office hours or download from the website: www.asset-dte.gov.bd
- Further information can be obtained at the address below during office hours [i.e., 09:00 to 17:00 hour].
- Expressions of Interest (EOI) needs to be submitted (either through e-mail or in person or by mail) to the following address by 15:00 hours (BST) on or before 12 January, 2025. Please clearly mention "Expression of Interest (EOI) for Communication Specialist".

(Signature)
22.12.2024
(Mr Zahid Hasan)
Project Director (Additional Secretary)
Accelerating and Strengthening Skills for Economic Transformation (ASSET) Project
Phone No: +880-2-41024953
E-mail: pd@asset-dte.gov.bd

PRAYER TIMING
DECEMBER 23

Faqr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha

AZAN 5:25 12:45 3:45 5:24 7:30
JAMAAT 6:00 1:15 4:00 5:27 7:30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

Strengthen security, probe 'secret killings'

Demand private univ students

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The combined private university chapter of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement yesterday placed a memorandum with four-point demands to the home affairs adviser to build a safe Bangladesh by strengthening state security.

Some 12 student representatives of the platform placed the memo to Adviser Lt Gen (ret'd) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury at the secretariat.

The four-point demands include the formation of an independent investigation committee, whose responsibility will be to find out whether there is any link between the banned organisation Chhatra League

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

AL won't be allowed to contest polls

Says Akhtar Hossain

BSS, Dhaka

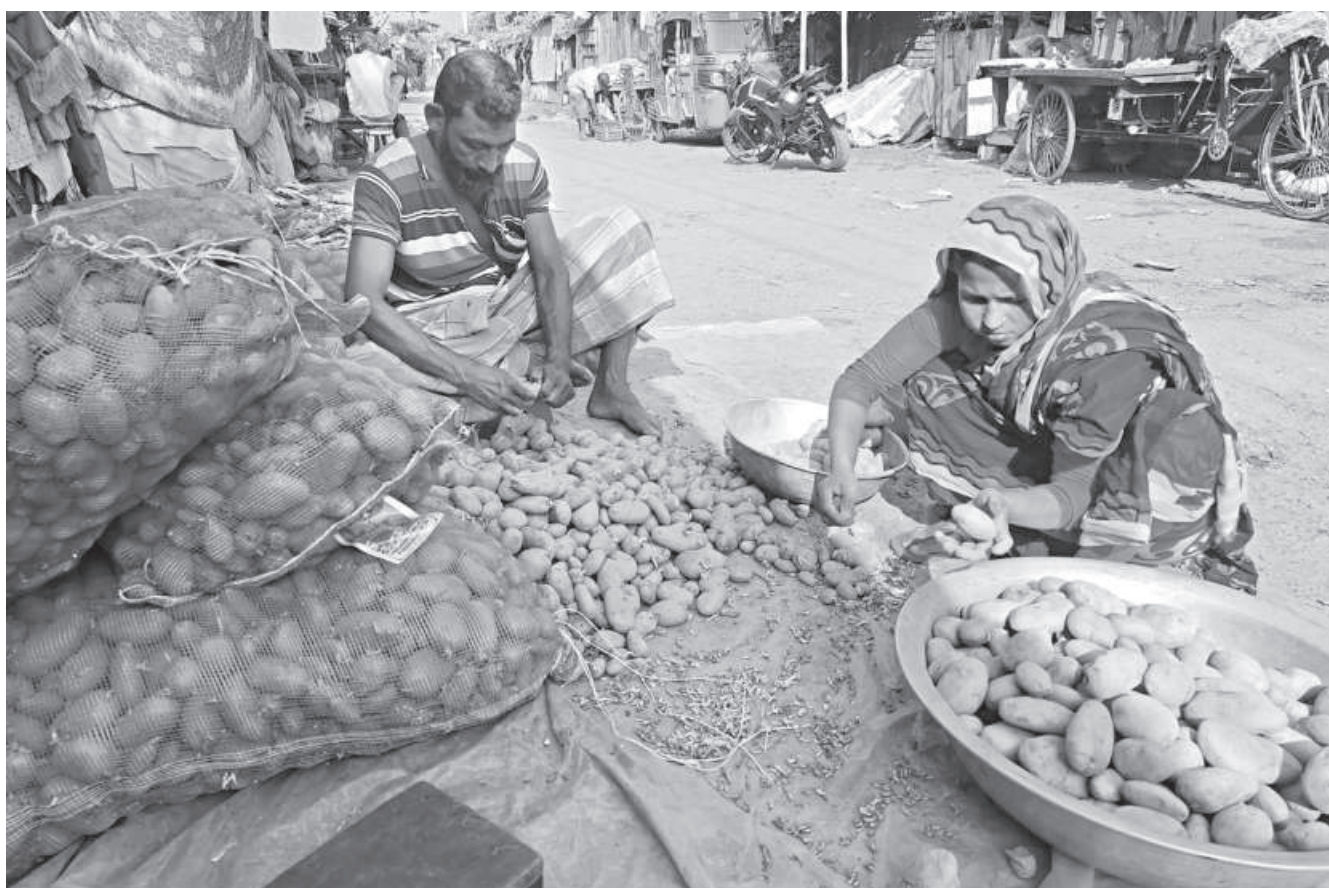
Awami League will not be allowed to participate in the upcoming elections under any circumstances until justice is served for the July-August massacre and persecution, said Akhtar Hossain, member secretary of the Jatiya Nagorik Committee yesterday.

Although there is no legal barrier preventing the Awami League from participating in the next elections, the people and students will not allow their participation, he said.

Akhtar made the remarks while talking to local journalists in Rangpur, where he paid homage to the graves of eight martyrs from Kawnia and Pirgachha upazilas, who were killed during the anti-discrimination student movement. He also met with the families of the martyrs.

He was accompanied by local Jatiya Nagorik Committee organisers, including

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5



Local traders preparing to sell old potatoes from last year, which they purchased at Tk 40-50 per kg from the wholesale market. They plan to sell these for Tk 50 per kg. The photo was taken in the Kalpatty area of Barishal city yesterday. PHOTO: TITU DAS

MUSTARD FARMING IN PATUAKHALI

Farmers reap benefits of 'relay system'

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

Farmers in Patuakhali have started mustard cultivation using the "relay system" (without tilling).

This method allows farmers to produce an additional crop alongside Aman and Rabi crops without incurring extra costs.

The Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) has established 347 demonstration plots to encourage farmers to adopt this method. Farmers are showing interest in the system as it helps meet the demand for edible oil.

Farmers said Aman paddy is

Patuakhali's primary agricultural crop. After planting Aman in Bhadra, it is harvested in Kartik-Agrahayan.

The DAE motivated farmers to grow mustard instead of leaving the land fallow for two and a half months.

Md Robi Faisal, deputy assistant agriculture officer in Dashmina upazila, said mustard seeds should be scattered on the soft land before the Aman harvest. One kilogramme of mustard seeds is sufficient to cultivate one bigha of land.

After harvesting the mustard crop within 75 to 80 days, various Rabi crops – including watermelon, chili, and Boro – can be grown on the same land. This

provides farmers with the opportunity to harvest an additional crop.

He said, in the traditional method, farmers cultivated mustard by tilling the land, which cost Tk 3,000-3,500 per acre. Additionally, irrigating the land once or twice added Tk 1,000-1,500 to the expenses. However, since the relay system requires no tilling or irrigation, farmers can cultivate mustard at no cost.

Md Nazrul Islam, deputy director of DAE in Patuakhali, said 347 plots have been set up in the district to promote mustard cultivation using the relay system. These include 100 in Bauphal,

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

Dhaka cannot engage

FROM PAGE 12

On Myanmar's political future, Touhid noted that all participants expressed support for its efforts to resolve internal issues and move forward.

"Everyone said they would support Myanmar, and if they choose a federal structure, we will not intervene. But we want a resolution," Touhid said.

The meeting on Thursday was chaired by Thailand's Foreign Minister Maris Sangiampongser. The attendees included Myanmar's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister U Than Swe, Laos's Foreign Minister Saleumxay Kommasith, India's Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, and China's Deputy Foreign Minister Ma Zhaoxian.

Speaking as the chief guest at an international seminar in Dhaka yesterday, the foreign adviser said peace in Myanmar is crucial to unlocking the full potential of the Bay of Bengal and its surrounding countries and that peace cannot be achieved without solving the Rohingya crisis.

"Peace and order will not be possible in Myanmar, and consequently in the region, unless the safe and secure return of Rohingyas to their homes," he said at the seminar titled "Reconnecting the Bay of Bengal Region: Exploring the Convergence of Interest," at the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies.

Noting that a civil war situation is currently prevailing in Myanmar, he said at least 12 million Rohingyas, who have fled the Rakhine state facing extreme atrocities, have fled to Bangladesh in the last seven years.

"There has been no progress in their repatriation and the situation is further complicated by a non-state actor, the Arakan Army, taking control of the entire

border with Bangladesh," he said.

"It is on Myanmar and the regional powers to create a congenial atmosphere for their return," said the foreign adviser.

Supported by the Embassy of Japan, the BIIS, in collaboration with the Institute of Developing Economies (IDE-JETRO), hosted the international seminar.

He said that the Bay of Bengal has emerged as a focal point of geopolitical and economic activity with its vast natural resources, crucial shipping routes, and potential for economic integration.

Touhid said the countries surrounding the Bay and other stakeholders should align their diverse interests, "ensuring that the Bay of Bengal becomes a region of collaboration rather than conflict; a hub of connectivity rather than contention".

He said Bangladesh is uniquely poised to become a regional transit hub and a key player in the global value chain with its strategic location and growing industrial base.

"In order to unlock these possibilities, Bangladesh must address pressing challenges and seize emerging opportunities," the adviser said.

He acknowledged that initiatives like the "Bay of Bengal Industrial Value Chain," championed by Japan, provide a blueprint for achieving this transformation by leveraging investment, technology, and labour.

The adviser also lauded Japan's contribution to Bangladesh's development.

Japanese Ambassador to Bangladesh Iwama Kiminori, BIIS Chairman Gousal Azam Sarkar and Director General Major General Ittekkar Anis, among others, spoke at the event.

Every year, I till the land and sow mustard, which requires irrigation later. It costs at least 5,000 taka per acre. But with the relay system, I have no expenses -- it's all profit.

MAJNU PYADA, a farmer from Gachani village

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Chief Adviser's Office

Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority

Dhaka Export Processing Zone

Ashulia, Savar, Dhaka-1349.

(www.bepza.gov.bd)

Ref. No. 03.06.2672.333.33.032.24-2232

Date: 22-12-2024

Auction Notice (7th Call)

Sealed auctions are hereby invited from the interested National/Foreign Buyers/Companies in order to sell inventoried & Valuated Structure, Machinery, Equipment & other Assets by auction "as is where basis" of terminated industry named M/s. Lenny Fashions Ltd., Plot # 66-68, Dhaka EPZ (Old Zone), a Play suits, Tracks suits, Coats, Overcoats, Pants, T-Shirts, Trousers, Jumpers, Rompers, Pajamas, Night wears etc. woven items manufacturing industry or to operate the enterprise. To participate in the auction the terms & conditions are stated below:

Terms & Conditions:

- Interested Persons/Organizations/ Existing enterprises of EPZ(s) (Local/Joint Venture/Foreign) or any other interested persons/organizations from outside EPZ can take part in this auction who are interested to purchase the Structure, Machinery, Equipment & other Assets "as is where basis" of the company by observing the existing rules and regulations in this regard.
- Successful bidder will have to pay VAT, TAX and other payable fees as per custom rules for the duty free imported Assets of existing Assets of industry to be taken out of the Domestic Tariff Area (DTA).
- Auction documents attached with a single pay order/bank draft/FDD or any other means approved by Bangladesh Government from any schedule bank of an amount of 15% as earnest money (non-refundable for successful bidder & refundable for unsuccessful bidder) must be submitted in favour of BEPZA. Auction documents without earnest money will be treated as rejected.
- Inventoried Structure, Machineries, Equipment & other Assets under the inventory list may be seen on 07/01/2025, 08/01/2025 & 09/01/2025 from 10.00 AM to 3.00 PM. Information regarding the visit and the list of Assets may be collected by contacting with the Executive Director, Dhaka EPZ directly.
- If the auction is accepted by the Authority, the successful bidder will have to pay the remaining 85% amount of the quoted price along with applicable TAX & VAT within 15 days to BEPZA through Pay Order/Bank Draft/FDD, or any other means approved by Bangladesh Government. Accordingly, the delivery of Structure, Machineries, Equipment & other Assets will have to be taken as per Customs & BEPZA rules.
- Auction Schedule may be bought by paying Tk. 5,000.00 (non-refundable) within 09/01/2025 during office hours from the Accounts Department of Dhaka EPZ, Chattogram EPZ, Adamjee EPZ, Mongla EPZ, Cumilla EPZ, Karnaphuli EPZ, Ishwardi EPZ, Uttara EPZ & Accounts Department of BEPZA Executive Office, Dhaka.
- Auction schedule may be dropped into the auction box kept at the office of Executive Director, Dhaka EPZ on 14/01/2025 from 10.00 am to 12.00 pm and Submitted Auction documents will be opened in the same date at 12:30 pm at the office of Executive Director, Dhaka EPZ in presence of the bidders (if any). Updated copy of VAT, TIN and Trade License shall have to be attached with the Auction schedule; but this condition may be relaxed by the Authority in case of fully new 100% foreign owned company interested to invest in the EPZ.
- Persons/Organizations/Investors who are interested to operate the closed industry will get priority in auction.
- Successful bidder will have to take permission (if applicable) to operate the industrial unit in the EPZ by following the project sanctioning procedure of BEPZA as per rules.
- The Authority reserves the right to accept any auction or reject any or all of the submitted auctions without showing any reason. The Authority also reserves the right to cancel the Auction and accordingly take next action if the desired rates are not obtained.

