

PASSPORT INDEX 2025

Bangladesh in bottom 7

Shares 100th spot with Libya, Palestine

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has slipped three notches in the global passport ranking for 2025, now standing at 100th place, according to the latest index released by UK-based firm Henley & Partners yesterday.

With this ranking, Bangladeshis now hold the 7th weakest passport globally.

Based on data from the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and backed up by in-house research, the index ranks all 199 of the world's most powerful passports based on how many of 227 global travel destinations they grant visa-free access to.

Bangladeshis passport holders currently have visa-free or visa-on-arrival access to 40 countries, down from 42 destinations in the previous year. This places Bangladesh in the same rank as Libya and the Palestinian Territories, a slight decline from last year's 97th position when it shared the spot with North Korea.

In South Asia, the Maldives, placed at 53rd position, holds the highest ranking. It is followed by India, Bhutan and Sri Lanka, placed respectively at 85th, 90th and 96th positions. Nepal and Pakistan rank just below Bangladesh at 101st and 103rd positions.

At the top of the index, Singapore ranks first, granting its passport holders visa-free access to 195 destinations. Japan follows in second place, allowing its citizens to

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Chief Advisor Professor Muhammad Yunus at a meeting with Vice President of European Investment Bank Nicola Beer at the state guest house Jamuna yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

Freedom fighter held over attack on students' procession

Family says he was framed; case docs show his age at 32

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Police have arrested a freedom fighter in Tangail's Sakhipur for his alleged involvement in an attack on a procession of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement on August 3.

However, his family members claimed that the 72-year-old freedom fighter Aiyub Khan had been falsely implicated in a case filed over the attack.

In the case statement, Aiyub Khan has been shown as a 32 year-old.

Aiyub is the former president of Ward-7 of the Jadavpur union unit of Awami League in Sakhipur upazila and is the 135th accused in the case.

Aiyub's family members claimed that he was not even present in Sakhipur on



Aiyub Khan

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Interest rate on savings certificates to be raised

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certificates which will be linked to the government's treasury bond interest rates.

The new system will be effective from January 1, said a finance ministry official, adding that the official notification would come soon.

The chief adviser has approved the new system and the relevant documents have been sent to the Internal Resources Division of the finance ministry for issuing the notification.

According to the proposal, the interest rates against savings certificates will be fixed following the weighted average interest rates of the five-year and two-year treasury bonds.

The interest rates against the treasury bonds will be reviewed every six months and the savings certificates' interest rates will be re-fixed.

Besides, in case of re-fixing the interest rates against savings certificates, a premium of at most 50 basis points will be added to the weighted average treasury bond interest rates.

There are three types of interest ceilings for the four savings certificates at present.

As per the new system, the interest rate against the five-year Bangladesh savings certificate will be 12.4 percent for up to Tk 7.5 lakh. For savings of Tk 7.5 lakh and above, the interest rate will be 12.37 percent.

At present, a beneficiary gets 11.28 percent interest for up to Tk 15 lakh after the maturity period, 10.30 percent for between Tk 15 lakh and Tk 30 lakh, and 9.3 percent for more than Tk 30 lakh.

In the case of the three monthly profit-bearing Sanchayapatra, the new interest rate will be 12.3 percent to 12.25 percent. Under the existing system, the interest rates are 11.04 to 9 percent.

In the case of the family savings certificate, the new interest rates will be from 12.5 to 12.37 percent while the existing interest rates are 11.5 to 9.5 percent.

Also, the interest rates against the pensioners' scheme will be 12.55 to 12.37 percent under the new system. At present, it is 11.76 to 9.75 percent.

Meanwhile, interest rates against the other savings instruments – the wage earners bond, the US dollar investment bond and the US dollar premium bond – will remain unchanged.

Proof of graft

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investigations into allegations that Hasina, her son Sajeeb Wazed Joy, and sister Sheikh Rehana and her daughter Tulip Siddiq embezzled Tk 80,000 crore from different projects.

The anti-graft body on December 22 decided to look into allegations that Hasina and Joy laundered \$300 million.

On December 26, ACC launched another investigation into the allegations of abuse of power to obtain plots of land against Hasina and her close family members.

Khaleda and Tarique reunite after 7yrs

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Mohammad Hazrat Ali Khan, acting high commissioner of Bangladesh to the United Kingdom, and several leaders of UK BNP also greeted the party chief at the airport with flowers.

Accompanied by Zubaida, Tarique, acting chairman of BNP who had been living in London with his family since 2008, then took it upon himself to drive his mother to the London Clinic directly from the airport.

The former prime minister was then admitted there.

This marks Khaleda's first overseas trip since July 16, 2017, when she last traveled to London for medical treatment. She had spent three months with her family and celebrated Eid-ul-Azha that year.

The 79-year-old former prime minister departed from Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport around 11:46pm on Tuesday (January 7), heading to London via Doha on the Qatar Royal Family's Airbus A319 air ambulance arranged by the Emir of Qatar.

She arrived at Heathrow at 2:55pm (Bangladesh time) after a 15-hour journey.

A 15-member team, including Syeda Sharmila Rahman, the wife of Khaleda's late son Arafat Rahman Koko; doctors, air ambulance specialists, party leaders, personal staffers, and caregivers accompanied her on the journey.

The air ambulance took off an hour and 46 minutes late, as Khaleda's convoy moved slowly amidst the huge

crowd of BNP leaders and activists lining the streets.

The BNP chief's eventual departure only became possible after the fall of the AL regime on August 5, 2024, signaling a major shift in the country's political landscape. She was fully freed by an order from President Mohammed Shahabuddin the very next day, paving the way for her overseas treatment.

A three-time former prime minister, Khaleda has been battling multiple health issues, including liver cirrhosis, diabetes, arthritis, and complications involving her kidneys, lungs, heart and eyes.

Doctors from Bangladesh handed over Khaleda's medical documents to UK-based specialists, who have reviewed all necessary tests and records to plan her next steps for treatment, according to party sources.

Speaking to reporters yesterday, her personal physician and BNP standing committee member AZM Zahid Hossain said the Khaleda will be under the supervision of Dr Patrick Kennedy, a consultant of gastroenterology and hepatology at the London Clinic.

Dr Kennedy, a globally recognised expert in liver diseases, is known for his pioneering work in viral liver conditions and holds a special interest in treating complex liver-related ailments.

Zahid earlier said Khaleda's next course of treatment will be determined after the doctors in London assess her health status, adding that she may require a liver transplant because of the cirrhosis and the entire treatment process, including recovery, may take

several months.

Her medical board in Dhaka said she might have to be taken to Johns Hopkins University Hospital for further treatment but only if the London Clinic doctors recommend it.

Also battling several lawsuits, Khaleda was jailed in a corruption case on February 8, 2018.

In April 2019, her health deteriorated due to inadequate medical treatment. She was released from prison after 776 days on March 26, 2020, amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

The AL government temporarily released her on an executive order, suspending her sentence on the condition that she remain at her Gulshan residence and not leave the country. The term of her release had been extended several times.

In April 2021, she contracted Covid-19 and recovered while under treatment at home. However, as the other health complications surfaced, she was admitted to Evercare Hospital several times.

On October 26, 2023, a team of three specialist doctors from the United States performed the transjugular intrahepatic portosystemic shunt procedure to address the fluid accumulation in her stomach and chest, as well as a bleed in the liver.

Senior BNP leaders, who, along with other activists, have campaigned for Khaleda's access to proper medical care over the past five years, said her medical trip to London is a pivotal moment for the party.

Student bodies split over polls timing

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Its leaders think that the BNP will do very well in the national election and it would give the student body some advantage.

DU Chhatra Dal General Secretary Nahiduzzaman Shipon said the environment on campus was not yet conducive for polls.

He referred to the instances of campus vigilantism and what many have termed as "moral policing".

"We urge the university authorities to prepare for polls once the situation is normal. That would ensure the participation of all student organisations and foster a competitive atmosphere," he said.

The Ducsu grants excessive power to the vice-chancellor, and it should be changed, he said.

REFORM OF CHARTER

FIRST AT JU

SAD leaders demand that the date for election should be set now.

