

4 dead, 3 injured in Akij factory explosion in Habiganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Four workers were killed, and three others critically injured in a cylinder explosion at an under-construction factory of Akij Group in Habiganj's Bahubal upazila yesterday.

Two of the deceased, identified as Mizan Gazi and Mahfuz, are from Chandpur and were workers of the factory, said Azizur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Bahubal Police Station.

The identities of the two other victims could not be known immediately.

Zahirul Islam, assistant superintendent of police (Nabiganj-Bahubal circle), said the cylinder exploded around 9:00am when the workers were checking gas pressure at the factory's sub-station.

The roof of the factory was blown away in the blast.

Two workers died on the spot, while the others were critically injured.

Five individuals were rushed to MAG Osmani Medical College in Sylhet, but two succumbed to their injuries on the way, OC Azizur said, quoting locals.

The rest of the injured were undergoing treatment in critical condition, he added.

PRY, SECONDARY EDUCATION New textbooks see changes over independence declaration

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

The new textbooks for primary and secondary students will now state that Ziaur Rahman declared the independence of Bangladesh in 1971.

Earlier, the books mentioned that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman made the declaration.

The new textbooks, which will have several changes, are currently being printed and will be distributed among the students from today (January 1).

Since 2010, a year after Sheikh Hasina came to power for the second time, the textbooks had mentioned that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declared independence via a wireless message just before he was arrested by the Pakistan army on March 26, 1971.

Prof AKM Reazul Hassan, chairman of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board, said the new textbooks for the 2025 academic year will state that "on March 26, 1971, Ziaur Rahman declared the independence of Bangladesh, and on March 27, he made

"The new textbooks for the 2025 academic year will state that 'on March 26, 1971, Ziaur Rahman declared the independence of Bangladesh, and on March 27, he made another declaration of independence on behalf of Bangabandhu'."

NCTB Chairman Reazul Hassan

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The information has been included in the free textbooks where the matter of the declaration was mentioned, he added.

Writer and researcher Rakkhal Raha, who was involved in the process of

making changes in the textbooks, said they tried to free the textbooks from "exaggerated, imposed history".

"Those who revised the textbooks found that it wasn't a fact-based information that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman sent the wireless message [declaring independence] while being arrested by the Pakistani army, and so they decided to remove it."

Earlier, in the textbooks of classes one to 10, the information on who made the declaration of independence was changed according to the government in power.

It is widely believed among supporters of Awami League that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had made the announcement, and that Ziaur Rahman, who was an army major and later a sector commander of the Liberation War, merely read out the declaration upon Mujib's instructions.

Meanwhile, supporters of BNP believe their party founder and also former president of the country Ziaur

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

Govt warns

FROM PAGE 1

Currently, 75 percent of promotions to deputy secretary are allocated to administration cadre officials, with the remaining 25 percent going to other cadres.

The reform commission recently proposed changing this ratio to 50:50, sparking protests from both sides. Administration cadre officers are demanding that 100 percent of promotions be reserved for them, while officials from other cadres are calling for equal opportunities.

The protests have included rallies, work stoppages, human chains, and discussions.

Despite the ministry's warning, officials from the 25 non-administration cadres are planning a discussion at the Krishibid Institution Bangladesh in the capital on January 3.

Mohammad Mofizur Rahman, coordinator of the non-administration cadre officials' movement, said, "We will hold a discussion that will not violate the code of conduct. Therefore, we will proceed with the programme as planned."

In its notice yesterday, the public administration ministry said some government officials had violated the code of conduct through activities such as protests, human chains, and inappropriate social media posts.

The ministry warned that such actions tarnish the image of government employees and emphasised the need to comply with Rule 30 of the code.

The Rule 30 prohibits publicly opposing or obstructing government decisions or orders, directly or indirectly, expressing dissatisfaction or discontentment publicly with government decisions; exerting undue influence to alter, revise, or cancel any government decision; and creating or inciting dissatisfaction or hostility among government employees.

According to the notice, violations of these rules will be considered misconduct under the Government Servants (Discipline and Appeal) Rules, 2018, and the offenders will face disciplinary actions.

MINISTRY FOR ACTION AGAINST SEVEN OFFICIALS
The public administration ministry has recently written to several other ministries urging actions against at least seven cadre officials for violating the rules.

Among the seven, Sadiqur Rahman Sabuj, former regional executive officer (administration cadre) of Gazipur City Corporation, has already been suspended for making inflammatory remarks about other cadres on Facebook.

The public administration ministry has attached copies of the officials' controversial social media posts to the letters. The Daily Star has seen these copies.

Criticising the officials' actions, Firoz Mia, a former additional secretary and public administration expert, said, "They are behaving like trade union [CBA] leaders, which is unacceptable. The government should have taken stricter measures against them earlier."

Nation steps into a year of hope

FROM PAGE 1

Expectations weigh heavily on Yunus and his colleagues. Their path is riddled with obstacles:

simmering grievances, deep political divides, and a system burdened by the oppressive legacy of Sheikh Hasina's 15-year rule. Yunus's vision is bold, even audacious, but it will be judged against the harsh realities of governance more acutely in 2025. Then there are lingering echoes of vengeance and retribution that threaten to overshadow his aspirations.

POLITICAL LANDSCAPE
For some, 2025 offers a fresh slate – a chance to transcend political conflicts rooted in Hasina's rule and embrace a new, inclusive chapter. For others, it raises pressing questions: Will the political landscape stabilise, or will tensions deepen?

Can the BNP, a key political voice, rise above the entrenched culture of vengeance that has long defined the nation's politics? If the BNP hopes to lead the country towards a more stable and inclusive future, it must break free from the past government's toxic legacy and chart a new course. Rising above the politics of retribution is no easy task, particularly when grievances run deep and old wounds remain unhealed. However, the BNP has an opportunity to lead by example.

So far, the BNP has stepped forward with a voice of reason during a tumultuous time, firmly opposing the removal of Bangladesh's President Mohammed Shahabuddin from office and any move to ban political parties. In doing so, it positioned itself as a stabilising force, acting as a bulwark against the rising tide of mob justice and chaos.

To lay down its vision for the future, the BNP has submitted a comprehensive set of recommendations to the Constitution Reform Commission. It proposed constitutional reforms to foster democratic governance. One key

recommendation is the introduction of a bicameral parliament to ensure broader representation in state governance. To prevent the concentration of power and promote democratic leadership transitions, the BNP proposed amending the constitution to restrict any individual from serving as prime minister for more than two consecutive terms. The BNP calls for a recalibration of executive powers to enhance the system of checks and balances.

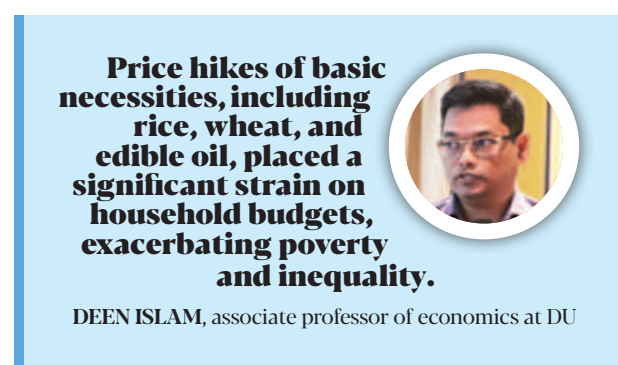
DIFFICULT ECONOMIC PATH
The year 2025 stands poised between optimism and caution, marked by contrasts. Politically, it

precarious environment, marred by the breakdown of law and order?

For the poorest and most vulnerable in Bangladesh, 2024 was a year of unrelenting hardship. The sharp rise in the cost of essential goods – food, fuel, and other daily staples – hit those with fragile finances the hardest, according to economists.

"Price hikes of basic necessities, including rice, wheat, and edible oil, placed a significant strain on household budgets, exacerbating poverty and inequality," said Deen Islam, associate professor of economics at Dhaka University.

Then came the floods.



promises high drama and significant turning points with a national election on the horizon. Economically, the path is far more difficult.

The business and investment climate faces uncertainty and peril. Political transition often brings instability, and for the private sector, this could dampen confidence and growth. Inflationary pressures, a lingering energy crisis, and shrinking global demand for key exports, such as garments, create a challenging environment for local businesses. Foreign investors, wary of instability, are likely to adopt a cautious approach as they assess the interim government's progress on law and order.

Can the government revive the economy amid global and domestic uncertainties? And how will businesses navigate a

Two deluges swept through key agricultural regions, decimating crops, upending livelihoods, and plunging local food systems into crisis. For millions, the year wasn't just marked by rising costs but by the gnawing fear that tomorrow might bring even less.

Looking ahead to 2025, global market trends suggest that the prices of essential commodities are likely to rise further, driven by supply chain disruptions and climatic challenges.

"To prevent a deepening crisis, the interim government must adopt proactive policies to safeguard the food supply and protect vulnerable populations," Deen Islam said.

The past year will go down in history as a period of tests exposing deep economic wounds, data manipulation,

and the unravelling of a carefully constructed facade of development. The recently released White Paper reveals the full extent of the economic damage caused by years of mismanagement, corruption, and systemic flaws. Manipulated data, lax financial oversight, reckless macroeconomic policies, and the plundering of public funds have inflicted deep wounds on the economy – far deeper than previously suspected.

What was once hailed as a global success story has been unmasked as a fragile facade, built on unstable foundations. At the heart of the problem lies a grim truth: years of unchecked corruption, abuse of public resources, and a kleptocratic culture prioritising personal gain over public good. This legacy has weakened institutions and battered the economy.

While the challenges of 2024 exposed the vulnerabilities in Bangladesh's economic framework, they also provided an opportunity for transformative change. By prioritising the welfare of its most vulnerable citizens and addressing structural weaknesses, Bangladesh can emerge stronger and more prepared for future economic uncertainties.

NATIONAL CONSENSUS
In a bold move, Yunus announced the formation of six reform commissions in September to address some of the nation's toughest challenges. These commissions aim to reform the judiciary, overhaul the electoral system, strengthen state administration, restructure the police, root out corruption, and revise the constitution. Their recommendations are expected in January. Dialogues with political parties will follow, setting the stage for reforms.

Perhaps the greatest challenge will be the rebuilding of the nation's institutions, systematically hollowed out during Hasina's tenure. Under her leadership,

independence was sacrificed for subservience, and institutions were moulded to serve party interests rather than public needs. Rebuilding these pillars of governance requires not only structural changes but also a profound moral reckoning.

Adding to this ambitious agenda, Yunus has established a commission aimed at forging a national consensus. This commission seeks to bridge the deep divides fracturing Bangladesh's society and politics, fostering dialogue among parties to chart a shared vision for the nation's future – a vision rooted in unity rather than division.

For Yunus, the stakes are high. Success in building consensus could transform the fragile optimism of 2025 into a genuine turning point. Failure, however, risks reinforcing the cycle of missed opportunities. In a country scarred by political vengeance and distrust, this effort may be the most delicate – and decisive – of all.

The successful completion of a national election by the end of 2025 or early 2026 could mark a significant turning point. An election would signal a return to democratic processes, fostering political stability and restoring confidence across the economy. Stability is crucial for economic performance, as prolonged uncertainty deters investment, stalls growth and erodes public trust.

"In the long run, a democratically elected political government can foster a good business and investment environment in Bangladesh by implementing some of the reforms recommended by the interim government," said Zaved Akhtar, president of the Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The task ahead is monumental. Undoing the damage requires systemic reforms, transparency, accountability, and a renewed trust in governance.

Make July uprising

FROM PAGE 1

said, "We still do not have a document on the proclamation of the July mass uprising. It must be issued by January 15. That day we want to reunite here with the proclamation."

"Our struggle against fascism and the Awami League will continue. Many couldn't accept our uprising and that is why there are conspiracies afoot at the Secretariat, in the police, and even in the courts."

Hinting at government officials, he said, "Accept the reality. Killer Hasina, who had taken away the people's right to vote by torturing political parties, won't be rehabilitated."

Nasiruddin Patwary, the convener of the Jatiya Nagorik Committee, said the proclamation should incorporate the spirit of July uprising that ousted the fascist government with the blood of hundreds of martyrs.

"We want a new Bangladesh that will not tolerate any intimidation by any country; we want a country without any tender manipulation and extortion. We want the government to immediately bring the Awami League and Sheikh Hasina to book," he said.

Mentioning that the gathering was a renewed effort to press home the demand for justice by the families of the martyred and the injured, Nasiruddin said, "We will fight until justice is ensured."

Akhtar Hossain, member secretary of the Jatiya Nagorik Committee, said people want a new

constitution. "The next election will be held to elect a constituent assembly which will decide on the new constitution and later will play the role of the legislature."

He said the government's announcement that it would write the proclamation is a victory for the Students Against Discrimination.

Member secretary Arif Sohel of Students Against Discrimination said, "We learned from the uprising that the meaning of independence is the rights of farmers, labourers, the basic human rights of all people, their right to food, education and health. All these should be in the proclamation."

Sarjis Alam, an organiser of the Jatiya Nagorik Committee, said the interim government should focus on breaking up the syndicates that have the markets in their grips.

Spokesperson of the Students Against Discrimination and the Jatiya Nagorik Committee Umama Fatima and Samantha Sharmin, and organisers of the platforms in the districts and universities also spoke at the event.

The event began with a one-minute silence in remembrance of those martyred in the uprising.

Abul Hasan, father of martyred Shahriar Hasan Alvi, made the introductory speech. He said, "We feel our children every moment. Our tears will never dry. Murderer Hasina, her cabinet members, and the helmet-forces must be brought to book."

Govt decision

FROM PAGE 1

student group and its organisation for citizens, the Nagorik Committee, sat for separate meetings at their offices in Bangla Motor around 10:00pm.

After intense drama for hours, they decided to hold a "March for Unity" instead of making the proclamation.

In the beginning, some of them became agitated and still wanted to go ahead with the programme while some wanted to call off the event.

Asif Mahmud, an adviser to the Yunus government and a key organiser of the student movement, was among the leaders who tried to calm the activists.

At the meeting of the student platform, the discussion started with an announcement by a top leader that the December 31 programme would be postponed, three leaders who were present at the meeting told The Daily Star, requesting to be unnamed.

Many resented his announcement, which he made "without consulting other leaders".

Organisers, who were entitled with responsibilities to bring activists from different districts and upazilas, presented a calculation of how many buses would bring how many people from each district.

Outside the office, the organisers were seen talking over their phones.

One of the organisers said buses had set off, but now they stopped midway, awaiting a decision. Nothing had been finalised yet.

At the other meeting, of the Nagorik Committee, a group of leaders expressed their dissatisfaction over being in the dark about the government's decision.

"They raised questions as to why Nagorik Committee Member Secretary Akhtar Hossain was not informed of the government's decision. However, at the meeting, Akhtar remained firm that the programme would be held at any cost," one member of the committee

told this newspaper.

They were holding repeated meetings separately and jointly at the two platform's offices.

Akhtar left the office around 10:45pm, followed by Joint Convener Sarwar Tushar shortly afterwards. Neither of them spoke to the media.

As per sources inside the two platforms, Adviser Asif Mahmud sat with the two groups and tried to explain the government's decision. He left the offices around 11:15pm.

Meanwhile, two groups were demonstrating outside the building. They chanted slogans demanding that the programme be held.

Hasnat Abdullah, the convener of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, arrived at the offices with Umama Fatema, spokesperson for the platform, at 12:30am on Tuesday.

The leaders sat again afterwards, and following an hour-long discussion, they decided the proclamation would not be announced.

However, since people from various districts were already on their way, the event would be held, but in a different pattern, they decided.

After their meeting, at 1:30am, Jatiya Nagorik Committee Chief Organiser Sarjis Alam told a press conference, "Through the initiative to prepare a declaration of uprising, the government has brought all of Bangladesh to a united stance. We applaud this effort."

The dramatic change of the plans about the proclamation came after the political parties gave mixed reactions over the issue.

The BNP and several other parties said they apprehended the move may delay the next election. They also wondered why the students wanted to make a proclamation five months after the uprising.

The Jamaat-e-Islami welcomed the student platform's decision to make a proclamation.