(Md. Ahsan Kabir)

Executive Director

Phone: 02-224498238

E-Mail: ed.depz@bepza.gov.bd

GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH
MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

PROJECT DIRECTOR'S OFFICE, CHATTOGRAM, CUMILLA AND MYMENSINGH (TRISHAL)
MILITARY FARM MODERNIZATION PROJECT, RV&F DIRECTORATE, QMG'S BR
ARMY HEADQUARTERS, DHAKA CANTONMENT

INVITATION FOR TENDERS FOR GOODS (CATTLE)

Invitation for Tender No: CCT-P/Tender/2024-2025/03

Dated: 19 December 2024

GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH			
1. Ministry/division	Ministry of Defence (MOD)		
2. Agency	Army Headquarters, QMG's Branch, RV&F Directorate Dhaka Cantonment, Bangladesh		
3. Procuring Entity Name	Project Director, Chattogram, Cumilla and Mymensingh (Trishal) Military Farm Modernization Project		
4. Procuring Entity Code	Not used at present		
5. Procuring Entity district	Dhaka		
6. Invitation for	Goods (Cattle)		
7. Invitation ref no and Date	23.01.901.062.05.058.01.19.12.24 Dated 19 December 2024		
KEY INFORMATION			
8. Procurement method	Open Tendering Method (OTM) - National		
FUNDING INFORMATION			
9. Budget and source of funds	Government of Bangladesh (GOB)		
10. Development partners (if applicable)	Not applicable		
PARTICULAR INFORMATION			
11. Project/programme code (if applicable)	224356100		
12. Project/programme name (if applicable)	Chattogram, Cumilla and Mymensingh (Trishal) Military Farm Modernization Project		
13. Tender package No.	SER-05		
14. Tender package name	Procurement of Bangladeshi Crossbred Holstein Friesian/Jersey Milch Cows with Calf		
15. Tender publication date	25 December 2024		
16. Tender selling date	26 December 2024 to 22 January 2025 up to 1400 hours		
17. Tender closing date and time	23 January 2025 1200 hours		
18. Tender opening date and time	23 January 2025 1230 hours		
19. Name & address of the office(s) Selling tender document (principal)	Chattogram, Cumilla and Mymensingh (Trishal) Military Farm Modernization Project, RV&F Directorate, QMG's Branch, Army Headquarters, Dhaka Cantonment		
Selling tender document (others)			
No conditions apply for sale, purchase or distribution of tender documents			
Receiving tender document			
Opening tender document			
Chattogram, Cumilla and Mymensingh (Trishal) Military Farm Modernization Project, RV&F Directorate, QMG's Branch, Army Headquarters, Dhaka Cantonment			
Place/date/time of Pre-tender meeting (optional)			
Not applicable			
INFORMATION FOR TENDERER			
21. Brief eligibility and qualification of tenderer	(a) Tenderer/Supplier must have minimum 05 years experience in the supply of Cattle or similar type of goods. (b) Satisfactory completion at least 01 contracts within last 05 years. (c) Eligible as per PPA 2006 & PPR 2008.		
22. Brief description of goods	Procurement of Bangladeshi Crossbred Holstein Friesian/Jersey Milch Cows with Calf		
23. Brief description of related services	Not applicable		
24. Price of tender document (Tk)	5000.00 (Non refundable)		
25. Lot No	Identification of lot	Location	Completion time in weeks/months
26. SER-05	Procurement of Bangladeshi Crossbred Holstein Friesian/Jersey Milch Cows with Calf	Military Farm Chattogram, Military Farm Cumilla and Military Farm Trishal	20,00,000.00 03 months from issue of supply order.
27. Name of official inviting tender	Colonel Md Balayet Hossain		
28. Designation of official inviting tender	Project Director		
29. Address of official inviting tender	Chattogram, Cumilla and Mymensingh (Trishal) Military Farm Modernization Project, RV&F Directorate, QMG's Branch, Army Headquarters, Dhaka Cantonment		
30. Contact details of official inviting tender	Phone: 880-2-8711111 extension 2692, Mobile: 8801769012692/8801769012696/8801769012636 Email: cctprojbd@gmail.com, Web Site: www.army.mil.bd		
Miscellaneous Instruction for Tenderer:			
a. Tenderer shall submit a copy of letter of valid enlistment with application on company letter-head to Project Director when purchasing tender schedule.			
b. Mentioning the rate of goods in the pad Tenderer must submit the tender in the Tender box kept at Project Office, Army Headquarters, RV&F Directorate, QMG's Branch, Dhaka Cantonment.			
c. Detail requirements are mentioned in Tender Data Sheet of tender documents.			
d. The Procuring Entity reserves the right to reject all tenders or annul the tender proceedings.			
e. Due to unavoidable/special circumstances if tender cannot open as per scheduled date and time then tender will be open on next working day at same time.			

আই এস পি আর/সেনা/৭৭৮
২২/১২/২৪

Project Director
Chattogram, Cumilla and Mymensingh (Trishal)
Military Farm Modernization Project
RV&F Directorate, QMG's Branch
Army Headquarters, Dhaka cantonment

GD-1243

Tilda Swinton to receive Lifetime Achievement Award at Berlinale

Berlin International Film Festival, otherwise known globally as the Berlinale, will present Scottish actress Tilda Swinton with a Lifetime Achievement Award next year.

Berlinale director Tricia Tuttle stated that the Honorary Golden Bear will



be awarded to Swinton for her "breathtaking" range and status as "one of our modern filmmaking idols". The award will be presented at the festival's opening ceremony in the German capital on February 13.

Swinton said in the statement that "to be honoured in this way by this particular festival is deeply touching for me."

The Berlinale, running February 13-23, ranks along with Cannes and Venice among Europe's top film festivals.



Blake Lively accuses 'It Ends With Us' costar Justin Baldoni of sexual harassment

Actress Blake Lively has filed a sexual harassment lawsuit against Justin Baldoni, her co-star, and director of *It Ends with Us*.

This surprising development comes several months after the film's April release and follows speculation about tensions between the two.

Last Saturday, TMZ revealed Blake Lively's lawsuit accusing sexual harassment, a deliberate smear campaign, and "severe emotional distress."

Justin Baldoni's lawyer, Bryan Freedman, called Blake Lively's allegations "shameful" and "categorically false" in a statement on the same day.

As per the outlet, tensions during *It Ends with Us* filming prompted separate meetings for the actors, one attended by Lively's husband, Ryan Reynolds.



PUJA CHERY eager to stun as Miss Shayla

Puja Chery plays a glamorous role in the web-series *Black Money*, directed by Raihan Rafi. The show has finished filming and is expected to premiere on Bongo in the new year.

Recently, they released its first song *Premar Dokandarr*, where Puja Chery essays sultry moves. The item song has been voiced by Akassh and Dilshad Nahar Kona, while the lyrics have been penned by Priyo Chattopadhyaya.

Puja dons the role of Miss Shayla in the series. In an interview with The Daily Star, she shared, "I'm making my return to the screen after a long time through a project directed by Rafi. My character in this project is quite challenging to play, and I believe the audience will enjoy the series."

Jared Leto to play Skeletor in 'Masters of the Universe' live-action film



Oscar winner Jared Leto has been roped into playing Skeletor, the skull-faced nemesis of He-Man, in the upcoming *Masters of the Universe* movie, according to Variety.

Starring Nicholas Galitzine, the film is based on Mattel's iconic toy line, which generated a hit animated series in 1983 and a 1987 movie featuring Dolph Lundgren as He-Man.

According to Variety, the film will be directed by *Bumblebee* famed director Travis Knight. Skeletor, known for commanding a group of loyal henchmen, will be joined by Trap Jaw, played by Sam C Wilson, Tri-Klops, portrayed by Kojo Attah, and Goat Man, played by *Game of Thrones* actor Hafthor Bjornsson.

WHAT'S THE HAPS?

Bangladesh Int'l Short and Independent Film Festival

The 17th Bangladesh International Short and Independent Film Festival, featuring 276 films from over 100 countries, will be organised this year by the Bangladesh Short Film Forum.

Date: December 20-27

Time and venue are referred to on the website for activities for each day.



RAHAT FATEH ALI KHAN to headline BPL Music fest for Tk 3.4cr

Renowned Pakistani singer Rahat Fateh Ali Khan will headline the BPL T20 Music Fest on December 23 at Mirpur's Sher-e-Bangla Stadium. While the fest will also be hosted in Chattogram and Sylhet, his performance is exclusive to the Mirpur event.



Despite waiving his fee for the *Echoes of Revolution* concert, the celebrated artiste will receive Tk 3.4 crore (approximately US \$286,000) for this show.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) approved this payment during a recent Board of Directors meeting.

COUNTRYWIDE

Good yield, better price delight Aman growers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

High yield of Aman paddy as well as good prices has brought big smiles to the faces of rice growers in different upazilas of five northern districts under Rangpur region.

Farmers said now each maund (40 kg) of Aman paddy is selling for Tk 1,300 to Tk 1,320 in the local markets, while it was sold between Tk 1,050 to Tk 1,100 at this time of the season.

As a result, farmers are quite happy to get fair prices of their produced paddy this season.

Currently, Aman harvesting season is going on in five northern districts — Lalmonirhat, Kurigram, Gaibandha, Rangpur and Nilphamari — under Rangpur region.

Alongside famers, many agricultural workers are passing busy time in either harvesting or threshing the paddy.

According to the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) officials, this year Aman has been cultivated on a total of 6,20,306 hectares of land in five districts under Rangpur region, with a target to produce 19,17,672 tonnes of rice.

Farmer Mansur Ali of Hatia village in Kurigram's Ulipur upazila said farmers in his locality have a good yield of Aman paddy due to favourable weather

condition.

About 13 to 15 maunds of paddy have been produced from each bigha of land, while growers had to spend Tk 10,000 to Tk 11,000 as production cost that includes seeds, fertilizer and labourer wages, Mansur said, adding that apart from paddy, farmers also get paddy straws worth around Tk 4,000 from each bigha.

Altaf Hossain, another farmer from Doljor area in Lalmonirhat's Aditmari upazila, said production of paddy has increased a bit as there was no fungal attacks in their paddy fields this year.

This year not only prices, but the cost of paddy production has also increased, compared to the previous years, due to high cost of seeds and fertilizers, he said, adding that after harvesting paddy he will go for potato and mustard cultivation.

Noor Alam, a wholesaler at Hatia paddy market in Kurigram's Ulipur upazila, said they were buying each maund of paddy from farmers at Tk 1,300 to Tk 1,320.

Kurigram DAE Deputy Director Abdullah Al Mamun said the good yield and better prices of Aman paddy this year will surely encourage farmers to bring more land under paddy cultivation next year.



PHOTO: STAR

Farmers process Aman paddy at Sindurmati village in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila.

BNP's demand for polls irks some people

FROM PAGE 12

"The main point is that I should be able to cast my vote. Peace should prevail in the country. Prices of essentials must be affordable. There should be no violence or robbery."

Referring to BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's Vision Bangladesh 2030 unveiled in 2016, and acting chairman Tarique Rahman's 31-point reform agenda announced in 2022, Fakhru highlighted his party's commitment to reforms.

"... Together, we will rebuild this country in a democratic way. We will

ensure voting rights for all. Over the last 15 years, no one has been able to cast their votes."

Fakhru urged the nation to stay united and avoid division. "We are all united. We are all Bangladeshis. We all want the country's progress."

Addressing government officials, police, army, and BGB personnel, the BNP secretary general called for collective efforts to reconstruct the nation.

"Let's use this opportunity [the situation after August 5] and use it properly. Let us forget divisions and work together to rebuild and

develop the country. Let's stay vigilant so that no one can exploit us."

About the Liberation War, the BNP leader said, "We must dream of a better future. It has been 53 years since our independence. Some may say to forget 1971, but we cannot. Our independent nation was born in 1971, and that's when I discovered my identity."

Fakhru alleged that Sheikh Hasina is plotting against the country while staying abroad.

"Sheikh Hasina has fled and is conspiring against the country, spreading propaganda...But we, the

people of Bangladesh, always live together peacefully — Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians."

The BNP leader said the public never wanted Hasina to be in power, but she, telling lies to people, stayed in power through three elections.

"She thought she would never lose her power. Look, within a few months, Hasina had to flee the country with her family."

Regarding the condition of local Awami League leaders, he said that no one is to look after them because their leaders fled.

Dense fog hampers road, river transport

FROM PAGE 12

car one after another, causing a pileup, he said, quoting witnesses.

According to the fire service, at least 10 vehicles were involved in the accident.

"Some 15 people were rescued. We took them to the local health complex. One of them was in critical condition," said Dewan Azad Hossain, station officer at Sreenagar Fire Service and Civil Defence.

Camellia Sarker, a physician at the Sreenagar Upazila Health Complex, said, "A person was brought

dead to the hospital. The injured were given first aid."

In Chandpur, at least 10 people were injured when two launches on the Dhaka-Barishal route collided head-on in the Meghna River in the early hours.

The collision took place between MV Kirtankhola-10 and MV Prince Awlad-10 around 2:30am at Hiran point of the river, said passengers and river port officials.

There were more than 1,200 passengers in the two launches, said Mohammad Abdur Razzak, deputy

director and river port officer of BIWTA in Barishal.

Meanwhile, ferry services on the Aricha-Kazirhat and Paturia-Daulatdia routes were halted for around three hours from 5:30am to dense fog.

Three ferries were stranded in the middle of the river due to poor visibility, said BIWTC officials.

Aricha and Paturia are located in Manikganj district, while Daulatdia is at Rajbari and Kazirhat is at Pabna.

A mild cold wave is sweeping over Thakurgaon

and Panchagarh and it may continue till Wednesday.

The country's lowest temperature was recorded at 9.4°C in Panchagarh's Tetulia yesterday morning, said Jitendra Nath, assistant officer at the Tetulia Weather Observatory Centre.

Temperatures between 8-10°C are considered mild cold waves, 6-8°C moderate cold waves, and less than 6°C severe cold waves.

[Our correspondents from Munshiganj, Barishal and Thakurgaon contributed to the report.]

Man found near Indian border

FROM PAGE 12

"The Indian police of Gopalnagar (a village in Bongaon subdivision) apprehended him," Karim said.

Md Khairul Bashar, officer-in-charge of Gomastapur Police Station, yesterday said upon reaching the police station, Rahmatullah told them that Indian law enforcers put him and 13 others on a boat on Friday night.

The boatman was asked to drop all of them off on the other side of the river, the OC said quoting Rahmatullah.

The OC believes that the river Rahmatullah was referring to is the Mahananda.

Khairul said locals found

him wandering in their area. He was asking them which place it was.

Rahmatullah was eventually helped to get to the Rohanpur police outpost from which he was taken to the Gomastapur Police Station.

During the family's press conference on February 12, his mother Momtaz Begum described how allegedly Rab picked up Rahmatullah around midnight.

"My neighbours told me that armed men in black uniforms surrounded our house. They dragged my son out and put him in a microbus. A black Rab vehicle stood by," she said. Rahmatullah's sister

Razia had claimed that "Rab-4" was written on the vehicle.

In February, then Rab-4 commander denied the force's involvement in the incident.

INQUIRY COMMISSION

The Inquiry Commission on Enforced Disappearances has found adequate evidence to suggest that India collaborated with Bangladeshi security agencies to assist in forcibly disappearing people.

In its preliminary report submitted to the Chief Adviser's Office, the commission stated that interviews with soldiers in Rab intelligence yielded information about the regular practice of

exchanging captives between the two countries.

"On one occasion, two captives were received and subsequently killed by the side of the road after the exchange," said the report.

On another occasion, a captive was handed over alive to another agency. In return, Rab intelligence handed over two captives from Bangladesh to India, read the report.

The report noted, "Whilst the soldier was unable to furnish us with the names of the captives, this level of official security service coordination underscores the systemic and transnational nature of enforced disappearances."

Summit Group

FROM PAGE 12

The CIC's review of financial statements from FY2018 to FY2024 revealed that Summit Power did not deduct Tk 318.34 crore in taxes on dividends paid to Summit Corporation. With penalties included, the total amount of unpaid taxes has increased to Tk 465.07 crore.

The investigation also found similar non-compliance when Summit Corporation paid dividends to Summit Power International.

The agency alleged that Summit Corporation failed to deduct Tk 437.65 crore in taxes when distributing dividends to its main shareholder, Summit International, which owns a 99.99 percent stake in Summit Corporation. With penalties included, the total unpaid taxes amount to Tk 647.73 crore.

Consequently, the two entities' total unpaid taxes amounted to Tk 1,112.8 crore, according to the NBR.

"We have yet to receive any information from NBR or any tax authorities. Summit has never evaded any tax. Upon receipt of any letter from NBR or tax authorities, we will do whatever is required to be done as per the laws of Bangladesh. We always did and shall always abide by the laws," Summit said in a statement.

The statement says the NBR provided "wrong clarification" to Summit in 2023. "We acted on NBR clarification as such the question of 'evasion' does not arise," Summit said.

The case has been handed over to Tax Zone-2 for further action. "We have shared our findings with the relevant tax zone, which has already sent letters to Summit Group," said the CIC official.

GERMAN CHRISTMAS
MARKET ATTACKSuspect held
on murder
charges

REUTERS, Berlin

A man suspected of ploughing a car through crowds at a German Christmas market in an attack that killed five people and injured scores faces multiple charges of murder and attempted murder, police said yesterday.

Friday evening's attack in the central city of Magdeburg shocked the country and stirred up tensions over the charged issue of immigration.

The suspect, who was in custody, is a 50-year-old psychiatrist from Saudi Arabia with a history of anti-Islamic rhetoric who has lived in Germany for almost two decades. The motive for the attack remained unclear.

There were scuffles and some "minor disturbances" at a far-right demonstration attended by around 2,100 people on Saturday night in Magdeburg, police said.



Police forensic experts examine the wreckage of an ambulance helicopter after it collided with a hospital building and crashed into the ground in Mugla, Turkey yesterday. The cause of the accident, which left four people dead, was being investigated.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Trump threatens to
take back control of
Panama Canal

AFP, Washington

Incoming US president Donald Trump on Saturday slammed what he called unfair fees for US ships passing through the Panama Canal and threatened to demand control of the waterway be returned to US.

He also hinted at China's growing influence around the canal, a worrying trend for American interests as US businesses depend on the channel to move goods between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

"Our Navy and Commerce have been treated in a very unfair and injudicious way. The fees being charged by Panama are ridiculous," he said in a post on his Truth Social platform. "This complete 'rip-off' of our Country will immediately stop." The Panama Canal was returned to the Central American country under a 1977 deal signed by president Jimmy Carter.

Syria won't negatively
interfere in Lebanon

HTS leader Julani tells visiting Druze chiefs

AFP, Damascus

Syria's new leader Ahmed al-Sharaa, also known as Abu Mohammed al-Julani, told Lebanese Druze leaders yesterday that his country would not negatively interfere in Lebanon and would respect its neighbour's sovereignty.

Syria will no longer exert "negative interference in Lebanon at all - it respects Lebanon's sovereignty, the unity of its territories, the independence of its decisions and its security stability," Sharaa told visiting Druze chiefs Walid and Taymur Jumblatt.

Walid Jumblatt is the first Lebanese figure

to meet Sharaa since his group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and allied rebel factions launched a lightning offensive last month, seizing Damascus on December 8 and ousting longtime ruler Bashar al-Assad.

Syria "will stay at equal distance from all" in Lebanon, Sharaa added, acknowledging that Syria has been a "source of fear and anxiety" for the country.

Walid Jumblatt, long a fierce critic of Assad and his father Hafez who ruled Syria before him, arrived in Damascus Sunday at the head of a delegation of lawmakers from his parliamentary bloc and religious figures from Lebanon's Druze minority.



Stampedes in Nigeria leave 32 dead

AFP, Lagos

Nigerian police yesterday raised the total death toll from two stampedes at food distribution centres to 32, as the country grappled with a spate of deadly crowd crushes at charity events.

Twenty-two people were killed on Saturday as people queued outside a centre distributing rice in the southern town of Okija, police said, after previously warning "many" were dead as a result of the incident.

And on the same day a separate stampede outside a church giving



food to the "vulnerable and elderly" in the capital Abuja killed at least 10 people, prompting Nigeria's President Bola Tinubu to clear his schedule in the wake of the twin

tragedies.

The stampedes outside food distribution centres come as Africa's most populous country grapples with its worst economic crisis in a generation, with inflation soaring to 34.6 percent in November.

Confirming the toll of 22 dead in Okija, a spokesman for the Anambra state police expressed condolences to the families and friends of those killed.

"The investigation into the unfortunate incident is still ongoing," Anambra police spokesman Tochukwu Ikenga said in a statement.

SL No.	Tender ID	Name of woks	Corrigendum Publishing Date	Online Tender Opening & Closing (Date & Time)
01.	1044292	CONSTRUCTION OF 10-STORIED MAIN BUILDING WITH SINGLE BASEMENT INCLUDING ADMIN, ACADEMIC, TRAINING CENTER, MEDICAL CENTER, LIBRARY, RESEARCH CENTER, CAFETERIA, BANK, POST OFFICE & TRANSPORTATION POOL ETC. ALONG WITH SANITARY, WATER SUPPLY & ELECTRIFICATION WORKS AT ISLAMIC ARABIC UNIVERSITY, KERANIGANJ UPAZILA, DHAKA DISTRICT.	22-Dec.-2024	Please visit the Tender Notice on the e-GP Website

This is an online Tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. The fees for downloading the e-Tender Documents of following Package from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered Banks branches. Further information and guidelines are available in the Procuring Entity Office, National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).


 (Mujahidul Islam Alif)
 Executive Engineer
 ee.dhak.eed@gmail.com

GD-1247

30,000 foreigners staying here
with expired visas

FROM PAGE 12

A senior official at the intelligence agency, speaking on condition of anonymity, told The Daily Star, "The visas of at least 60 percent of the Indians residing in Bangladesh have expired."

This suggests around 27,000 Indian nationals are staying with expired visas.

China nationals rank second in terms of foreigners living in Bangladesh with expired visas, according to the Special Branch (SB) database.

"There are about 10,000 Chinese nationals currently living in Bangladesh, and 40% of their visas have expired," the official said.

The database shows that around 13,000 US nationals are in the country, but many of them hold dual citizenship, the official said.

As of December 13, there are around 119,000 foreigners living in Bangladesh.

Other foreign nationals include 7,500 from the UK, 4,500 from Canada, 3,500 from Nepal, 4,500 from Russia, 4,500 from Japan, 2,500 from Sri Lanka, 2,000 from Pakistan, 2,000 from Italy, 500 from Belarus, 500 from Indonesia, 500 from Japan, 300 from Bhutan, 150 from Portugal, 100 from Finland, and 22 from Argentina. Additionally, there are 17,928 nationals from other countries, many of whom are from African nations.

Apart from Indian and Chinese nationals, around 1,017 South Korean citizens, 187 Sri Lankans, 231 UK citizens, 97 Canadians, and 461 Nigerians are staying in Bangladesh even after their visas expired.

PENALTIES

According to the visa wing of the DIP, these individuals must renew their visas by paying a penalty before leaving the country or risk legal complications during their stay.

Previously, the visa penalty was Tk 200 per day, with a monthly slab of Tk 10,000, and a maximum fee of Tk 30,000 for a stay of up to three months.

However, the penalty structure was revised on December 5, Nadira Akter, director (Passport, Visa and Inspection) at the DIP, told The Daily Star.

She said that the penalty is now Tk 1,000 per day for the first 15 days after visa expiry.

"After 15 days till 90 days, the penalty is Tk 2,000 per day. There is no longer a limit on the penalty, and from day 91 onwards, the penalty is Tk 3,000 per day."

Asked about the impact of the home ministry's warning, Nadira said it could not be determined immediately, as the warning was only recently issued. "Moreover, we usually receive a large number of visa extension applications towards the end of December due to the holidays. We may have a clearer picture in a month."

EXEMPTION

Officials at the SB and DIP said students are generally not penalised for up to three months after visa expiry. After that, students must pay a penalty.

Additionally, dual nationals are exempt from penalties.

A senior DIP official mentioned that dealing with Chinese and African nationals or students is challenging, especially when their penalties are

high.

"To address this, the government has decided to penalise companies and universities if they fail to notify authorities about the expiration of a foreign employee's or student's visa."

DIP Director Nadira said, "Universities should check the financial statements of foreign students carefully before issuing visa letters, as many African nationals face financial issues."

LEGAL STANDS

The SB's additional inspector general can authorise a case to be filed with the relevant court under the Foreigners Act, 1964, against those with illegal status.

According to sources, foreign nationals are getting away with expired visas due to weaknesses in the legal framework and the lack of a comprehensive database.

Many of these individuals are involved in criminal activities such as drug trafficking, fraud, dealing in counterfeit currency, illegal VoIP businesses, gold smuggling, online casinos, and even human trafficking. Some others are suspected of smuggling money to their home countries via illegal channels.

Enamul Haque Sagor, assistant inspector general of police at the Police Headquarters, told The Daily Star, "No foreign national has the opportunity or legal validity to stay in Bangladesh illegally. Police will take appropriate legal action against foreign nationals who will stay in the country illegally."

"In this case, everyone is requested to follow the instructions of the home ministry."



ESSENTIAL DRUGS COMPANY LIMITED

395-397, Tejgaon Industrial Area
Dhaka- 1208

INTERNATIONAL TENDER NOTICE

EDCL invites **Two Envelope System** International Tender for Supply of Pharmaceutical Raw & Packing Material on C&F@ Dhaka By Air and Chittagong by Sea Basis:-

S.L No.	Tender No. & Date	Name of the Items	Cost of Tender Schedule	Last date of Closing & opening
01.	IMP/R&PM/SEM/37/2024-2025 dated 22/12/2024	Pharmaceutical Raw & Packing Materials: (specification as per tender schedule): 01. Mebendazole BP 02. Cefradine Sterile for Injection (Cefradine with L-Arginine) USP 03. Diclofenac Sodium, Tablet Grade BP 04. Colecalciferol BP (Vitamin D3, Dry Powder) 05. Hankel Glue Dela K-44/46 (Brown Colour) or Hankel glue Optal S 2008	Tk. 1,500.00/set Equivalent to US\$ 13.00 Non-refundable	Closing : 14/01/2025 At 11.00 AM Opening : 14/01/2025 At 11.15 AM
02.	IMP/RM/SEM/38/2024-2025 dated 22/12/2024	Pharmaceutical Raw Materials: (specification as per tender schedule): 01. Benzyl Benzoate BP 02. Lactose BP 03. Stearic Acid BP 04. Sodium Benzoate BP 05. Indomethacin BP	Tk. 2,150.00/set Equivalent to US\$ 18.00 Non-refundable	Closing : 16/01/2025 At 11.00 AM Opening : 16/01/2025 At 11.15 AM
03.	IMP/RM/SEM/39/2024-2025 dated 22/12/2024	Pharmaceutical Raw Materials: (specification as per tender schedule): 01. Azithromycin Dihydrate Compacted USP	Tk. 6,000.00/set Equivalent to US\$ 50.00 Non-refundable	Closing : 19/01/2025 At 11.00 AM Opening : 19/01/2025 At 11.15 AM
04.	IMP/RM/SEM/40/2024-2025 dated 22/12/2024	Pharmaceutical Raw Materials: (specification as per tender schedule): 01. Colloidal Anhydrous Silica (Aerosil-200) BP 02. Ciprofloxacin HCl USP 03. Methyl Hydroxy Benzoate Sodium BP 04. Montelukast Sodium USP 05. Flucloxacillin Sodium Micronized BP	Tk. 3100.00/set Equivalent to US\$ 26.00 Non-refundable	Closing : 21/01/2025 At 11.00 AM Opening : 21/01/2025 At 11.15 AM
05.	IMP/RM/SEM/41/2024-2025 dated 22/12/2024	Pharmaceutical Raw Materials: (specification as per tender schedule): 01. Cetyl Alcohol BP 02. Cefradine Micronised BP 03. Cefixime Trihydrate Compacted USP 04. Croscarmellose Sodium BP	Tk. 4,650.00/set Equivalent to US\$ 39.00 Non-refundable	Closing : 23/01/2025 At 11.00 AM Opening : 23/01/2025 At 11.15 AM

Tender schedule will be sold from the Accounts Department of Essential Drugs Company Limited, Dhaka on payment as stated above during office hours on all working days (except Friday, Saturday and Govt. Holidays). No tender schedule will be sold on the opening date of the tender.

The tender will be accompanied by an amount of Earnest Money in the form of Bank Draft/Pay Order/Bank Guarantee from any Schedule Bank of Bangladesh in favour of "Essential Drugs Company Limited" without which the tender will be considered as non-responsive.

Essential Drugs Company Limited authority reserves the right to accept or reject any or all the tenders without assigning any reason whatsoever.

N.B: This Information is also available at our Website : www.edcl.gov.bd

General Manager
Procurement (CC)
For : Managing Director

Size (10" x 4 Clm)

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR: LATE S. M. ALI

Take strict measures to protect minorities

Recent incidents complicate efforts to combat disinformation

We are deeply concerned by some recent attacks targeting members of the Hindu community, including their homes, temples, and shops. According to a report, the body of a Hindu devotee, Tarun Kumar Dash, was found tied up at Kashimpur crematorium and temple in Natore on Saturday morning. Police and locals suspect he was murdered by criminals who looted cash, valuables, and religious items from the temple. A murder case has been filed in this connection, but no arrests have been made yet. Earlier, according to another report, miscreants vandalised eight idols across three temples in Mymensingh and Dinajpur. These incidents share similarities with another that took place earlier in the month, whose repercussions are still being felt.

That day, on December 3, an angry mob attacked Hindu residents in Manglargaon village, Sunamganj, following allegations of blasphemy against a young Hindu man who apparently posted an insulting comment about the Quran on Facebook. Despite Akash's arrest under the Cyber Security Act, the mob attacked about 40 houses, several shops, and temples, as per our correspondent who visited the area recently. While security has since been beefed up, for many Hindus, Manglargaon serves as a microcosm of the community's insecurities these days. Horrifying accounts given by the victims justify the fear that still haunts them.

We have to acknowledge that these incidents complicate Bangladesh's efforts to counter India's disinformation campaign, which persists despite the positivity expressed during the recent high level talks between the countries. On Friday, just 10 days after Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri's visit, an Indian state minister claimed in the Lok Sabha that 2,200 incidents of violence against minorities occurred in Bangladesh in 2024—a figure rightly dismissed as “misleading” and “highly exaggerated” by Bangladesh. In reality, Ain O Salish Kendra recorded 138 incidents of violence between January and November 2024—which is still concerning but far from India's inflated claims. It bears repeating that most of these attacks were political, not communal, and occurred between August 5 and August 8, when there was no government in place. That said, the continuation of such violence makes it urgent that we address both disinformation and genuine grievances with equal vigour.

While India must stop its disinformation campaign, which only fuels anti-India sentiment and consequently exacerbates insecurities among Hindus, Bangladesh also must ensure its commitment to communal harmony is matched by resolute action. According to government estimates, at least 97 cases have been filed and 75 people arrested for alleged attacks on religious minorities between August 4 and December 10. These efforts must be intensified. The authorities must act swiftly and impartially against anyone inciting or committing such crimes, and those responsible must be punished. The fears of minorities also have to be acknowledged, which cannot be erased with temporary security measures or token compensation. We must adopt a comprehensive strategy combining law enforcement with community engagement to guarantee their rights, safety, and dignity.

Build capacity to curb medical tourism

Inadequate facilities, irregularities driving many patients abroad

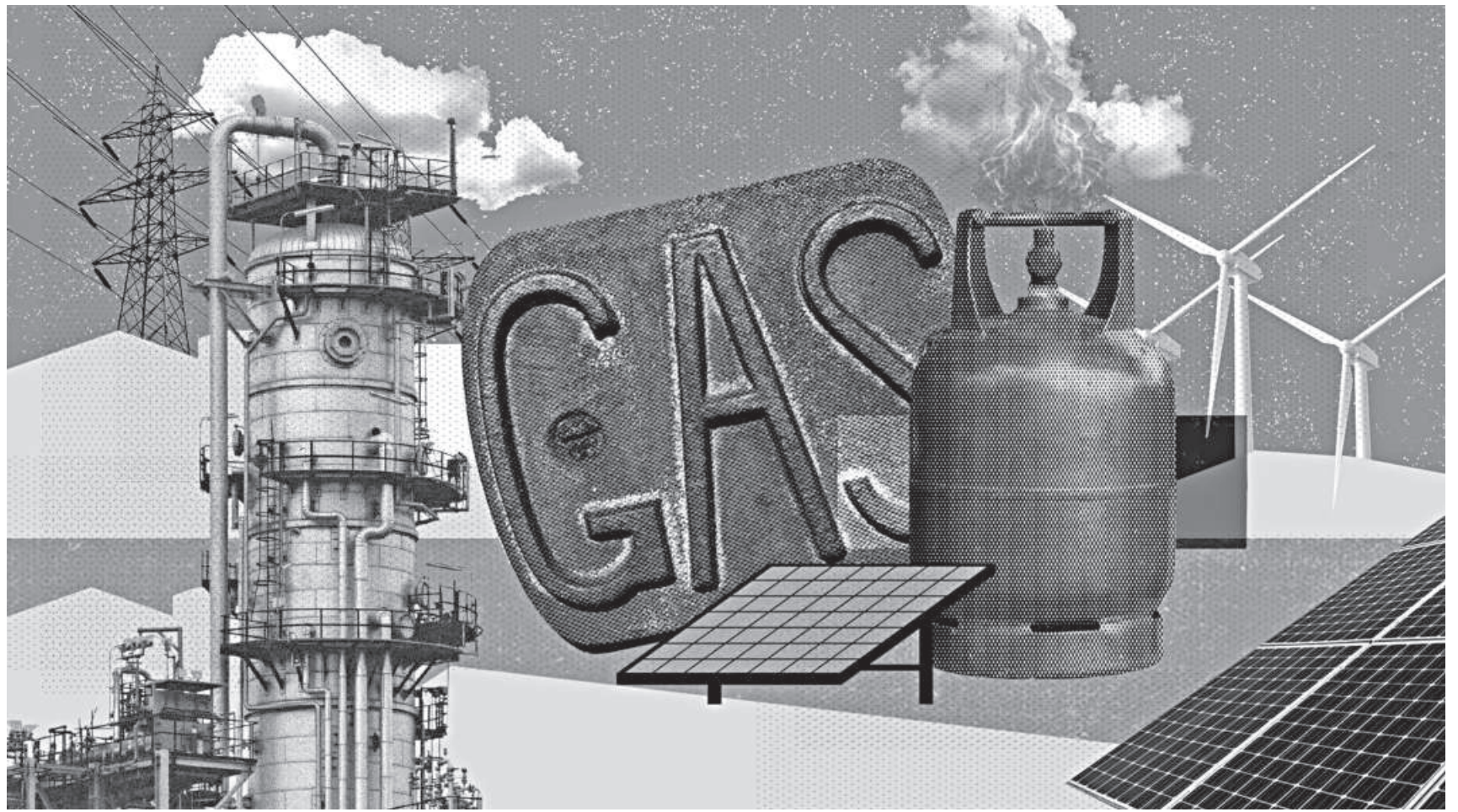
We commend the initiatives the government is taking to improve local treatment for cancer, infertility, and heart and kidney diseases. According to a report by *The Business Standard*, the government aims to encourage patients seeking treatment abroad for these ailments to opt for domestic facilities instead.

While exact figures are unavailable, around 800,000 Bangladeshis reportedly travel abroad annually for medical treatment, spending over \$5 billion. According to a report by *Prothom Alo*, 57 percent of these patients go to India, 20 percent to Thailand, 20 percent to Singapore, and the rest to countries like the UK, Japan, Malaysia, China, and the UAE. But recent Indian visa restrictions have created uncertainties for many, especially those requiring treatment for cancer, cardiopathy, nephropathy, or infertility. Against this backdrop, the government's plan to establish eight cancer hospitals and dialysis centres, each with 100 beds, across the country within the next 6-12 months is a welcome move indeed.

However, outbound medical tourism is primarily driven by gaps in local healthcare, including shortages of facilities, equipment, and skilled staff. For example, the 750-bed “super-specialised” hospital of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University's (BSMMU) is still operating at only 10 percent capacity two years after its inauguration mainly due to a manpower crisis. While health ministry officials assure us that it will soon be fully operational, similar mistakes must be avoided for new projects. Plans to introduce double shifts at government hospitals to ease patient pressure, and asking private hospitals to operate on a non-profit basis for at least six months, are also positive steps.

Increasing the capacity of the Mohammadpur Fertility Services and Training Centre (MFSTC) is another commendable initiative. Meanwhile, amendments to the organ transplant law to expand the donor pool must be done responsibly, ensuring safeguards against exploitation by organ traders. Beyond these ad hoc measures, broader reforms to the healthcare sector are also essential. Patients are often driven abroad due to the nexus between doctors and diagnostic centres or pharmaceutical companies, high costs of medicine and tests, lack of trust in local care, etc. Moreover, improving the behaviour of medical professionals, such as dedicating more time to patients, is crucial.

Our healthcare industry must prioritise service over profit. Alongside government efforts, medical professionals and industry leaders must work collaboratively to build a system that inspires trust and addresses patient needs effectively.



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

The current gas crisis needs governmental focus



Dr Ijaz Hossain is former dean of engineering at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET).

IJAZ HOSSAIN

Why and how did we arrive at the current precarious state of the gas crisis? The answer lies in how the last government managed the sector. To achieve rapid economic growth, industries were allowed to be built without adequate assurance of energy. Additionally, all gas-consuming sectors were allowed to grow, while the relevant authorities knew full well that a severe gas shortfall was looming. Bangladesh Oil, Gas and Mineral Corporation, also known as Petrobangla, started to produce more and more gas at the behest of the government; gas production per day went up from approximately 1,400 MMcf to 2,800 MMcf—doubling in less than eight years. This was only possible because the international oil companies (IOCs) were managing several gas fields, including the large Bibiyana field. During this rapid production growth period, there was practically no addition to gas reserves; the remaining reserves are less than 10 Tcf, projected to be nearly exhausted by 2030. Continuing production from the existing reserves with no exploration activities meant that we would hit a peak, after which the production would start to decline. That is exactly what has happened: the annual production has fallen from the high 2,800 MMcf to just above 1,900 MMcf.

As can be seen from Petrobangla's gas demand projection, prepared several years back, the demand for gas would be 3,777 MMcf in 2024-25. However, Petrobangla now estimates that it is actually closer to

The role of solar PV in alleviating the energy crisis in Bangladesh can hardly be overemphasised. Neglecting gas exploration and promoting renewable energy in the last decade have been two actions that are at the root of the primary energy crisis and are completely against the national interest.

4,000 MMcf. The supply of gas on December 8 was 2,740 MMcf, of which domestic production was 1,919 MMcf and imported LNG was 821 MMcf. Therefore, even compared to the conservative demand projection, there is a shortfall of more than 1,000 MMcf—the actual shortfall is more than 1,200 MMcf. Demand in all sectors except fertiliser is increasing. Therefore, the situation in the middle of next year, when power demand is expected to surge, may be alarming, especially for industrial customers.

It is interesting to study Petrobangla's natural gas demand forecast. According to this, the share of the power sector is projected to decrease from 38.5 percent in FY2024-25 to 37.4 percent in FY2030-31. However, the industry's share including captive generation is projected to increase from 41.3 percent to 46 percent during the same period. This increase will mainly come from a reduced share of the domestic and CNG sectors. Therefore, it is already in Petrobangla's plans to decrease the share of gas to the domestic and CNG sectors. Needless to say, this plan was chalked out to protect industries and the economy. The question is: will the government adhere to Petrobangla's plan for gas supply?

Then again, how does the government plan to tackle the looming gas shortfall in the upcoming summer? Whenever this issue was raised, the

full capacity. Additionally, import from the Adani power plant as well as the previously contracted electricity import from the Indian grid have to be kept fully active. These sources of electricity will lessen the power sector's gas demand and allow more gas to be supplied to the industry sector, which is vital for our export earnings. To prevent further increases in the price of electricity and/or to keep subsidies to a minimum level, oil-fired power plants must be limited to the peak hours. Of course, some load-shedding will become inevitable when the demand becomes very high, but that can be kept at a tolerable level with planning.

There are several things that the government can do to improve the situation and prepare for long-term stability, such as: i) reduce system loss of gas; ii) encourage more rooftop solar PV panel installations; iii) help build more solar power plants; iv) encourage more use of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG); and v) promote energy conservation and energy efficiency.

System loss has become a cancer in the gas supply system. System loss, which Petrobangla calls “unaccounted for gas” (UFG), has been an average of 9.8 percent for the years 2020, 2021 and 2022. In a situation where the country cannot find enough dollars to meet all its obligations, this loss

is the root of the primary energy crisis and are completely against the national interest. Even after years of efforts, the contribution of solar PV electricity to the national grid is less than one percent. Setting up rooftop solar panels is as simple as buying a refrigerator or TV these days. Achieving 500MW of rooftop solar PV in a matter of months is possible if willingness is there. Grid-tied solar parks have been a bane for Bangladesh. Successive governments have failed to achieve the acceptable level of penetration. Land availability, high tax on solar panels, inverters and accessories, transmission infrastructure requirements, and bureaucratic bottlenecks are some of the issues that have hindered progress. The new government has cancelled the ongoing 40 solar park projects as they were initially awarded without bidding. If these projects are quickly revived, then another 500MW can be easily set up within a short time. Rooftop solar PV and solar parks can substantially lower the need for oil-fired power plants, thus lessening some of the burden of purchasing heavy fuel oil (HFO).

LPG is an excellent fuel that can readily replace gas for cooking and transport, thus lessening the demand for gas. If promoted properly, LPG can be the fuel of choice for both cooking

NATIONAL GAS DEMAND FORECAST BY PETROBANGLA

Year	Power (MMcfd)	Share	Industry + Captive Power (MMcfd)	Share	Total (MMcfd)
FY2024-25	1,454	38.5 percent	873+685	41.3 percent	3,777
FY2026-27	1,601	37.3 percent	1,132+735	43.5 percent	4,288
FY2028-29	1,738	37.4 percent	1,319+772	45.0 percent	4,643
FY2030-31	1,827	37.4 percent	1,467+782	46.0 percent	4,885

previous administration mentioned the drilling of 50 wells by this year and 100 more in the coming years. These kinds of reassurances seem encouraging, but will the required actions follow these promises? Are enough rigs active to accomplish this task, and are the requisite funds being provided on time? Most experts and those knowledgeable with how the government works doubt whether the full implementation of the drilling of 100 wells within the stipulated time is possible. Even if the drilling of 100 wells is accomplished, what is the certainty of finding enough gas? The other question that arises is, even if we find significant quantities of gas, how long will it take to add that to the grid? It would appear that the authorities are trying to weather out the next year without firm plans to tackle the situation.

Since the liquefied natural gas (LNG) supply will be limited by the capacities of the two regasification units now being managed by Excelerate Energy, it is imperative to import the maximum possible quantity of gas so that a constant supply of 1,100 MMcf can be maintained throughout the year. Moreover, all efforts should be made to import coal so that all the coal-fired power plants are running at

must be accounted for in LNG cost terms and needs to be given utmost importance. Of course, not all of it can be attributed to theft or pilferage, because there is a technical system loss of four to five percent due to leaks in pipes and valves. UFG is acknowledged by Petrobangla, but there is another gas pilferage hidden in the domestic sector consumption. The domestic sector is shown to consume 11-13 percent of the total gas; since there is no metering, this consumption figure is the result of a theoretical calculation based on hypothetical gas consumption per household. Sector experts believe the actual domestic sector consumption is no more than six to seven percent. Therefore, nearly five percent is unauthorised usage. If this is added to the theft/pilferage portion of UFG, the total gas loss is nearly 10 percent. The magnitude of the problem can be appreciated from the following calculation: assuming the daily supply of 2,800 MMcf and regasified LNG price of \$12 per MMBtu, this loss amounts to \$1.2 billion annually.

The role of solar PV in alleviating the energy crisis in Bangladesh can hardly be overemphasised. Neglecting gas exploration and promoting renewable energy in the last decade have been two actions that are at

and transport. Even though LPG is more expensive than LNG, its use is being advocated because there is no pilferage or other system loss associated with its supply and distribution. Moreover, because it is more expensive than gas, the consumers use it frugally. The main reason for advocating its use for cooking, however, is that Petrobangla and the distribution companies are unable to control misuse, pilferage and leaks in the distribution system.

Energy conservation and energy efficiency are important measures that can save energy, thus assisting in managing the primary energy crisis. In the future, as the Paris Agreement comes into force for all countries, energy transition will be essential to meet commitments to tackle climate change. Therefore, a solid programme in energy conservation/efficiency must be developed. In the short term, it will help in managing the gas and electricity shortfalls, and in the long term, it will deliver the desired goals of achieving net zero emission. Energy conservation measures are behavioural things—such as switching off light bulbs and fixing dripping taps—while energy efficiency involves technical measures, many of these are no/low-cost actions that can easily be driven through awareness campaigns.

A guide to smuggling dreams and national nightmares



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H.M. NAZMUL ALAM

In the vast tapestry of human creativity, few heists match the sheer audacity of the Awami League's 15-year saga of economic escapades. It's as though the government took cues from *Ocean's Eleven*, but instead of Danny Ocean and his suave crew, we had a merry band of bureaucrats, politicians and their cronies, all playing fast and loose with public funds. The white paper report on \$234 billion (approximately Tk 28 lakh crore) in smuggled money isn't just a document; it's the script of a dystopian drama where "the tumour" of corruption metastasised across the economy, creating villains more cunning than Moriarty and institutions more fragile than Humpty Dumpty.

Jerry Maguire's famous line seems to have been taken as gospel by corrupt leaders and business moguls, who perfected the art of money laundering during the Awami League's tenure. According to the white paper, an average of Tk 1.8 lakh crore was smuggled abroad annually—enough to buy private islands, fund covert lunar missions or, more realistically, snap up overpriced condos in Dubai. Bangladeshis now own 532 properties in Dubai, worth a cool \$375 million, which makes one wonder: is Bangladesh exporting labour or landlords?

Meanwhile, the Malaysia My Second Home programme welcomed more than 3,600 Bangladeshis, proving that while the poor migrate for better opportunities, the rich migrate for better villas. These transactions read like chapters from *The Great Gatsby*, where extravagance and deceit coexist in splendid harmony. But unlike Jay Gatsby's mysterious fortune, this loot comes with a paper trail—albeit one guarded by layers of bureaucratic misdirection.

Banks have been called the lifeblood of



VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

economies, but during this regime, they morphed into black holes, swallowing Tk 6.75 lakh crore in distressed loans. That's enough to build more than 13 metro rails or 22 Padma Bridges—or, in the true satirical spirit, one really long bridge to nowhere. Like Littlefinger from the *Game of Thrones*, the regime's players used banks not to build but to destabilise, enriching themselves while the kingdom crumbled.

These "distressed loans" weren't just numbers; they were lifelines for a select few oligarchs. Loans were disbursed with the generosity of Santa Claus, except the gifts were misappropriated funds, and the recipients were neither naughty nor nice—just connected. Remember *The Truman Show*, where

everything was a perfectly crafted illusion? That's precisely how the previous regime approached development projects. Roads, bridges, and hospitals became vanity projects, bloated with unnecessary costs and laced with bribes. It's almost poetic how money flowed like champagne at Gatsby's parties—except it wasn't enjoyed by the citizens who footed the bill.

Even the Annual Development Programme (ADP) was a masterpiece of creative accounting,

quietly pocket the proceeds.

In 1984, George Orwell described a world where truth was malleable, and facts were twisted to serve the ruling party. The Awami League apparently took this as a blueprint, manipulating GDP and inflation statistics to paint a rosy picture. The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) became the Ministry of Truth, churning out data that would make even Big Brother blush.

Meanwhile, corruption flourished

but instead of cooking meth, he's cooking up development budgets. The white paper reveals how inflated project costs were systematically looted, with money laundered through shell companies and overseas investments. Every construction project became a criminal enterprise, and every politician a Gustavo Fring, a respectable façade hiding a sinister core.

As we sift through this economic rubble, the interim government faces a Herculean task: restoring integrity to institutions gutted by corruption. But let's not kid ourselves. There will be no sweeping reforms overnight. Instead, we're in for a gritty reboot, where every move is calculated, and every step forward is hard-earned.

The white paper ends with a plea for political will, but one must wonder: is will alone enough to undo 15-plus years of systemic plunder? Perhaps the answer lies not in politics but in public vigilance. For now, though, the Tk 28 lakh crore smuggled remains a testament to a regime that prioritised greed over governance, corruption over competence, and illusion over integrity.

Like all great tragedies, this saga offers a glimmer of hope. The exposure of these crimes marks a turning point—a chance for redemption. But the road ahead is long, winding, and riddled with potholes, many of which were paid for with our stolen money.

So here's to the future—a cleaner, fairer, and more transparent Bangladesh. And to the past?

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Well, that's best left as a cautionary tale. Let's just hope the next generation writes a different story, one where the villains are vanquished, and the heroes don't need offshore accounts.

How our RMG sector can thrive in 2025



RMG NOTES
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MOSTAFIZ UDDIN

The recent layoffs of approximately 40,000 workers across 15 apparel units of Beximco Group, one of Bangladesh's largest garment manufacturers, have sent shockwaves through the industry because of their timing and sheer scale. Such a significant workforce reduction, attributed to a lack of work orders and difficulties in opening letters of credit for raw material imports, is evidence of the ongoing challenges in the country's ready-made garment (RMG) industry. There are also, however, some issues that are unique to Beximco, so it would be a mistake to be

also potentially deter international buyers concerned about ethical labour practices.

On this front, my hope is that we are through the worst of the worker unrest, and now we can, as an industry, put these issues behind us in 2025.

The political upheaval following the ouster of Sheikh Hasina's regime has led to disruptions in factory operations and supply chains. Such instability risks eroding buyer confidence, resulting in order cancellations. It is difficult to say how much impact this situation has had on the economy as there are



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Workers of 16 factories owned by Beximco block the Nabinagar-Chandra highway in Gazipur for five hours on December 21, 2024, demanding the reopening of the factories.

published.

For context, the garment exports hit \$46.99 billion in FY2022-23, an increase from \$42.613 billion in FY2021-22 and \$31.456 billion in FY2020-21.

The FY2020-21 figure is an outlier as it reflects the tail-end of the pandemic when orders were down across the board. What we are looking at is a fall of around \$11 billion over a 12-month period, which is clearly a cause for concern. In this context, the job losses at Beximco come as no surprise.

It should be noted that in the past year we have seen a change of president in the US, a key market, as well as major political and economic instability in many European

countries such as Germany, France and the UK. While not in recession, the European Union has witnessed sluggish growth in the past 12 months. Many countries are implementing net zero plans which are causing short-term pain as countries attempt to balance growth with environmental commitments.

Despite these issues, I still believe there are ample opportunities for Bangladesh to grow substantially in 2025. But to capitalise on these, the government and the industry must take proactive steps.

The government's decision to provide liquidity support to Beximco for wage payments demonstrates a welcome commitment to stabilise the industry.

Such interventions can prevent immediate crises and provide a buffer for companies to restructure and adapt. More support like this may be required if other flagship companies find themselves in a short-term liquidity crisis.

Moving beyond basic garment manufacturing to high-value products, such as technical textiles and sports apparel, will ultimately be key to opening new markets and reducing dependency on traditional buyers. This shift requires investment in technology and skills development but promises higher profit margins and market stability.

Strengthening industrial relations will also be critical moving forward. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has proposed key reforms to resolve labour unrest, emphasising the importance of constructive social dialogue. Implementing these reforms can lead to a more harmonious industrial environment in Bangladesh, enhancing productivity and worker satisfaction.

In summary, while it is always difficult to see job loss at a major manufacturer, there are steps we can take to mitigate its impact while ensuring that it does not become endemic across the industry. The year 2024 as a whole has been something of an *annus horribilis* for Bangladesh—a year in which political instability combined with an uncertain global economy have combined to create the perfect storm for garment manufacturers. We must hold our nerves as we approach the end of this intense period. The fundamentals of our industry—our safe factories, our capable workforce, and world-class production methods—remain robust.

Let's all work together—industry, government and global stakeholders—to bounce back stronger than ever in 2025.

Strengthening industrial relations will also be critical moving forward. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has proposed key reforms to resolve labour unrest, emphasising the importance of constructive social dialogue.

too alarmed by this news, as concerning as it might be to many.

As I see it, Beximco's problems are evidence of a number of ongoing problems in the garment industry. The layoffs have resulted in significant labour unrest, with workers protesting for unpaid wages and job security. Such disruptions not only affect the immediate workforce but could

many variables at play in the global economy.

However, it was recently reported that Bangladesh's RMG sector recorded export earnings of \$35.88 billion in the calendar year of 2023, according to the revised data from the Export Promotion Bureau. Initially reported at \$47.38 billion, this correction points to an \$11.50 billion decrease in export earnings compared to what was previously

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
1 Denali setting
7 Invites
11 Door
12 Debt reminder
13 Idaho export
14 Wee
15 Stops, as rain
17 Bad writer
20 Stratium
23 "That's disgusting!"
24 Like many roads
26 Avril follower
27 Drake's music
28 Gene messenger
29 Collapse inward
31 Failure
32 Car sticker
33 Tag sale words

- 34 Finally
37 Tabloid staple
39 Voter's page
43 Assistant
44 Pal of George and Jerry
45 Fall short of
46 Checked out
- DOWN**
1 Phone download
2 John, to Ringo
3 Gallery fill
4 Celery serving
5 Designer Spade
6 Oodles
7 Real
8 Boat-building places
9 Family
10 Pig's place

- 16 Incline
17 Like a greenhouse
18 Athlete's optimal effort
19 They can be tapped to pay
21 Tedium
22 Goes through
24 Fantasy villain
25 Gum mass
30 Coffee bar orders
33 Travel aid
35 Aid illegally
36 Mall event
37 Block up
38 Clock numeral
40 Turned on
41 Count starter
42 TV's "— Lasso"



SATURDAY'S ANSWERS



BIRTH CENTENARY OF PROF AF SALAHUDDIN AHMED

Growth of National Consciousness

The present day Banglali nationalism has grown out of a collective feeling of oneness among the people irrespective of their caste and creed inhabiting the geographical territory now comprising Bangladesh. This feeling or consciousness has after 1947 assumed new dimension and character and forms the basis of the new nationalism of Bangladesh

AF SALAHUDDIN AHMED

Although the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent and sovereign state is a fact of recent history, this country has been the home of an ancient civilization. From very early times human species belonging to various races and tribes and coming from different regions had been pouring into this land and had settled here permanently. To mention only few, there were proto-Australoid, Mongoloid, Aryan or Indo-Aryan, and Scythians. They had brought with them their own varied cultural traits. These were intermingled with the indigenous cultural elements of this region and by this process the culture of Bengal was invigorated and transformed through the ages.

At the beginning of the thirteenth century Bengal was conquered by a band of Turko-Afghan horde who were followers of Islam. Before Muslim conquest, however, between the middle of eighth and twelfth centuries, for nearly four hundred years, Bengal was under the rule of the Kings of the Pala dynasty. The Palas were Buddhists. Thereafter a ruling dynasty from the South Indian region known as the Senas established their supremacy in Bengal. The Sena rulers were zealous Hindus. In order to establish the Brahmanical religion firmly in this land a considerable number of Brahman pandits well-versed in Hindu religious scriptures were brought to Bengal during this period and were settled in this country. But traditional Hinduism did not gain firm foothold in Bengal. Till the time of Muslim conquest at the beginning of the thirteenth century the influence of tantrik Buddhist elements which represented a corrupt form of Buddhism could be noticeable in the religious life of the common people of this region. The comparatively easy manner in which the Turkish military adventurer Ikhtiyaruddin Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khilji was able to subdue Bengal with a handful of soldiers was due to the fact that Hinduism did not have strong social roots in this country.

It is generally believed that Islam had come to Bengal long before the Muslim

conquest of the region in the thirteenth century. Some Arab Muslim traders who had come to Bengal around eighth and ninth centuries are said to have established settlements in the coastal regions of Bengal particularly in Noakhali and Chittagong regions.

religion than by its outward external rituals. Hence, narrow communal feeling could never influence the minds of the people of this region. Tagore had truly observed: "Even in ancient times humanist Bengal was looked down upon by the upholders of traditional society and scriptures of India. Anyone visiting this land for purpose other than pilgrimage had to perform penance. That means Bengal has always been free from the orthodoxy of scriptures. Such unorthodox religious orders like those of Buddhists and Jains always held sway over Bengal and its neighboring regions. At that time the land of Magadha (Bihar) along with Bengal was also treated as outcast and was independent. The same independent spirit is also noticeable among the Vaishnavas and bauls of Bengal. They have never allowed their literature and songs to be overburdened by ornamental or scriptural influence. Free from the great weight of scripture and yet how deep and noble is their expression. Our spiritual saints have in the simple language of their devotional songs such as kirtan, baul and bhaitiyali created such incomparable humanistic feelings, sweetness and charm that one cannot reach their depth nor can one surpass their limit. Where can you find the limit or the end of such unbounded human emotion? Like the unchained spirit it is so simple and free from all burdens: its mystery is limitless and boundless.

According to the famous sixteenth century Mughal historian Abul Fazl the name Bangal or Bangla was derived by suffixing the word al to Banga or Vanga

aul-bauls have been far more effective than those of the orthodox and fundamentalist mullahs. These spiritual saints had by their moral qualities and unblemished character been able to win the respect and admiration of all sections of people. The religious tradition which they had initiated was that of spiritual humanism and tolerance which have left an everlasting imprint on the Bengali mind and intellect. In our cultural tradition also the predominant trend has been not of discord or conflict but that of peaceful co-existence of different faiths and the harmonious blending of various creeds. In fact, the characteristic feature of Bengali life and culture is unity in diversity. Before the advent of British colonial rule communal antagonism as we know it today did not exist either in Bengal or in other regions of the Indian subcontinent. For various historical reasons communal antagonism or religious conflict began to manifest

the means of production. Most religions are not confined within particular geographical limits for instance Christianity and Islam are spread over many parts of the world. In the Middle Ages attempts had been made to unify Christendom and the Islamic world under the Holy Roman Empire and Caliphate, but this is not possible at all in modern times. Thus we find that both Christian and Muslim worlds are divided into so many nation states.

Like religion, language also by itself cannot be the basis of nationalism although both religion and language can largely help in awakening national consciousness. The inhabitants of Arabia and north Africa though they all speak Arabic and are adherents of Islam have not been able to form a single nation state.

The most essential feature for the growth of national consciousness is the awareness of a common inheritance. Without this awareness national feeling



AF Salahuddin Ahmed (1924-2014)

towards the Muslim community and caste prejudices of the Hindus also contributed in a great measure to the growth of Muslim separatist feeling and anti-Hindu communalism particularly among the rising generations of the Bengali Muslim middle classes.

The creation by Pakistan would not have been possible without the support of the Bengali Muslims. They were the most vocal champions of the Pakistan movement. In fact, the Bengali Muslims constituted more than half of the Muslim population of India. But soon after the creation of Pakistan the Bengali Muslims began to be concerned regarding their future within the framework of the Pakistan state which came to be dominated by non-Bengali Muslims mostly Punjabis and Urdu speaking immigrants from India. These elements began to exploit the resources of the Eastern region of Pakistan solely for their own benefit. No serious attempt was made to develop the Bengali speaking region. The Bengali Muslims particularly resented the conspiracy of the Pakistani rulers to make Urdu as the state language of Pakistan disregarding the feeling of the Bengalis who were very much proud of their language and cultural heritage. In fact, the Bengali Muslims were now in an introspective mood. They were passing through a period of groping with regard to their cultural identity. So long they were emotionally drawn more towards the events in the Muslim world outside India than to their own country. In the changed situation after the creation of Pakistan, the Bengali Muslims drawn by patriotic feeling were beginning to be aware of their distinct cultural identity. It is in this context that the great Bengali Muslim linguist and scholar and a distinguished exponent of Islamic learning Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah made a remarkable observation:

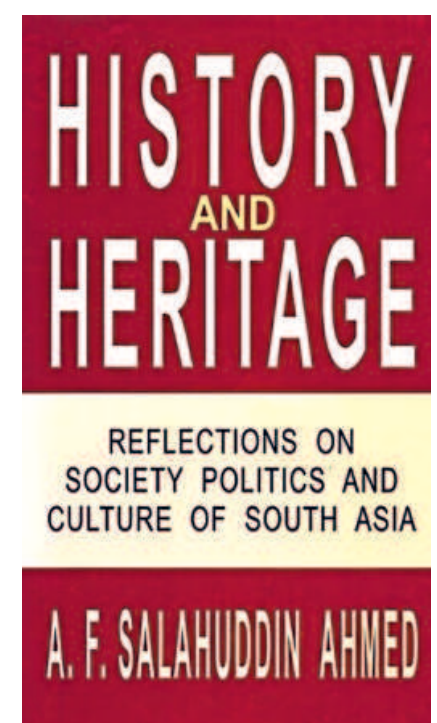
It is a reality that we are Hindus and Muslims, but the greater reality is that we are all Bengalis. It is not the question of any ideal, it is a basic fact. Mother nature has in her own hand imprinted such indelible marks of Bengaliness on our face and language that these cannot be hidden by outward signs of thread or tuft on head [worn by orthodox Hindus] or cap-lungi-beard (worn by Muslims).

Out of this awareness was born in course of time the new distinct Banglali nationalism. This nationalism was new in the sense that it was different from the communal nationalism that had existed due to certain peculiar historical situation in pre-1947 India. The present day Banglali nationalism has grown out of a collective feeling of oneness among the people irrespective of their caste and creed inhabiting the geographical territory now comprising Bangladesh. This feeling or consciousness has after 1947 assumed new dimension and character and forms the basis of the new nationalism of Bangladesh. The people of this region after the creation of Pakistan were in the changed perspective beginning to be conscious of their distinct cultural heritage—a heritage which was not limited within the narrow bounds of any particular religion but a heritage which was composite and humanist in character; and this consciousness of common heritage had led to the creation of the independent and sovereign Bangladesh state.

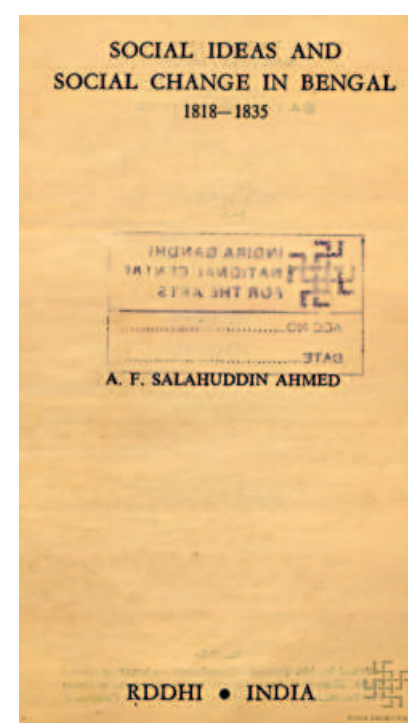
In order to have a clear understanding of the historical background of Bangladesh nationalism it would be necessary to analyze the changes that had taken [place] in the social and political thinking of the Bengali Muslims during the nineteenth century.

This article is the first chapter of the book *Bengali Nationalism and the Emergence of Bangladesh: An Introductory Outline* (International Centre for Bengal Studies, 1994).

AF Salahuddin Ahmed (1924-2014) was a renowned historian, and a national professor of Bangladesh.



Two important works by AF Salahuddin Ahmed



during British rule. It would appear that through their struggle for liberation the Bengalis were able to resurrect their age-old tradition.

The world today is divided into many nation states. Nationalism is the basis of the modern state system. In one sense modern nationalism may be compared with religion. As in the past religion had served as a driving force which had united people of all classes under one banner, so in modern times particularly after the French Revolution the new idea of nationalism seemed to be the most inspiring doctrine of all which welded together diverse sections of people. In fact, the roots of many wars in modern times may be traced to nationalism.

Although the idea of nationalism had been germinating for the past several centuries, it was only after the first world war particularly at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 that nationalism gained universal recognition. It was at this great conference that the principle of self-determination of each nation was for the first time declared unanimously. This declaration was reiterated in much more stronger language by the charter adopted by the United Nations after the second world war. It is however one thing to proclaim an ideal and quite another to implement it. As Hans Kohn has observed:

Nationalism is first and foremost a state of mind, an act of consciousness, which since the French Revolution has become more and more common to mankind.

Nationalism is primarily a territorial concept. It is the collective consciousness or feeling of a people inhabiting within the boundaries of a particular geographical territory. This consciousness or feeling is caused by several factors. In Europe during the period which is known in history as the Middle Ages which lasted for nearly thousand years—from fifth to fifteenth centuries—every aspect of a man's life—politics, society, art, literature and philosophy—was dominated by religion. In those days states were created on the basis of religion. Hence those who held political power did not hesitate to exploit the religious faith and prejudice of the people in order to maintain themselves in power.

Various factors contribute to the growth of national consciousness among the people of a particular region such as race, religion and language. But the rise of modern nationalism is not caused by any single factor. For example, take the case of religion. It is true that throughout the ages religion has succeeded in unifying large sections of mankind; but such unification solely on the basis of religion has not lasted long. The overriding influence of religion, however, has greatly declined owing to economic, social and political changes and the development of science and technology as well as improvement in

or consciousness cannot fully develop notwithstanding the fact that a particular group of people may belong to the same race or religion or speak the same language or live in the same region or are inhabitants of the same state. According to the famous nineteenth century French historian and philosopher Ernest Renan (1823-1892):

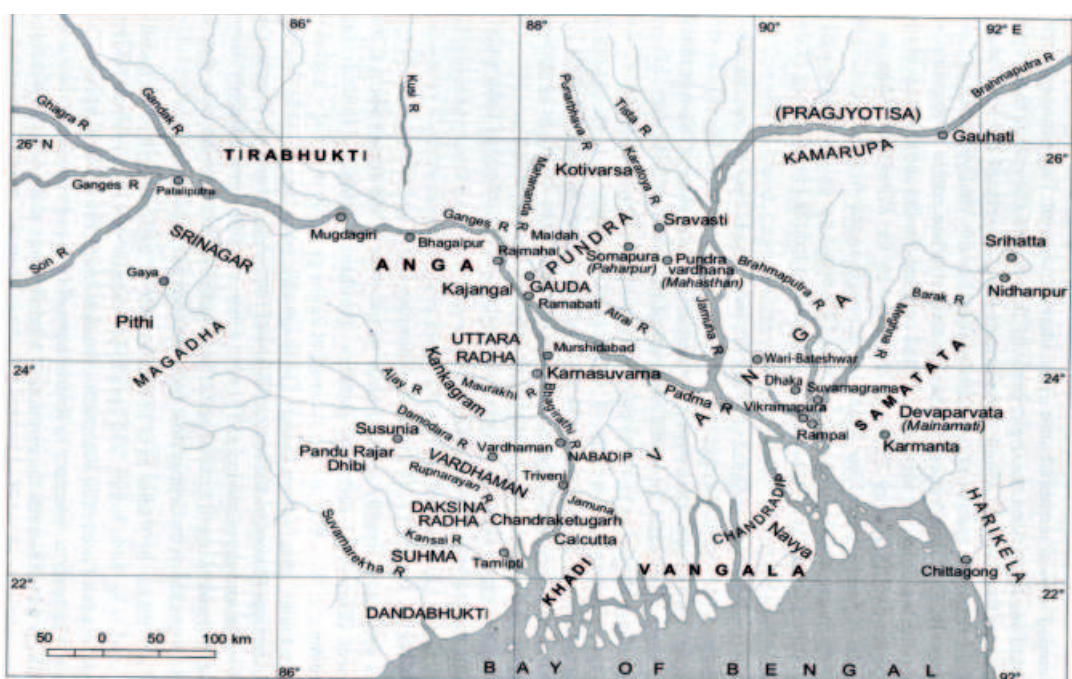
A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which are really one, constitute this soul, this spiritual principle. One is the past, the other is the present. One is the possession in common of a rich inheritance of memories. The other is the present consent, the desire to live together, the will to realize the unimpaird heritage.

A particular community's collective memory of the joys and sorrows of its past days, its consciousness of a glorious inheritance of its distinct way of life in defense of which its innumerable members have fought, have made sacrifices or have laid down their lives—these are the factors that contribute to the making of a nation

Since nationalism is primarily a territorial concept one of its principal sources is unalloyed love for the territory, that is, patriotism. And with this sentiment there arises a common sense of identity among all the people irrespective of religion, caste and color that inhabit the territory. Hence, nationalism is invariably linked with secularism.

In this context we can have a somewhat clear idea about the nature of nationalism in Bangladesh. Not many years ago, the Bengali Muslims had viewed their image and cultural identity from two opposite angles. Should they identify themselves as Bengalis or Muslims? This was the question which had deeply agitated their minds. In seeking answer to this question some had sought to merge their Indigenous Bengali identity into the all-embracing whirlpool of Islam, while others attempted to establish their Bengali identity by completely ignoring the contribution and influence of Islam. Again, there were some individuals who viewed the situation differently at different times.

Although myth is not history, myth may help in making history. Thus Pakistan was created on the basis of a myth. The Muslims of India had come to believe without any historical foundation or logic that since they adhered to one common religious faith namely Islam, they belonged to a distinct nation and possessed a distinct culture of their own. Hence they expected that their hopes and aspirations would be fulfilled if they could establish a distinct state of their own. This was the prime idea behind the Pakistan movement. Between 1940 and 1946 a great majority of the Indian Muslim community seems to have been overtaken by this psychosis. Of course the general Hindu attitude of indifference if not hostility



Ancient Map of Bengal. Source: History of Bangladesh, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2018.

conquest of the region in the thirteenth century. Some Arab Muslim traders who had come to Bengal around eighth and ninth centuries are said to have established settlements in the coastal regions of Bengal particularly in Noakhali and Chittagong regions.

The Muslim conquest of Bengal in the thirteenth century facilitated the spread of Islam. People particularly belonging to the lower social orders who had been suffering from the evils of the Hindu caste system and other prejudices readily accepted Islam being drawn by its simple religious creed and egalitarian social system. But despite conversion to an alien religion they did not forsake their indigenous culture.

It is commonly known that the inhabitants of Bengal have sprung from varied racial background. Besides Dravidian, Aryan, Arab, and Turko-Afghan elements there was another element which came from East Africa. For quite a number of years Bengal was ruled by five or six Abyssinian sultans. There was also a practice of keeping Abyssinian guards at royal palaces. Traces of this Abyssinian descent are still noticeable in the facial features of both Bengali Hindus and Muslims. Again, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the coastal areas of Bengal were infested by Portuguese-Arakanese pirates known as Maghs. Traces of this element can also be found in the physical appearances of some inhabitants of the coastal region.

According to the famous sixteenth century Mughal historian Abul Fazl the name Bangal or Bangla was derived by suffixing the word al to Banga or Vanga

"I'm very excited. I want to be challenged and I've got a few plans against India's bowlers. I feel like I'm moving really nicely so hopefully I get that opportunity."

Australia opener Sam Konstas ahead of the Boxing Day Test between Australia and India



Salahuddin urges buoyed Tigers to strive for consistency

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh team returned yesterday after a successful West Indies tour in which they won their first Test in West Indies since 2009 and clinched their maiden T20I series in the Caribbean.

Although Bangladesh lost the ODI series 3-0, given that the team found new performers in the absence of players like Mushfiqur Rahim, Najmul Hossain Shanto, Towhid Hridoy and Mustafizur Rahman, there are many positive the Tigers can take out of the series.

Jaker Ali shone in all three formats with important runs, Shamim Hossain hit whirlwind innings down the order in the T20Is, Soumya Sarkar looked close to his classy best in white-ball cricket while Mahmudullah Riyad turned back the clock in the ODI series.

The pacers ensured that the hosts did not take the Test series 2-0 as their efforts saw the Tigers earn a series-leveling win in the Jamaica Test.

Speedster Nahid Rana rattled the West Indies in the second Test, Taskin Ahmed and Hasan Mahmud remained affective throughout the tour and all-rounder Mahedi Hasan proved more than handy with his off-spin in the T20Is and was rightful-



ly named the player of the series.

But a series win should not take away focus from the deficiencies that exist in the team, felt Bangladesh's senior assistant coach Mohammed Salahuddin, saying it is high time for the players to start showing more consistency.

"We do have weaknesses, but it would not be right to talk about them publicly," Salahuddin told reporters on his return to the country yesterday.

"Although we won the T20 series, we

have to begin working on those weaknesses. We can't take too long, if we wait, time would get away from us. After spending so much time [in international cricket], we [Bangladesh team] should be in a position where we can play consistent cricket," he added.

A lack of consistency has long plagued the players of the Bangladesh team with batters like Liton Das, who is going through a terrible patch, Afif Hossain and even Hridoy not being consistent at the highest level for long periods.

Inconsistency has been an issue in Soumya's decade long international career as well, however, in the while-ball series in the Caribbean, the left-hander

showed composure and stuck to a process which helped him score runs.

Salahuddin said that players like Soumya are thinking more independently now which is helping their game and credited head coach Phil Simmons for giving players the freedom to think differently.

"The boys are getting used to playing with more responsibility. In our team meetings, they are getting involved and speaking up a lot more. We needed this very much.

"Our primary goal was to change their mentality. The head coach has given them a lot of freedom to change their way of thinking. I feel they are getting some success because of that. In the future, they can do even better," he said.

Salahuddin also spoke about how winning the second Test sparked their aggression for the rest of the tour.

"We got a lot of motivation from the Test series. From there we began thinking whether we should play to survive or become more aggressive. Usually what happens is that the players only think about themselves. How they are playing, how they got out, the boys mostly think about things like that.

"But when we began thinking about the opposition, we started playing aggressive cricket and that changed how we approached the game. This small change happened in the Test series. After that, we felt we have a good chance of doing well in the entire series."



WOMEN'S BCL Joty hits 85 on batters' day

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh skipper Nigar Sultana Joty hit an unbeaten 85 for Central Zone against North Zone on the second day of their BCL match at the Shaheed Kamruzzaman Stadium in Rajshahi.

On a day ruled by batters, off-spinner Jannatul Ferdous bagged a fiver for 85 runs for North Zone. Earlier, Murshida Khatun and Farzana Akter hit fifties before Joty stitched together a 77-run stand with national teammate Shorna Akter and later forged a 62-run stand with Nahida Akter to take Central Zone to 308 for five at stumps. On day one, Nahida had grabbed headlines with a seven-wicket haul for 48.

At Bangla Trac Cricket Academy Ground in Rajshahi, South Zone piled on the runs as opener Ayesha Rahman hit 94 while Rubya Haider made 82. Rabeya Khan also managed 70 as South Zone were bowled out for 347. Spinner Shorifa Khatun bagged four for 67 for East Zone.

Salma Khatun bagged two wickets before end of play as East Zone finished the day on 26 for three.



NCL T20

Metro beat Khulna, set up final with Rangpur

bowlers, conceding 35 in his four overs for the solitary wicket of Naim.

Chasing a paltry total, Khulna batters misfired badly. Four of their batters reached double figures with skipper Nurul Hasan scoring the highest 22 off 18 balls, but none of them could bat through and take them home.

Khulna Division's experienced stars did not turn up as Dhaka Metro clinched the second qualifier by 38 runs to qualify for the final of the National Cricket League (NCL) T20 at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Metro, who went undefeated in the league phase, will get a chance to avenge their defeat in the first qualifier and take home the trophy when they take on Rangpur Division in the final in Sylhet on Tuesday.

Yesterday, batting first, Metro hobbled to 119-8 as only three of their batters reached double figures with opener and captain Mohammad Naim top scoring with 57 off 53 balls.

Masum Khan, Sheikh Parvez Jibon and Mehedi Hasan Rana took two wickets each while Mustafizur Rahman, on his return, finished as the most expensive of the Khulna

Although the league phase saw some big totals, both the qualifiers and the eliminator were low-scoring games. Khulna batter Mithun felt playing too many matches in quick succession caused this.

"There were many consecutive matches and the wicket didn't get rest," Mithun said in a press conference. "Next time this tournament takes place, it would be better if it takes place over a longer period."

WOMEN'S U-19 ASIA CUP Bangladesh lose to India in final

SPORTS REPORTER

India clinched the title of the inaugural ACC Women's U-19 Asia Cup beating Bangladesh by 41 runs in the final in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Bangladesh, despite faring pretty well with the ball to restrict the opposition to 117 for seven after opting to bowl first, failed to show fight with the bat.

Right arm pacer Farzana Easmin took four for 31 while off-spinner Nishita Akter took two 23 as the bowlers kept India under a tight leash, despite a 47 ball 52 from opener Gongadi Trisha.



The women in red and green started their chase pretty well, reaching 40 in the seventh over losing two wickets, however, things started to go downhill since then. Apart from Fahomida Choya (18) and Juairiya Ferdous (22), none of the others managed to reach double digit as Bangladesh were eventually bowled out for 76 runs in 18.3 overs, conceding a heavy defeat.

This was Bangladesh's second defeat in the tournament and second to India, having lost by eight wickets against the same opposition in Super 4 stage.

Root back in England ODI squad

REUTERS

Joe Root returned to England's one-day international squad for the first time since their ill-fated World Cup title defence in November 2023, as the country's cricket board named players on Sunday for a white-ball tour of India and the Champions Trophy.

The England and Wales Cricket Board added that Ben Stokes was not considered for selection as the test skipper continues to be assessed following a left hamstring injury sustained in their big defeat by New Zealand in the third test this month.

The talismanic all-rounder had come out of retirement in the 50-overs format to play in last year's World Cup, where England finished a dismal seventh out of 10 teams.

England play five Twenty20 internationals and three ODIs against India starting on Jan. 22 before heading to Pakistan for the Champions Trophy in February and March.

Pace bowler Mark Wood returned to both squads after missing the tours of Pakistan and New Zealand with an elbow injury, but there was no spot for Sam Curran or Reece Topley.

Rising batsman Jacob Bethell was also rewarded for his good form in New Zealand.

Leg-spinner Rehan Ahmed joined the T20 unit, while veteran Rohan Ahmed was named only for the ODIs.

The Jos Buttler-led squads will depart on Jan. 17 with head coach Brendon McCullum, who was put in charge of the limited-overs sides in September.



Hockey set to return after seven months

SPORTS REPORTER

The ad-hoc committee of Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) is set to start its work by holding Victory Day Hockey Competition with four services teams, BKSP and Hockey Players' Welfare Unity, a team comprising national, age-group and former national players.

Star-studded Bangladesh Navy will play against BKSP in the opening match today as six teams, split into two groups, will fight for the title, which will be decided on December 30.

Services teams like Navy, Army, Air Force and Police usually take part in invitational tournaments regularly but the inclusion of Hockey Players' Welfare Unity caught everyone's attention due to the presence of current and former national players.

"Players who are not involved with services teams requested us to include them in the competition. They will play under the banner of Hockey Players' Welfare Unity, a move we welcomed," BHF general secretary Lt Col (Rtd) Riazul Hasan said at a press conference at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

National forward Pushkor Khisha Mimo

informed that they have just got together to play the tournament as there has been no competition since the Dhaka Premier Division Hockey League ended in April.

"Bangladesh Navy, Army, Air Force, Police and even BKSP have some fixed players but there are also many players outside of those teams. They would have been sitting idle. So we have taken the initiative to play the competition because of our love towards hockey," Mimo told The Daily Star over phone.

Mimo also informed that a couple of individuals promised them to provide them with expenditures of jerseys, food and running of the camp as the players won't benefit from this tournament.

The national forward also urged the new committee to keep hockey on the ground.

"We want the continuation of hockey from the ad-hoc committee through the premier hockey league and franchise league. The committee should think of the players who are not involved with the service teams instead of thinking only about the services teams," said Mimo.

BHF general secretary Riazul said that they want to run the sport without any interruption and the victory day tournament is the first step towards that goal.



Simeone's Atletico on a roll

Alexander Sorloth struck deep in stoppage time to hand Atletico Madrid a 2-1 comeback win at Barcelona on Saturday that moved them top of LaLiga, with 41 points from 18 matches, three ahead of the Catalans who have played a game more. Pedri put the hosts ahead in the first half but Rodrigo De Paul levelled after the break before Sorloth found the net in the sixth minute of stoppage time.

Atletico handed Barcelona a third straight home league defeat.

The win was Atletico's 12th straight victory in all competitions.

Sorloth's stoppage time winner saw Atletico win their first match away at Barcelona since 2006. It is also the first time that the Catalans lost to a Diego Simeone-led Atletico team at home.



PHOTO: REUTERS

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BNP's demand for polls irks some people

Says Fakhrul

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A group of people become unhappy whenever the BNP raises the issue of the upcoming national election, party Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir told a rally in Panchagarh yesterday.



"We want to reclaim our voting rights. I want to cast my vote and give it to whoever I please. But when we talk about this, some people become dissatisfied and question why we keep bringing up the issue of voting," Fakhrul said this while addressing the gathering at Sakoa High School ground.

"Yes, we demand voting rights because if we can cast our votes, we will be able to elect the right people for ourselves. Those representatives will work for our welfare."

Fakhrul said the concept of reforms is not well understood by many in the country.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3



Occupying the street and footpath from Banglamotor to Moghbazar intersection, cars are accessorised and repaired by motor parts shops and garages. It causes congestion on one of the busiest streets in the capital.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

30,000 foreigners staying here with expired visas

Most of them from India, China, say intelligence, immigration officials

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

At least 30,000 foreign nationals, mostly from India and China, are currently residing in Bangladesh with expired visas and have yet to apply for extensions or renewals of their documents.

The matter came to light after speaking to sources at an intelligence agency and the visa wing of the Department of Immigration and Passports (DIP).

On December 8, the Ministry of Home Affairs advised foreign nationals, who are living in Bangladesh without valid visas, to promptly take necessary action as per existing regulation, warning that the failure to do so would result in legal repercussions.

Over the past month, 15,000 applications have been filed by foreigners seeking visa extensions or renewals.

According to available data, Indians make up the largest group of foreigners in the country with expired visas.

As of December 13, around 45,000 Indians were living in Bangladesh, with most of them here in professional capacity and the rest being students.

SEE PAGE 7 COL 4

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE

Man found near Indian border

Family claims he was taken by Rab 16 months ago; victim tells cops he was pushed into India, served 7 months there

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A 20-year-old man from Dhaka's Dhamrai, who had allegedly been forcibly disappeared since August 29, 2023, showed up yesterday at a police station close to the border between Bangladesh and India in Chapainawabganj.



Rahmatullah

Rahmatullah was picked up from his home by men in plainclothes. Those who picked him up used a vehicle that had "Rab-4" written on it, the family told a press conference in February this year.

Yesterday afternoon, Rahmatullah appeared at Gomastapur Police Station in Chapainawabganj and told the police personnel there that he had been pushed across the border into India after he had been forcibly disappeared for nine months.

Superintendent of Chapainawabganj Police Md Rezaul Karim said that Rahmatullah told police that he served seven months in an Indian prison for illegal entry into that country. Prior to that, he was moved around different locations during his nine months of detention in Bangladesh.

Nine months after he was taken, Rahmatullah was dropped off at the Jashore border one night by two men on a motorbike and was told to walk towards India, the SP said quoting him.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3

Summit Group accused of Tk 1,112cr tax evasion

Company denies any wrongdoing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The National Board of Revenue has alleged that two entities under Summit Group failed to deduct taxes at source on dividend payments, resulting in about Tk 1,112 crore in unpaid taxes.

Summit Corporation Limited, one of the country's largest conglomerates, is accused of not deducting the mandatory 15 percent tax at source when it paid dividends to Summit Power International, a Singapore-based company and its parent entity.

Additionally, Summit Power Limited allegedly failed to withhold the required tax on dividends paid to Summit Corporation Limited, which holds a majority stake in the company.

Summit Group has refuted the allegations, asserting its commitment to legal compliance.

The Central Intelligence Cell (CIC) of the NBR conducted a probe into the tax practices of Summit Group as part of a broader examination of industrial giants, including Bashundhara Group, Beximco, Nassa Group, Orion Group

and S Alam Group, and Third Wave Technologies (Nagad).

The investigations were launched following the installation of an interim government in August.

"This is one of the largest tax deduction at source (TDS) cases we've encountered," said a senior CIC official. The probe, which spanned over six weeks, involved an extensive review of shareholdings, dividend declarations, and payment records of Summit Power Limited.

Summit Power, with a paid-up capital of Tk 1,067 crore, has a diverse shareholder base, including Summit Corporation (63.19 percent), Euro Hub Investments Limited (3.65 percent), institutional investors (18.52 percent), and public investors (14.64 percent).

Under Section 117 of the Income Tax Act, companies registered in Bangladesh are required to deduct taxes at source on dividend payments. However, investigators found that Summit Power failed to comply with this obligation for dividends paid to Summit Corporation.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 7

Dense fog hampers road, river transport

One killed, at least 24 injured in accidents

STAR REPORT

Poor visibility caused by dense fog led to two accidents yesterday – a 10-car pileup in Munshiganj and a collision between two ferries in Chandpur – leaving one dead and two dozens injured.

In Munshiganj, a man was killed and around 15 others were injured in a series of crashes involving multiple vehicles on the Dhaka-Mawa highway early in the morning.

The deceased was identified as Forhad, 40, driver of a private car. He was a resident of Daiyar village in Faridpur's Bhanga upazila, said police.

The accident took place in Shologhar area under Sreenagar upazila around 6:00am, said Abdul Quader Jilani, officer-in-charge (OC) of Hasara Highway Police Station.

The chain of crashes began when a lorry struck a private car from behind. Subsequently, a bus, a microbus, and several other vehicles also hit the private

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3

CONFLICT IN RAKHINE

Dhaka cannot engage with non-state actors

Says Touhid

BSS, Dhaka

Bangladesh has called on Myanmar to address the ongoing crisis in the Rakhine state and its borders, stressing that it cannot engage in negotiations with non-state actors, such as the Arakan Army.

Foreign Affairs Adviser Md Touhid Hossain conveyed this message to Myanmar during an informal consultation held on Thursday in Thailand.

During the meeting, Touhid also emphasised that peace and stability in the region would remain elusive without a resolution to the Rohingya crisis.

Senior representatives from Bangladesh, Myanmar, India, China, Laos, and other nations attended the consultation focused on Myanmar.

"I informed Myanmar that the border is no longer under your control. Non-state actors like the Arakan Army are controlling it. As a state, we cannot engage with them. Myanmar must find a way to resolve the issues related to the border and Rakhine," Touhid yesterday told reporters in the capital, sharing details of his discussions at the consultation.

In reply, Myanmar said they are trying to regain control of the border.

Touhid said that the meeting focused on a few key issues regarding Myanmar, including the border, drug trafficking, arms smuggling, human trafficking, and its political future.



SEE PAGE 5 COL 5

Israeli strikes kill 28 in Gaza Strip

Four children among dead; military orders evacuation of Kamal Adwan Hospital

REUTERS, Cairo

Israeli military strikes across the Gaza Strip killed at least 28 Palestinians, eight of them at a school sheltering displaced families in Gaza City, medics said, as the Israeli military ordered the evacuation of Kamal Adwan Hospital in the north.

Palestinian medics said eight people, including four children, were killed in the Musa Bin Nusayr School that sheltered displaced families in Gaza City.

The Israeli military said in a statement the strike targeted Hamas members operating from a command centre embedded inside the school. It said Hamas fighters used the place to plan and execute attacks against Israeli forces.

Also in Gaza City, medics said four Palestinians were killed when an airstrike hit a car. At least five other Palestinians were killed in two separate airstrikes in Rafah and Khan Younis south of the enclave.

Civil agency spokesman Mahmud Bassal said in a statement that at least 13 people were killed in an air strike on a house in central Gaza's Deir el-Balah.

In the northern Gaza town of Beit Lahiya, where the army has operated since October, Hussam Abu Safiya, the director of Kamal Adwan Hospital, said the army ordered staff to evacuate the hospital and move patients and injured people toward another hospital in the area.



A youth searches for survivors at the site of an Israeli strike that targeted a house in the Deir el-Balah area in the central Gaza Strip yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

EVMs won't be used in future polls

Says chief of electoral reform commission

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

No election will be held using Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), Badiul Alam Majumdar, chief of the Electoral Reform Commission, said yesterday.



After a meeting with different stakeholders at the Chattogram Deputy Commissioner's office, he said, "We all know what happened before. Everybody has knowledge about that. If there is any new information, we have asked for it to be submitted."

"The electoral system was sent into exile. Now everyone is determined to ensure that crimes like killings and crimes against humanity are not repeated. We have sat with political parties and they also emphasised on holding a free and fair election by presenting several recommendations," he added.

Badiul said their proposals for correcting the errors in the voter list would

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