JU authorities formed a five-member election commission.

Shah M Faysal Hossain, joint convener of JU Chhatra Dal, said constitutional and administrative reforms should be made before the Jucus polls.

"We will soon discuss our reform proposals with the university authorities," he told The Daily Star.

Bangladesh Chhatra Union, Samajtantrik Chhatra Front, Biplobi Chhatra Maitri, and several cultural organisations, also have similar demands. The Chhatra Dal and these organisations demand that Shibir should not be allowed to participate in the election.

A meeting on Jucus ended abruptly on November 19 over disagreements on the matter.

Riddha Anindya Ganguly, general secretary of the JU Bangladesh Chhatra Union, said, "We appreciate the administration's willingness to hold the Jucus election. But necessary reforms must be made first."

Riddha said Shibir was banned at JU in 1989 by 22 student organisations for its involvement in a murder.

"But if Shibir takes accountability and publicly apologises for its past crimes, we may consider acknowledging its political activities,"

she said.

Sojib Ahmed Zenich, convener of JU Samajtantrik Chhatra Front, said, "A committee must be formed to update the outdated Jucus constitution. Additionally, the university authorities must create a fair, dorm-wise database of students."

The JU unit of the SAD has yet to clarify its reform proposals, but stress that the election schedule should be announced soon.

"The administration must ensure the election schedule is announced on February 1," said Touhid Siam, member secretary of the platform's JU unit.

Moniruzzaman, chief election commissioner of Jucus polls, said, "If the student bodies seek reforms, they may discuss the matter with the university administration. The Election Commission has no role in this. The election schedule is set to be announced on February 1."

RAJSHAHI AND CHITTAGONG

Salahuddin Ammar, coordinator of the RU SAD, said, "We want a roadmap to the Rucus polls immediately. Delays may make the campus unstable."

Abdullah Masud, president of the Bangladesh Chhatra Union's RU unit, said the vice-chancellor announced that Rucus polls would be held within five months, but the three months have already passed.

"There is still a lot of ambiguity about the entire electoral process," he added.

RU VC Saleh Hasan Naqib, however, said that they are hopeful of announcing a roadmap to the polls by mid-January.

At CU, Leaders and members of various student organisations, including SAD, JCD, Shibir, Chhatra Adhikar Parishad, Chhatra Andolon and Chhatra Union are demonstrating for holding elections.

Kamal Uddin, pro-vice chancellor (administration), said the university formed a committee which will work for holding the polls.

The committee will recommend necessary reforms, he said.

[Sakib Ahmed and Nurahsan Mridul also contributed to this report]

Grameen Bank ownership

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Awami League government.

Its founder Muhammad Yunus, now the chief adviser of the interim government, was forced to resign from Grameen Bank as managing director in 2011 after the government stated that his age exceeded the retirement age for public servants.

In the proposed amendment, the government is seeking to empower the board of the microcredit lender to approve the resignation of its directors and managing director. At present, the approval has to come from the government.

The new arrangement will significantly increase control for the bank's microcredit borrowers and reduce the involvement of the state in the affairs of the institution.

The Sheikh Hasina-led government became highly involved in the workings of Grameen Bank in 2011.

Initially, Grameen Bank members had a 60 percent stake and the government the rest. Later, the government's stake was reduced to 25 percent while the shares of the members went up to 75 percent.

In reality, the ratio of paid-up capital given by the government and the members of the bank came down to 3.29 percent and 96.71 percent respectively by the end of 2010.

The government later injected funds to raise its stakes to 25 percent.

After the proposed changes are passed, the ratio of shares of Grameen Bank members will rise to 95 percent.

In early October, the interim government reinstated a tax exemption for Grameen Bank until December 2029.

Grameen Bank enjoyed the tax exemption from its inception in 1983 as its activities are primarily focused on poverty alleviation. The benefit is typically renewed every five years and was last extended until December 2020.

The previous government did not extend the exemption after that period.

Officials at the FID said they have given some observations to the Grameen Bank authority.

"We will hold another meeting after we get the response from the bank," said a senior official of FID.