

PANTHAKUNJA PARK PROTEST
7 hurt as green groups clash

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least seven environmental activists were injured yesterday in a scuffle between two green groups during a protest at Panthakunja Park in Dhaka.

The clash erupted when members of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (BAPA) and Green Voice, joined by around 150 activists, arrived at the park to hold a human chain demanding its preservation.

However, their presence angered activists of Bangladesh Gach Rokkhya Andolon, who have been staging a continuous protest at the site for the past 21 days.

“Our seven activists were injured, and one required hospital treatment after Green Voice members attacked us multiple times,” said Amirul Rajib, convener of BGRA, a coalition of green organisations and individuals.

Amirul said their round-the-clock protest had already secured assurances from officials that construction materials related to the Elevated Expressway project would be removed by March 25.

“Around 2,000 trees have been felled for the project, leaving no greenery nearby, which is why we’ve been protesting continuously,” he added.

He criticised the other groups for

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6



Environmental activists scuffle over participating in a protest to protect Panthakunja Park in Dhaka yesterday. At least seven persons were injured in the clash.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Vehicle registration declines again in 2024
Inflation, high dollar exchange rate key factors, say experts

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The issuance of new vehicle registrations in Bangladesh declined for the second straight year in 2024, dropping by 15 percent compared to 2023.

This happened as soaring inflation and rising dollar exchange rates took a toll on the transport sector, said officials and importers, adding that the changed political situation is another reason behind it.

Registrations of most vehicle types, including motorcycles and buses, declined, but registered SUVs increased by 11.45 percent, indicating a shift in consumer preferences among affluent buyers.

In contrast, the registration of buses and minibuses, crucial for public transport, dropped by 33.51 percent year-on-year, shows government data.

This decline highlights the strain on public transport system that relies heavily on these vehicles. This will cause further issues for the already struggling public transport system, experts said.

According to Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) data, 3.08 lakh vehicles were registered in 2024, 14.69 percent fewer than in 2023, when 3.61 lakh vehicles were registered.

Vehicle registrations gradually increased from 2013 to 2019 before dropping in 2020 due to the pandemic. The highest number of registrations was in 2022, with 5.78 lakh vehicles, followed by a

decline in 2023, shows BRTA data.

The registered vehicles in the country are 62.60 lakh now, of which 45.80 lakh are motorcycles.

REASONS BEHIND THE DECLINE

The decline in motorcycle registrations contributed significantly to the overall drop.

A total of 2.63 lakh motorcycles were registered in 2024, a 15.38 percent decrease from 2023, shows BRTA data.



PHOTO: AI GENERATED IMAGE

According to Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) data, 3.08 lakh vehicles were registered in 2024, 14.69 percent fewer than in 2023, when 3.61 lakh vehicles were registered.

Biplob Kumar Roy, general secretary of the Bangladesh Motorcycle Assemblers and Manufacturers Association (BMAMA), said high inflation has reduced purchasing power, which is reflected in the declining bike registrations.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

Migration saw 22pc drop last year: report

MD ABBAS

Despite record-high remittances last year, the number of Bangladeshi migrant workers going abroad decreased by 22.5 percent in the last year.

A total of 1,011,856 people went abroad, a decrease of 293,597 compared to 1,305,856 people in 2023, according to the Bureau of Manpower, Employment, and Training (BMET).

According to Bangladesh Bank data, expatriates sent home a record US \$26.9 billion in remittances, marking a 23 percent year-on-year increase, and providing relief to policymakers striving to bolster the country’s dollar reserves.

During the Covid-19 outbreak in 2020, the number of expatriate Bangladeshis going abroad dropped to a record low of 217,669. Since then, however, the numbers have shown an upward trend.

The following year, the figure tripled to 617,209. By 2022, it rose to 1,135,873, and in 2023, reached an all-time high of 1,305,453.

This year, however, the trend has seen a significant decline.

The report also highlighted a concerning drop in female migrant workers. By November last year, only 54,696 women had gone overseas, marking a 22 percent decline compared to the previous year.

Saudi Arabia remained the primary destination for Bangladeshi migrant workers, accounting for 60 percent of all migrations last year, followed by Malaysia and Qatar as major destinations, said the report.

The report titled “Labour Dynamics of Labour Migration from Bangladesh in 2024”, published by the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU), revealed that corruption, irregularities, and fraudulent practices have severely impacted Bangladesh’s labour migration opportunities.

At a recent press briefing, Prof Tasneem Siddiqui, founding chairperson of RMMRU, attributed the contraction in the labour market to systemic corruption and irregularities.



REASONS FOR DECLINE

- Corruption and syndicates
- Suspended labour markets
- Economic, political instability
- Decline in female migration

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Reform in governance, policy
- Skills development, tech integration
- Improving worker safety, welfare
- Transparency in recruitment processes

“In 2021, Malaysia reopened its labour market under a syndicate, but it was shut down again in May 2024,” she explained.

“This syndicate, led by Datuk Seri Aminul Islam and his Bangladeshi associate Ruhul Amin, misappropriated US \$2 billion. Their actions inflated migration costs, leaving many workers stranded abroad or forced to return home.”

She also noted that labour migration to several countries, including Oman, Bahrain, the UAE, and the Maldives, remained suspended throughout 2024.

Furthermore, migration to Italy and Serbia was halted due to the submission of falsified documents.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

PLASTIC WASTE MANAGEMENT
Producers to be held accountable

UNB, Dhaka

The environment ministry is preparing to introduce Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) guidelines to tackle plastic pollution, said Adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan yesterday.

She said the initiative aims to hold producers accountable for the full lifecycle of their products, ensuring effective reuse, recycling and safe disposal of plastic waste.

“Producers must take responsibility for their products, even at the end of their lifecycle. Through these guidelines, opportunities for reusing, recycling and safely managing plastic waste will be significantly enhanced,” said Rizwana Hasan.

She emphasised the importance of collective efforts in addressing the issue, urging all stakeholders to work together.

“Raising awareness about the harmful effects of polythene and microplastics is crucial. We must bring about a shift in people’s mindset. Only a united approach can help us control the plastic crisis,” she added.

Senior officials, including the secretary and additional secretaries to the Environment, Forest, and Climate Change Ministry, as well as representatives from various non-governmental organisations, attended the meeting.

The EPR initiative is expected to play a vital role in guiding Bangladesh toward environmentally sustainable development by curbing plastic pollution and fostering eco-conscious practices, according to the environment ministry.

Country shows positive shifts in gender norms

Prof Naila Kabeer tells BIDS event

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has seen a significant decline in “son preference” and fertility rates in recent decades, indicating a shift in traditional gender norms, according to Prof Naila Kabeer of the London School of Economics.

Son preference refers to parents preferring to give birth to a male child over a female one, while fertility rate refers to the average number of children a woman gives birth to in her life.

Speaking at a public lecture titled “Renegotiating Patriarchy: Gender, Agency, and the Bangladesh Paradox,” organised by Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) at its office in Dhaka, Prof Kabeer discussed her fieldwork in a Faridpur village in 1979 and a follow-up visit in 2010.

Unlike India and Pakistan, where son preference and female-selective abortions have distorted gender ratios, Bangladesh has maintained near-normal ratios, reflecting a cultural shift toward valuing daughters.

She noted a significant decline in son preference and growing acceptance of daughters as valuable contributors to family well-being.

These changes, she said, show a shift in societal attitudes toward gender roles.

Despite challenges like poverty, weak governance, and deep-rooted patriarchy, Bangladesh has made notable progress in health, education, population control, and gender equality, she said.

Fertility rates in Bangladesh have dropped to 2.2, a better drop than in India and Pakistan. Girls’ school enrolment has also surpassed both

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

‘UPDF member’ killed in Rangamati
Says ISPR

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An alleged member of the United People’s Democratic Front (UPDF-Main) was killed in a gunfire exchange with Bangladesh Army personnel in Rangamati’s Naniarchar zone yesterday, said the Inter-Services Public Relations.

Acting on intelligence, the army discovered a UPDF-Main hideout in the Perachhara area during a special operation conducted around 5:50am, the ISPR added.

When the army personnel initiated a search, the UPDF (Main) members opened fire, prompting a gunfight, it said in a press release.

One UPDF (Main) member was killed, and several others were injured while the injured retreated into the dense forest, the press release said.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

Bangladesh, India to exchange detained fishermen Sunday
Says foreign adviser

UNB, Dhaka

Foreign Affairs Adviser Md Touhid Hossain yesterday said Bangladesh and India would exchange nearly 200 fishermen detained in their respective countries on Sunday.

“If everything (formalities) goes as per schedule, the exchanges will take place on Sunday,” he told reporters while visiting the recently renovated DCAB (Diplomatic Correspondents Association, Bangladesh) Lounge at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

India currently holds 90 Bangladeshi fishermen who were detained on different occasions while 95 Indian fishermen were being held in Bangladeshi prisons.

According to a report by the Indian news outlet The Economic Times, on December 10, the Indian Coast Guard detained two Bangladeshi trawlers, along with 78 crew members, on charges of fishing “illegally” in Indian waters.

Earlier, in September last, 12 Bangladeshi fishermen were detained when their trawler sank in Indian water.

Six Indian trawlers entered Bangladesh water in September and October last, leading to the detention of 95 Indian sailors and the confiscation of their trawlers.

Foreign Secretary Md Jashim Uddin, Secretary (East) Dr Md Nazrul Islam, outgoing DCAB President Nurul Islam Hasib, newly elected President AKM Moinuddin, and DCAB members were present.



With practiced hands, boatmen hoist the sails under a clear, endless sky while the Shibsa River shimmers like a silver ribbon. Over time, sailboats have been disappearing from the country’s rivers. However, in some areas, it is still possible to see boats sailing forward into the wind, even in this modern era. The photo was taken in Paikgacha, Khulna yesterday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN