



Russia-Iran pact adds momentum to ties: Putin
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Students suffer as NCTB fails to deliver books

Only 37% of 40.15cr textbooks distributed till first half of Jan

ARAFAT RAHMAN

Even two weeks into the new academic year, primary and secondary students across the country have not been able to fully start academic activities, with 25.15 crore or 63 percent of the required textbooks remaining undelivered.

Despite initial assurances of distributing all 40.15 crore free textbooks by January 31, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) has so far delivered 15 crore textbooks, or 37 percent of the total, leaving students, parents, and teachers frustrated.

These include around 75 percent of the 9.19 crore primary school books, and 30 percent of the nearly 31 crore secondary school books, according to NCTB officials.

The NCTB attributed the delay to a series of challenges, including curriculum change, supply chain disruption, and printing mismanagement. In September, the NCTB reverted to the 2012 curriculum, requiring revisions to 441 textbooks. This time-intensive process and a delay in the re-tendering process, coupled with political



WHY THE DELAY

Curriculum revisions

Printing mismanagement

Slow re-tendering process

Supply chain disruptions

BOOKS	DELIVERED
Primary	9.19cr 75%
Secondary	30.96cr 30%
Overall	40.15cr 37%

changeover and instability after protests over quotas, further delayed the distribution.

"Several presses took on more work than they could handle, and the supply chain of paper was poorly managed," NCTB Chairman Prof AKM Reazul Hassan told the media. He alleged that many presses printed guidebooks while printing textbooks, causing more delay.

Students of secondary-level schools suffered the most due to the delay, report our correspondents.

For example, in Chattogram, only 13.8 percent of the required 1.7 crore textbooks for secondary students have been delivered. At Government Collegiate School, students of classes 6, 7, and 9 received only Bangla, English, and mathematics books while students of classes 5, 8, and 10 are yet to receive any book.

The school's headteacher Rehana Akhtar vented her frustration over the delay, saying, "Students are falling behind."

In Barishal, just 8.8 percent of the secondary-level textbooks have reached the schools. A parent, Mushtaq Ahmed, said, "How can class 10 students prepare for exams with only three out of 10 textbooks? This is ruining their future."

The crisis has severely impacted Rangpur as well, where only 12 percent of the secondary-level textbooks have been delivered. Vocational and commerce students in this division did not receive any.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



Palestinians gather to receive food prepared by a charity kitchen in Khan Younis, in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday. *Inset*, mourners pray beside the bodies of Palestinians killed in Israeli airstrikes at Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis. The Israeli security cabinet approved a ceasefire in Gaza yesterday, raising hopes that the violence in the devastated Palestinian territory would end when the truce takes effect on Sunday.

PHOTO: REUTERS



Hills are being razed indiscriminately in Bayek and Gopinathpur unions of Brahmanbaria's Kasba upazila. A syndicate is reportedly engaging in this environmentally destructive act under the patronisation of the upazila administration. Hill cutting raises the risk of landslides, which claim the lives of people living in the foothills every year. The photo was taken recently in Pathariyadwar village of Gopinathpur union.

PHOTO: MASUK HRIDOV

REFORM COMMISSION REPORTS Proposals seek to bring youths into JS

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

Reform commissions on the constitution and election process have both recommended measures that increase opportunities for the youth to run for parliament and become more involved in

minimum of 10 percent of the total seats in the lower house," said the constitution commission.

The electoral commission suggested reserving 10 percent nominations for youths, religious and ethnic minorities,

MINIMUM AGE FOR MPS

INDIA, NEPAL	UK	US	SRI LANKA	BANGLADESH
25 for lower house, 35 for upper house	18 for lower house, 21 for upper house	25 for lower house, 30 for upper house	18 (proposed)	21 for lower house, 35 for upper house
			INDONESIA, VIETNAM 21	

SOURCE:INTER-PARLIAMENTARYUNION

politics, sparking both hope and criticism.

While the constitution commission suggested lowering the minimum age for aspiring lawmakers from the existing 25 years to 21, both commissions have recommended that political parties reserve a tenth of their nominations for youth and other disadvantaged groups.

"Political parties shall nominate candidates from among the youth for a

minimum of 10 percent of the total seats in the lower house," said the constitution commission.

The electoral commission suggested reserving 10 percent nominations for youths, religious and ethnic minorities,

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

16 sued over attack on indigenous protesters

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A case has been filed against 16 people, including four current and former students of Dhaka University and a recently expelled member of Jatiya Nagorik Committee in connection with Wednesday's attack on indigenous protesters in the capital.

At least 200 300 unnamed people were also accused in the case.

On Wednesday, at least 20 people were injured when members of "Students for Sovereignty" attacked an indigenous group protesting outside the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) office in Motijheel over the removal of the term "adivasi" (indigenous) from textbooks.

Jagadish Chakma, president of Pahari Chhatria Parishad's Dhaka Metropolitan unit, lodged the case with Motijheel Police Station on Thursday.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

-Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem-



In loving memory of

TARIQUE AHMED
1966 - 2024

On this day, we remember Tarique Ahmed, whose inspiring leadership, unwavering dedication, and vision continue to guide us even in his absence.

It has been a year since his passing, yet his legacy remains alive in our work and hearts. His contributions and values have left an indelible mark on M&J Group and we are all fortunate enough to know him.

Forever missed, always remembered.



MY DHAKA

THE YEAR OF THE SNAKE

Dhaka's inaugural Chinese New Year festivities

RBR

I had nothing significant planned for last Friday, and was absent-mindedly saying yes to all sorts of plans my friends were making; completely forgetting an important wedding reception I had to attend that very day.

I don't know how it slipped my mind, other than blaming the "brain fog" syndrome Dhakaites are experiencing (but never addressing their addiction to watching non-sensical social media videos).

Coming back to the topic of Friday, I was all elated when a friend sent me a video message about the Chinese New Year celebration being held at Gulshan Lake Park. The first of its kind in Dhaka, I jumped at the offer and dressed like a Christmas tree, and went to the beautiful park to join in the festivities, and promised to sneak into the wedding reception later.

It was dusk, the sky was an orange marmalade shade, and the old, tall trees of the park were lit up with fairy lights. Red traditional Chinese lanterns swung in the cool evening breeze, and the conventional colourful paper hangings swayed, ushering in the year of the wood snake. All this added up to a magical ambience.

The event was joyful, with traditional dragon and lion dances gliding and cruising away in vibrant yellow colours. Huge traditional drums, gongs, and cymbals were present. The beating of the drums in a loud tempo signified warding off the 'bad luck monster' and ringing in the good luck.

The display of martial arts,



instrumental music, and traditional Chinese dances performed by teachers and students of the Confucius Institute of Shanto Mariam, North South University, and Dhaka University (CI at DU) was spectacular. For those not in the know, Confucius Classrooms are hubs that serve the local community and promote joint planning of cultural activities and sharing of ideas and resources.

An interesting DIY booth had hand-crafted white paper fans on a stick, and visitors could paint the face of the fan

with either calligraphy or scenery or write Spring Festival couplets.

The fair-like atmosphere was taken up a notch with New Year goods markets, delicious barbecue booths that had live grilling stations, where satay sticks of chicken liver, giblets, skin, offal of cattle, and sprigs of Chinese chives were lightly sprinkled with salt and some secret ingredient that had visitors standing in long queues.

"The Chinese New Year Festival is the most important traditional festival in China and has been included in the

Unesco Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity list.

The date of the Chinese New Year 2025 is January 29.

On the eve of the Chinese New Year festival, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China, the Chinese Embassy in Bangladesh, and all sectors of Chinese and Bangladeshi society have jointly planned to hold a series of "Happy Chinese New Year Festival" celebrations in Dhaka and Chattogram, including two temple fairs, a nine day Chinese Film Week and five performances by the Zhejiang Wu Opera Troupe of China," says Vivian Huang, secretary general of Overseas Chinese Association in Bangladesh.

This celebration will allow people to experience the rich and colourful Chinese culture and strengthen China-Bangladesh bilateral relations.

According to old texts, the Chinese New Year marks the beginning and end of each Chinese zodiac year. The Chinese zodiac is a 12-year cycle of animal signs.

For 2025, the Chinese New Year begins on January 29, marking the start of the Year of the Snake, specifically the Wood Snake, and ending on February 16, 2026.

The snake, known for its wisdom and transformative energy, is coupled with the wood element, embodying growth, stability, and creativity.

My Chinese sign is a monkey. As astrologers say, monkeys have a history of bitter compatibility with snakes, I hope to be cordial to my "snake" friends, because I love reading astrology mumbo-jumbo and believing it too.

Fencing necessary to ensure a crime-free border with Bangladesh

Says India's ministry of external affairs

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

India yesterday reiterated that fencing is one of the necessary measures to ensure a crime-free border with Bangladesh.

Randhir Jaiswal, the spokesperson for the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, also stated that India expects Bangladesh to honour the protocols and agreements established between the two countries in this regard.

His remarks were made at the weekly press briefing in New Delhi in response to a question about increasing tensions along the India-Bangladesh border over the issue of fencing. The question also highlighted a comment by Bangladesh's Home Adviser, Jahangir Alam Chowdhury, indicating that Dhaka wants to review past agreements on the issue.

Jaiswal emphasised that India's position on these issues was clarified when the Acting High Commissioner of Bangladesh to India Md Nural Islam was summoned by the MEA to South Block on January 13.

"It was conveyed that, regarding security measures at the border, including fencing, India adheres to all protocols and agreements between the two governments as well as between the Border Security Force and Border Guard Bangladesh," Jaiswal said.

He further added, "Barbed wire fencing, border lighting, installation of technical devices, and cattle fences are measures implemented to secure the border."

India expects Bangladesh to honour all previous agreements, Jaiswal said, expressing hope for a cooperative approach in combating cross-border crimes.

Responding to a question about the growing calls within Bangladesh for early elections and a recent comment by the US ambassador to India, Eric Garcetti, on the subject, the MEA spokesperson said that India's stance on relations with Bangladesh has been communicated on multiple occasions.

Students suffer as NCTB fails to deliver books

FROM PAGE 1

Requesting anonymity, a teacher from Dinajpur Zilla School said a large number of students, particularly from class 6, have yet to receive their textbooks. "We have been in constant contact with the relevant department, but there is no clear timeline for when the books will be available."

In the absence of official textbooks, many students are resorting to alternatives. Shahriar, a ninth-grade student at Dinajpur Zilla School, said he started studying last year's textbooks. Many have downloaded the books from the NCTB website.

In Mymensingh, less than half of the required books have reached the secondary-level students.

Harithan Biswas, headteacher of Rangpur Kalibati Secondary School in Khulna's Dumuria upazila, told The

Daily Star that they received Bangla first paper, English first paper and mathematics for classes 6, 7 and 8, but no textbooks for classes 9 and 10.

English version textbooks also remain undelivered in the division, where overall 70 percent textbooks have been delivered.

Some guardians downloaded and printed PDF copies of the books to cover learning losses, Harichand said.

At the primary level, the books for classes 4 and 5 have not yet reached the schools.

In Chattogram, 50.23 percent of the required primary textbooks have been delivered. Mahbubur Rahman, acting headteacher of a government primary school, said students were relying on old books.

The rate of delivery to the primary schools of Mymensingh is 44 percent,

Barishal 49 percent and Khulna 54 percent.

Kaberi Hossain, a teacher at Kabirpur Model Primary School in Jhenaiah's Shaikupura upazila, said, "It's difficult for us to give lessons for the lack of books."

Students are also anxious about the delay. "I have to take exams in a few months, but with no materials to study, it's overwhelming," said Hasan Ali, a class five student in Rangpur.

Speaking to this newspaper, a leader of the Printing Industries Association of Bangladesh, said, "We are under extreme pressure... The cost of paper has increased, and banks are not giving us enough support to meet the deadlines. It's becoming harder to maintain quality and complete orders on time with the limited resources available."

[Correspondents from respective districts contributed to this report]

Contacted, NCTB member (textbook) Prof Riad Chaudhury said,

"The situation has reached this point due to several challenges. However, we have been relentlessly working to deliver the textbooks to the students."

He said the NCTB was prioritising textbooks for class 10, as they have to take public exams. "We are hopeful that we can deliver all the primary and class 10 textbooks by this month," Prof Riad said.

"The entire printing process is under extensive monitoring so that we can ensure quality this year. We have already rejected over 3 lakh textbooks for substandard materials," he added.

Education Adviser Wahiduddin Mahmud recently said all the textbooks would be distributed within February.

The sharp rise in planet-warming

2024 saw fastest-ever annual rise in CO2 levels

Says UK weather service

AFP, Paris

Carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere in 2024 grew at the fastest annual rate on record, exceeding their own projections by some margin, according to the UK weather service.

The reduction in the acreage of Aman season paddy, the report added.

Currently, there is a satisfactory stock of rice in the country and necessary measures have been taken to prevent any future shortages, Majumder said.

On January 12, the public stock of food grains stood at 12.25 lakh tonnes, including 8.2 lakh tonnes of rice, down 25 percent year-on-year.

The government's initiative to import rice, both at the government and private levels, is a positive step towards bringing down the rice prices and alleviating people's suffering, said Mohammad Jahangir Alam, a professor in the Department of Agribusiness and Marketing at Bangladesh Agricultural University.

However, he emphasized the need for a comprehensive analysis to determine whether the price hike is solely due to a supply shortage or if there are other factors.

"Because, the upward trend in rice prices appears to be beyond control."

Alam also highlighted the importance of considering transportation costs when importing rice.

"If rice is sourced from distant countries, transportation costs will rise, which could lead to higher prices for consumers. Therefore, priority should be given to importing from countries that minimize transportation expenses."

He cautioned that excessive imports beyond the country's demand could adversely affect local farmers, urging the government to carefully balance imports with domestic production.

"The impact on farmers should not be overlooked," he added.

Rice imports to hit seven-year high

FROM PAGE 1

The government has finalised plans to import 100,000 tonnes of rice from Myanmar on a government-to-government arrangement.

The first consignment of 27,000 tonnes has already reached the country, and another shipment will arrive later this month, Majumder said.

From Pakistan, 50,000 tonnes of rice will be imported through the G2G method.

A decision has also been made to import 1 lakh tonnes of rice from Vietnam via the G2G method, with necessary arrangements nearing completion.

The private sector businesspeople have shown interest in importing rice due to the zero tariff on rice imports for the private sector, Majumder said.

The move comes at a time when the price of fine rice has risen by 4.05 percent in the past month, medium-grain rice by 3.31 percent and coarse rice by 6.67 percent.

And in the past year, the price of fine rice has increased by 12.41 percent, medium grain rice by 15.74 percent and coarse rice by 9.80 percent.

Fine rice is selling for Tk 70 to Tk 84 per kg, coarse rice for Tk 54-58 per kg, and medium-grain rice for Tk 60-65 per kg, according to data from the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh.

However, in Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Cuba, France, Canada, the UK and Sweden it is 18 for the parliament or their lower house. In Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam, MPs must be 21.

As for the upper houses, it is 21 for UK, 24 for France, and 30 years for Malaysia and Canada.

Asked about the definition of youth, Ali Riaz said there is an international standard and the age for youth will be defined through a law. Again, political parties can also fix their definition.

The United Nations defines those aged between 15 and 24 as "youth".

According to the National Youth Policy of Bangladesh, any citizen between 18 and 35 is considered youth.

Asked whether their proposals were made to favour the political party to be formed by the student platforms, Ali Riaz said, "I want to say clearly, giving benefit to political party or possible political parties, was never our consideration."

The constitution commission also

proposed a bicameral legislature— "National Assembly" as lower house with 400 members and "Senate" as upper house with 105 seats.

The senators, 100 will be elected through a proportional representation of the national election for the assembly. The remaining five will be nominated by the president from among people without any political affiliations.

The constitution commission suggested a lowering age floor for the lower house but did not mention anything about the upper house. The electoral commission, however, recommended a minimum age of 35 to be eligible for the upper house. It further stipulated that all senators have a bachelor's degree.

The electoral commission proposes to prohibit associate organisations of the main parties that only act as their extensions. In other words, none of the parties would be allowed to have separate student wings or youth fronts under any guise.

Another criteria to be eligible for an MP nomination is a minimum three years' membership in the party.

Currently, The Representation of the People Order clearly states that political parties are now allowed to have affiliated student, teacher and labour organisations. But most of the political parties bypass the provisions as they termed their student and labour bodies as "friendly" organisations.

BNP Standing Committee Member Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain said the party would make detailed comments after reviewing the proposals.

"But what I can say right now is that people are criticising the move to lower the age for lawmakers and reserving 10 percent nominations for youths," he said.

He said that the current minimum age is widely accepted. "So many are suspicious why this move is being taken now."

"The interim government is party neutral and if this government goes ahead with such proposals, it will seem to be supporting a specific group, and people will not accept it," he said.

"But their contribution was never acknowledged sufficiently. Different political parties turned youths into political cadres and instituted politics

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DHAKA

Hasina regime silenced media

Shafiqul Alam says previous govt used state agencies to muzzle press

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam yesterday said steps must be taken to ensure that no one can directly interfere with the media in the future like it was done during the ousted Sheikh Hasina government.

He said, "Over the past 15 years, intelligence agencies also played a role in silencing newspapers. Journalists would lose their jobs if they received certain phone calls, and news reports had to be removed..."

Shafiqul Alam made these remarks at a discussion titled "Media Reform Proposals: Citizens' Perspectives".

The event was organised by a group named "We Want a Fascism-Free Media" at the Dhaka Reporters' Unity in the capital's Segunbagicha.

Shafiqul said, "The previous government had the capability to control the media. A single phone call from DGFI, NSI, DB, or a minister was enough. I have heard many stories about how they controlled the media."

Advising to compile writings by columnists who defended fascism rule, he said, "Do not spread hatred against anyone. Punishing someone is not our objective. Conduct research; we aim to expose those who crafted the narratives."

Shafiqul said the previous government even justified murder as acceptable through its narratives. He emphasised the need for collective efforts to prevent the seeds of fascism from being sown again in Bangladesh.

He also said, "Ensuring the application of copyright law is crucial. All journalists must speak out strongly on this issue."

SEE PAGE 4 COL 8



The fifth floor of this seven-storey building at Hazaribagh in Dhaka caught on fire yesterday afternoon, gutting over a dozen businesses. Inset, fire fighters dousing the blaze.

DHAKA SATURDAY JANUARY 18, 2025
MAGH 4, 1431 BS
The Daily Star 3

HAZARIBAGH FIRE
Over a dozen businesses burnt to ashes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A fire broke out on the fifth floor of a seven-storey building in the capital's Hazaribagh yesterday afternoon, devastating over a dozen businesses and causing significant losses.

The blaze originated around 2:14pm in a Phoenix Leather warehouse on the fifth floor and quickly spread to the sixth and seventh floors, said the fire service headquarters.

After a two-and-a-half-hour effort, 12 firefighting units brought the fire under control by 4:45pm. It was fully extinguished by 7:00pm. Law enforcers, along with army and Border Guard Bangladesh personnel, assisted in fire control and rescue efforts.

Lt Col Tajul Islam Chowdhury, fire service director (operations and maintenance), said the building lacked fire safety measures despite repeated warnings.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

Polls in 6 months unrealistic: Sarjis

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur



Holding elections within the next six months is unrealistic, said Sarjis Alam, chief organiser of Jatiya Nagarik Committee, yesterday at an event in Panchagarh.

"Our demand should not be limited to holding an election after such a big uprising at the cost of so much blood, lives and everything," he said.

It is simply impossible to update the voter list and reform the judicial system within the six months," he added. However, he said they will not disagree if the next general election is held within a logical time, reports BSS.

Sarjis said the interim government announced that the election would be held by mid-2026, "If they consider holding the election two to four months earlier [early 2026], it would be logical," he said.

Sarjis said the Election Commission, judiciary, and law enforcement agencies need to be reformed to ensure a transparent election.

"We believe that the elections we are hoping for will align with the people's expectations and aspirations, but only after the necessary reforms are

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

TIPU MURDER CASE 26 years on, trial yet to see closure

EMRUL HASAN BAPPI and CHAITANYA CHANDRA HALDER

It has been 26 years into the murder of Sayeed Ahmed Tipu, but the trial of the case is yet to see any closure at a Dhaka court due to the non-appearance of prosecution witnesses to testify.

Tipu was the younger brother of former army chief General Aziz Ahmed, who filed the case in 1999 after Tipu was shot dead in the city. Aziz Ahmed gave his deposition before the court on January 6, 2004.

According to the case record, 34 out of 41 prosecution witnesses had given their depositions before the court in the last two decades.

Of the 34, 32 testified between December 10, 2003 and May 22, 2011, while two, including Tipu's brother, Anis Ahmed, testified on April 1, 2021.

The cross examination of Anis Ahmed and one of his acquaintances Syed Shahriar Morshed is yet to be completed as they have not appeared before the court since April 1 of 2021, a court staffer told The Daily Star.

The remaining seven witnesses, however, did not appear before the court to testify since

then. Of them, five are the case's investigative officers who are to give their depositions.

The court issued summons against them multiple times, said the court staffer.

On January 8 this year, the Special Tribunal for Prevention of Public Safety Disturbances of Dhaka issued non-bailable arrest warrants against Anis and Shahriar for failing to comply with multiple court orders.

The prosecution said the witnesses are not attending the trial procedures due to security concerns as the accused are top listed criminals.

"We want to complete the trial, but the witnesses are also not appearing before the court. We do not know why they are not coming to testify," Md Anwarul Islam, public prosecutor, told The Daily Star.

Tipu was shot dead around 7:30pm on March 13, 1999 on Airport Road in the capital's Khilkhet area when he was in a private car, according to the FIR.

Aziz Ahmed filed a murder case with Badda Police Station in this regard on March 13, 1999.

On July 22, 2001, Md Mokbul Hossain, an inspector of the Criminal Investigation Department of police, submitted a charge

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

Nature must be at centre of development

Says Rizwana

STAR REPORT

The youth must take the lead in protecting the environment and nature, said Syeda Rizwana Hasan, adviser to the environment and water resources ministries, yesterday.

She was addressing the 15th National Nature Summit, organised by the Notre Dame Nature Study Club at Notre Dame College in Dhaka.

Rizwana said the current development approach needs to change, as unsafe food and water are consequences of past mistakes.

"Nature must be at the centre of development. Protecting air, soil, and water is essential," she said.

Protection of nature is not just the government's responsibility but a duty of every citizen, she added.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

RMG exports reached \$38.48 billion last year

Says EPB data

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh exported \$7.2 billion worth of garments to the US, its single largest export destination, in 2024, according to data from the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB).

The US accounted for 18.72 percent of Bangladesh's total garment exports last year.

The European Union remained the dominant market, accounting for 50.34 percent of total RMG exports, which amounted to US \$19.37 billion.

In 2024, Bangladesh's Ready-Made Garment (RMG) exports totalled US \$38.48 billion.

The UK contributed US \$4.3 billion, representing an 11.25 percent share.

Within the EU, key markets included Germany, which imported US \$4.83 billion, followed by



TOTAL RMG EXPORTS

EU \$19.37b (50.34%)
US \$7.2b (18.72%)
UK \$4.3b (11.25%)
Canada \$1.24b (3.23%)

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

NATURE'S SWEET BOUNTY Honey collectors thrive in Jamalpur

JAHIDUL ISLAM NIRAB, Jamalpur

In Jamalpur, the buzz of activity is palpable as honey collectors revel in a bustling season, with beekeeping emerging as both a promising enterprise and a profitable profession.

Entrepreneurs from across the country have flocked to the district, drawn by the high demand for honey and the lucrative returns it offers.

Nestled in the north-central region of Bangladesh, Jamalpur is witnessing a steady increase in honey production. According to the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), this season has already seen collectors harvest 35,530 kilogrammes of honey from the mustard fields, transforming the landscape into a picturesque expanse of yellow blossoms.

To maximise honey production, beekeepers have established 7,287 beehives throughout the district. These hives not only yield honey but also play a crucial role in enhancing mustard production through pollination. While farmers have cultivated mustard on 41,550 hectares this season, honey is



being harvested from 4,615 hectares of mustard fields.

Across the district's seven upazilas, 45 honey collectors from various parts of the country have installed beehives. Islampur upazila leads the way with 2,812 beehives, followed by Melandah with 1,105, Sarishabari with 1,100, Bakshiganj with 1,050, Madarganj with 780, Dewanganj with 230,

and Jamalpur Sadar with 210.

Kazi Moniruzzaman, a honey collector from Gazipur, has set up 200 beehives in Gaibandha union of Islampur upazila. "I've already collected 1,000 kilogrammes of honey since early December and am hopeful of good profits as the weather remains favorable," he said.

He said he sells honey at prices ranging from Tk 350 to Tk 400 per kilo. In Chhabilapur village of Melandah upazila, Nurul Huda, another honey collector from Satkhira, has set up 190 beehives. This season, he has collected a similar amount of honey.

Similarly, Mosharaf Hossain, from Satkhira, has dedicated 15 years to this profession. He recently collected 45 maunds of honey from Shyampur village in Melandah. "If the government provides soft loans, it will help us sustain and expand this profession," he noted.

Deputy Director of the DAE, Zakia Sultana, said last year, 34 honey collectors set up 5,643 boxes and harvested 29,450 kilogrammes of honey. "This year, the numbers have increased significantly, benefiting both honey collectors and mustard farmers, as pollination boosts crop yields," she said.

Honey collection is expected to continue till the end of January.



Need a dedicated commission to tackle environmental issues
Prof Rehman Sobhan tells event

UNB, Dhaka

Former caretaker government adviser Professor Rehman Sobhan yesterday attributed environmental degradation to unchecked profit motives and market dominance.

He also urged establishing a dedicated commission to tackle these challenges.

"Environmental protection efforts are being hindered by the lack of proper enforcement of laws... I also called for urgent action to establish a commission dedicated to addressing environmental challenges," he said while inaugurating a special conference celebrating the 25th anniversary of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (BAPA) at the Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University in Dhaka.

The rising cost of land, driven by market economics, is causing the encroachment of rivers, wetlands, and forests for housing development.



Prof Sobhan underscored the need for collective action and suggested forming a specialised commission to address the issue effectively.

He highlighted how the rising cost of land, driven by market economics, is causing the encroachment of rivers, wetlands, and forests for housing development.

Praising the involvement of citizens in environmental movements, Sobhan noted that despite existing progressive laws, their implementation remains inadequate.

He also stressed the importance of unifying different environmental platforms to create collective pressure on the government.

Drawing attention to past development projects, he said the Kaptai Hydropower Project, initially envisioned as a solution to the country's energy crisis, failed to deliver on its promises.

"Instead, it displaced a significant population and caused severe environmental damage. We must refrain

SEE PAGE 4 COL 8



Candidates go through one last revision of the syllabus before sitting for the MBBS admission test yesterday. They even share helpful advice on particular topics with each other. The photo was taken opposite Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Child dies in Rohingya camp fire

Around 100 houses gutted

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

A five-year-old child died in a fire that broke out at the Mochoni Rohingya camp in Teknaf, Cox's Bazar early yesterday.

The deceased, Ayesha Siddiqua, was sleeping inside when their house was engulfed in the fire that occurred at G-2 block of the newly registered camp in Nayapara.

"As soon as the fire broke out, I tried to escape with everyone, but I couldn't find my daughter. Later, I found out that she had died in her sleep in the fire. The fire was not accidental; it was intentionally staged. We demand a proper investigation," said Mohammad Ibrahim, the child's father.

At least 500 people became homeless as the fire ravaged around 100 houses.

"The fire broke out suddenly in one

house, and quickly spread to nearby houses and structures. Rohingya and APBN members worked together and brought the fire under control later," said Mohammad Kausar

Before the fire, many houses in our block were locked from the outside, which indicates that someone deliberately set the camp on fire.

Omar Farooq
A community leader of camp's G-2 block

Sikder, commanding officer of 16th Armed Police Battalion and also an additional deputy inspector general.

The Rohingyas at the camp alleged that the fire was preplanned.

Omar Farooq, a community leader of camp's G-2 block, said, "Before the fire, many houses in our block were locked from the outside, which indicates that someone deliberately set the camp on fire."

Shaheed Nur, a Rohingya resident, said, "We captured one criminal involved in abduction in the camp and handed him over to the authorities. Three days ago, his gang threatened to set fire to the camp, and they did it."

Asked in this regard, the APBN official said they will look into the issue.

Contacted, Abdul Hannan, in-charge of Nayapara Camp in Teknaf, said the affected people are being provided with assistances including blankets, dry food, and other supplies, while donor agencies have started rebuilding the houses.

"The police are investigating the cause of the fire," he added.

RMG exports reached

FROM PAGE 3

Spain with US \$3.42 billion, and France with US \$2.14 billion.

Additionally, exports to Canada reached US \$1.24 billion, accounting for 3.23 percent of the market.

Bangladesh is also making notable progress in non-traditional markets like Japan and Australia, reflecting efforts to

diversify.

Non-traditional markets contributed US \$6.33 billion, or 16.46 percent of total RMG exports.

Among these markets, Japan led with US \$1.12 billion, followed by Australia at US \$831 million, India at US \$606 million, Turkey at US \$426 million, and Russia at US \$343 million.

Polls in 6 months

FROM PAGE 3

implemented," he added.

Sarjis also said groups comprising citizens from every district and upazila will be formed

across the country to prevent corruption and irregularities.

He said Rangpur division, including Panchagarh, has faced significant neglect in development over the past 16 years.

"The people of Panchagarh deserve what is rightfully theirs, and we will work to secure that," he said.

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মানারগাঁও জাদুঘর প্রাঙ্গণ
মাসব্যাপী
লোককারুশিল্প মেলা ৩
লোকজ উৎসব ২০২৫
বিশ্বে আকর্ষণ-কর্মসূল ও বিশ্বে ধৰ্মী, লোকীয়ে
প্রদানী, ধৰ্মী ধৰ্ম ও লোককারুশিল্প পরিবেশনা
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বাংলাদেশ লোক ও কারুশিল্প ফাউন্ডেশন
সংকুলিত বিষয়ক মন্ত্রণালয়
সোনারগাঁও, নারামগঞ্জ

www.sonargaonmuseum.gov.bd

GD-181

JCD to hold 'March for Justice' today

BSS, Dhaka

Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), a pro-BNP student organisation, will observe the "March for Justice" programme today.

The programme will demand the trial of "goons" of the recently-banned Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) and teachers from various educational institutions who acted as cohorts of the Awami League during the July-August uprising.

The JCD will bring out the procession from the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh (IEB) to Central Shaheed Minar at 2:30pm, said a press release from the organisation.

26 years on

FROM PAGE 3

sheet accusing six people -- top listed criminals Sanjidal Hasan Emon, Mohammad Islam Munna, Shamsur Rahman Mona, Anisur Rahman Zaved, Tarique Saif Mamun and Sagor Hossain Osman.

According to the case record, Osman died during the trial. Emon and Mamun are now on bail, while the rest are absconding.

The court framed charges against the six on December 10, 2003.

The next hearing in the case is scheduled for May 4 this year.

On May 9 last year, the Speedy Trial Tribunal 2 of Dhaka acquitted Emon and Mamun of the case filed over film actor Sohel Chowdhury's murder.

On December 18, 1998, Sohel was shot dead by some unidentified criminals at Trumps Club in Abedin Tower on Banani's Road 18.

Residential students

FROM PAGE 5

In response, CU assistant proctors Nurul Hamid Kannan and Nazmul Hossain intervened to control the situation.

Abdullah Al Galib, a resident of Shahjalal Hall and a student of Banking and Insurance, said, "We found no evidence of the hall's provost approving the claims made by Chhatra Dal. They did not obtain permission for the community feast or any political meeting. They are advancing their political agenda, which we, the general students, are opposing."

The programme will demand the trial of "goons" of the recently-banned Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) and teachers from various educational institutions who acted as cohorts of the Awami League during the July-August uprising.

The JCD will bring out the procession from the

'outsiders' and attempting to destabilise the campus. The event was organised by Chhatra Dal members residing in Shahjalal Hall."

CU Assistant Proctor Nazmul Hossain confirmed to the protesting students that Chhatra Dal had indeed received permission for the feast from the hall's provost. He suggested that any complaints be discussed with the provost on Sunday.

Later, at CU Zero Point, Abdullah Al Noman, president of CU Chhatra Dal, condemned the attack, accusing Chhatra Shibir members disguised as students of ambushing them. He also criticised the administration for failing to investigate previous incidents.

He stressed the need to connect with grassroots communities affected by local environmental problems.

One of our members was injured in this attack," he added.

Noman added, "If the university administration does not take necessary action within the next 48 hours, we will be forced to take a stronger stand."

Need

FROM PAGE 3
from pursuing projects that harm the environment," he asserted.

In his keynote speech, Prof Nazrul Islam, vice president of BAPA and founder of BEN, acknowledged the challenges of sustaining voluntary efforts and self-funded initiatives.

He called for increased collaborative support.

Chairing the inaugural session, BAPA President Dr Nur Mohammad Talukdar reflected on the organisation's achievements over its 25-year journey while noting gaps in creating a nationwide environmental movement.

He stressed the need to connect with grassroots communities affected by local environmental problems.

Environmental scientists, researchers, and representatives from across the country attended the conference.

Hasina regime

FROM PAGE 3
"You spend two months working on a report, and in just one minute, another news outlet -- or even a hundred outlets -- steals it. You take a great photo, and a major newspaper publishes it without permission. If you produce a quality report, a hundred outlets steal it. Those who engage in such theft should be shut down."

Acbar Hossain Majumder, press minister at the Bangladesh High Commission in the UK; Plabon Tariq, the group's spokesperson; Uttara University teacher Mahbub Alam, and lawyer Molla Md Faruque Kaiser also spoke at the event.

Joynal Abedin Shishir, convener of the group, moderated the discussion.

The event concluded with the presentation of 13 proposals aimed at reforming the media.

Over a dozen

FROM PAGE 3

"This old building, housing factories dealing with flammable materials like plastic and leather, had no firefighting equipment. It posed a severe fire risk," he said.

He said water shortages, narrow roads, flammable substances, and large crowds of onlookers posed challenges to the firefighters.

The fire destroyed businesses on the upper floors, he said. While the exact cause of fire is yet to be determined, officials suspect an electrical short circuit or discarded cigarette may have triggered the blaze.

Among the victims, Nur Jahan Sandal Factory, owned by Samin Ahmed

Khan's family, had relocated to the building only four months ago, investing Tk 3 crore in machinery for Eid production.

"We have no insurance. Everything is lost. How will we recover from this?" Samin said.

Nasir Uddin, proprietor of Khan Footwear, said his warehouse of footwear worth several lakh taka was also destroyed.

PRAYER TIMING JANUARY 18

Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 5:30 12:45 4:15 5:40 7:00
JAMAAT 6:05 1:15 4:30 5:44 7:30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

পর্যবেক্ষণ প্রতীক স্থানে একটি প্রতীকীয়া পুরুষ দিবেন।

(ii) আবেদনের প্রতিক স্থানে Online আবেদনের ক্ষেত্রে ক্ষেত্রে প্রতীকীয়া পুরুষ দিবেন।

খ. Online আবেদনের প্রতিকীয়া পুরুষ দিবেন। প্রতীকীয়া পুরুষ দিবেন।

গ. Online আবেদনের প্রতিকীয়া পুরুষ দিবেন। প্রতীকীয়া পুরুষ দিবেন।

ঘ. প্রতীকীয়া পুরুষ দিবেন। প্রতীকীয়া পুরুষ দিবেন।

ঙ. প্রতীকীয়া পুরুষ দিবেন। প্রতীকীয়া পুরুষ দিবেন।

শ. প্রতীকীয়া পুরুষ দিবেন। প্রতীকীয়া পুরুষ দিবেন।

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স. প্রতীকীয়া পুরুষ দিবেন। প্রতীকীয়া পুরুষ দিবেন।

হ. প্রতীকীয়া পুরুষ দিবেন। প্রতীকীয়া পুরুষ দিবেন।

ঁ. প্রতীকীয়া পুরুষ দিবেন। প্রতীকীয়া পুরুষ দিবেন।

ঁঁ. প্রতীকীয়া পুরুষ দিবেন। প্রতীকীয়া পুরুষ দিবেন।

ঁঁঁ. প্রতীকীয়া পুরুষ দিবেন। প্রতীকীয়া পুরুষ দিবেন।

ঁঁঁঁ. প্রতীকীয়া পুরুষ দিবেন। প্রতীকীয়া পুরুষ দিবেন।

ঁঁঁঁঁ. প্রতীকীয়া পুরুষ দিবেন। প্রতীকীয়া পুরুষ দিবেন।

Residential
students, JCD
clash at CU hall
STAR REPORT

A clash broke out between residential students and Chhatra Dal activists at Shahjalal Hall of Chittagong University on Thursday night over a community feast.

Chhatra Dal alleged that members of Chhatra Shibir, disguised as regular students, launched an attack on them. On the other hand, residential students claimed the opposite.

The incident occurred shortly after a community feast began at 10:30pm. Around 11:00pm, general residential students started protesting against Chhatra Dal, chanting slogans such as "We do not accept outsiders, we will not tolerate" and "No to parasitic politics."

The situation at Shahjalal Hall quickly escalated into a clash.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6



Residents rely on dinghies to cross the canal for commuting between Ghazalia and Dakua unions in Patuakhali as the construction of a bridge over the waterbody has remained unfinished for two years. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR

Shawl makers struggle amid high production costs

MIRZA SHAKIL, Tangail

Even though sales of Tangail's iconic shawl, produced in both handlooms and powerlooms, have increased this winter, weavers and artisans are struggling to make expected profits due to the rising cost of production, especially the high price of yarn.

While demand has increased compared to last year, the higher costs of materials mean that shawls cannot be sold at higher prices, leaving weavers with narrow profit margins.

Tangail is known for its craftsmanship in producing fashionable shawls in various colours and designs. Popular types include Manipuri, Bangshali and Nayantara. The production of these shawls involves around 5,000 artisans from Delduar, Basail, and Nagarparupur upazilas. Despite the demand, many artisans are finding it increasingly difficult to sustain themselves financially.

Artisans like Abdus Salam shared

that while this year's sales are better due to the earlier onset of winter, profits remain low due to increased yarn prices.

Similarly, Shahar Ali, who has been in the profession for many years, said wages for making shawls have not risen in line with the increased

produce 4-5, leading to reduced competitiveness.

Craftsman Moinal Hossain said many artisans are now forced to seek alternative livelihoods during the off season.

On average, producing a single shawl costs Tk 250-350, and wholesalers add a profit margin of Tk 50-100. However, weavers often rely on loans to cover production costs. After repaying loans and interest, little profit remains, leaving many artisans in financial distress, they said.

Rabiul Islam, liaison officer of Tangail Basic Center of Bangladesh Tant Board, said the board is working for the development of the local handloom industry.

cost of living, making it hard for artisans to support their families.

The rise of powerloom machines has further impacted traditional handloom weavers. While a powerloom machine can produce 10-20 shawls daily, an artisan working on a handloom can only

On behalf of the board, the marginal weavers are given loan assistance from Tk 30,000 to Tk 1.5 lakh at five percent interest and powerloom machine weavers from Tk 50,000 to Tk 2.5 lakh without any deposit. They have to repay this loan in three years," he added.



Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Local Government Engineering Department
Office of the Executive Engineer

District: Cumilla
www.lged.gov.bd

Memo No. 46.02.1900.00.07. 427.2024-430

Date: 16/01/2025

e-Tender Notice Tender Notice No: 41/2024-2025

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the Procurement of Works as stated below:

Sl. No.	Package No.	Name of Works	Tender/ Proposal ID No.	Document last selling/ downloading Date and Time	Tender/ Proposal Closing Date and Time	Method of Tender
1.	CRMIDP/COM/W-452/2023-24	Construction of 2-Storied Rural Market Building (With 04-Storied Foundation) at Jhalam Bazar under Upazila: Barura, District: Cumilla(4th call).	1065738	04-Feb-2025 16:00 BST	05-Feb-2025 12:30 BST	OTM
2.	LGED/CUM/VRP/Re-hab/24-25/W-254	Rehabilitation of Bamonda R&H-Aushpara Road from Ch: 00-2900m(Road ID: 419724028) under Laksham Upazila, District: Cumilla	1061753	11-Feb-2025 16:00 BST	12-Feb-2025 12:30 BST	OTM

This is an online Tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no Off-line/Hard copies will be accepted.

To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required.

The fees for downloading the e-Tender Documents from the National e-GP Portal have to be deposited through online at any Branches of registered Bank. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

The Tender Notice will be available on the website: www.lged.gov.bd and www.lged.comilla.gov.bd


Mohammed Abdul Matin
Executive Engineer
LGED, Cumilla
Phone: 081-68960
E-mail: xen.cumilla@lged.gov.bd

GD-180

GHAZALIA CANAL

Locals suffer as bridge work stalled for 2yrs

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

The construction of a bridge over the Ghazalia canal in Patuakhali's Galachipa upazila has remained halted for the past two years, causing significant inconvenience to locals.

Following the collapse of the old iron bridge in 2015, residents have been forced to rely on dinghies to cross the canal, despite the risks, for commuting between Ghazalia and Dakua unions.

The Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) initiated a project to build a 72-meter-long, 3-meter-wide iron girder bridge at a cost of Tk 5.91 crore.

The contract was awarded to Haji Enterprise, a Barishal-based contractor, on January 18, 2021, with a completion deadline of January 24, 2022.

However, after completing just 30 percent of the work, the contractor withdrew Tk 1.94 crore in bills and sought an extension.

Although the deadline was extended to June 30, 2024, the construction has

yet to resume, alleged locals.

They said some residents still use the remains of the old bridge at great risk, while others depend on dinghies.

"No vehicles can travel between the two unions, making transportation costly and time consuming. It's especially difficult for moving goods," said Alam Sikder, a resident of Hogla Bunia village in Dakua union.

Lokon Gazi, a resident of Char Chandail village in Ghazalia union, said students are forced to use the old bridge to cross the canal to attend schools in Ghazalia union.

Contacted, contractor Kabir Sikder cited changes to the bridge's design and the ongoing revision of the construction estimate as reasons for the delay. He said the work would resume once the revised estimate is approved.

Md Jahangir Hossain, upazila engineer of LGED in Galachipa, said, "A letter will be sent to the contractor to expedite construction once the revised estimate is finalised."

GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
SAMAJSEBA BHABAN
E-8/B-1, AGARGAON, DHAKA-1207

No- 41.01.0000.013.07.1011.24-79

Date: 16.01.2025

Invitation for Tenders

1	Ministry/ Division	Ministry of Social Welfare
2	Agency/ Department	Department of Social Services (DSS), Agargaon, Dhaka-1207
3	Procuring Entity Name	Director (Admin & Finance), Department of Social Services (DSS), E-8/B-1, Agargaon, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207
4	Procuring Entity Code	Not Applicable
5	Procuring Entity District	Dhaka
6	Invitation for	GR:28 Stationery, Toiletries & Others Items of the Department of social Service Head Quarter, Dhaka-1207.
7	Invitation Ref No	41.01.0000.013.07.1011.24-79
8	Date	16/01/2025
KEY INFORMATION		
9	Procurement Method	Open Tendering Method (OTM)
FUNDING INFORMATION		
10	Budget and Source of Funds	Revenue Budget, GOB
PARTICULAR INFORMATION		
11	Tender Package No.	GR28/FY: 24-25
12	Tender Package Name	GR:28 Stationery, Toiletries & Others Items of the Department of social Service Head Quarter, Dhaka-1207.
13	Tender Publication Date	18/01/2025
14	Start of Tender Document Selling Date	20/01/2025
15	Tender Last Selling Date	02/2025 (Within Office Working Time)
16	Tender Closing Date and Time	03/02/2025 Time: 12:00 PM
17	Tender Opening Date and Time	03/02/2025 Time: 02.00 PM
18	Name & Address of the office(s)	Address: - Selling Tender Document (Principal) Deputy Director (Admin & Finance), Department of Social Services (DSS), E-8/B-1, Agargaon, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207. - Selling Tender Document (Others) Social Service Officer (Audit), 2 nd Floor, Department of Social Services, E-8/B-1, Agargaon, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207.
19	NO CONDITIONS APPLY FOR SALE, PURCHASE OR DISTRIBUTION OF TENDER DOCUMENTS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Receiving Tender Document 		1. 1 st Floor, Department of Social Services (DSS), E-8/B-1, Agargaon, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207. 2. Office of the Divisional Director, Department of Social Services, 3/20, Humayun Road, Mohammadpur, Dhaka.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opening Tender Document 		Meeting Room of MEGNA, 1 st Floor, Department of Social Services (DSS), E-8/B-1, Agargaon, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207.
INFORMATION FOR TENDERER		
20	Brief Eligibility and Qualification of Tenderer	As specified in the Tender Document.
21	Brief Description of Goods	GR:28 Stationery, Toiletries & Others Items of the Department of social Service Head Quarter, Dhaka-1207.
22	Brief Description of Related Services	As specified in the Tender Document.
23	Price of Tender Document (Tk) (Each Lot)	২০০০/- টাকার (অফেরতযোগ্য) নিম্নরিত কোড নথে প্রেসার্জ চালানের মাধ্যমে জমা দিতে হবে। 3 0 9 6 1 0 0 0 0 2 3 6 6
24	Lot No	Identification of Lot
25	Single lot	GR:28 Stationery, Toiletries & Others Items of the Department of social Service Head Quarter, Dhaka-1207.
26	Location	DSS, Dhaka
27	Tender Security Amount (Taka)	2,70,000/-
28	Completion Time in Days	28 (Twenty-Eight) Days from the Date of Contract signing
24	Name of Official Inviting Tender	Shahed Parvez
25	Designation of Official Inviting Tender	Director (Administration and Finance)
26	Address of Official Inviting Tender	Head Office, Department of Social Services, E-8/B-1, Agargaon, Dhaka-1207.
27	Contact details of Official Inviting Tender	Phone: 8802 55007022 (Office Working Time).
28	The Procuring Entity reserves the right to reject all Tenders or annul the Tender proceedings	

Shahed Parvez
Director (Administration and Finance)
Department of Social Service.

Xi holds phone talks with Trump

Sends VP Zheng to attend Trump's inauguration

AGENCIES

Chinese President Xi Jinping yesterday held phone talks with US president-elect Donald Trump, Chinese state media reported.

CCTV said the phone call happened "on the evening of January 17", without providing any immediate further details.

Earlier yesterday, China announced Xi would send Vice President Han Zheng to attend Trump's inauguration next week, reports AFP.

India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar is set to represent India at the swearing-in ceremony. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said that Jaishankar will also have meetings with representatives of the incoming Trump administration during his visit to the US, reports The Hindu.

India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar is set to represent India at the swearing-in ceremony.

Japan and Australia will be represented by their respective Foreign Ministers Takeshi Iwaya and Penny Wong. Argentina's President, Javier Milei, a strong supporter of Trump, has said he will attend, according to reports. Another Trump backer, Hungary's Viktor Orban, has said he is considering coming.

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni has said she hopes to attend the inauguration.

Hard-right Eurosceptic Nigel Farage, who leads the Reform UK party, is due to be at the ceremony, as is French far-right politician Eric Zemmour.

Trump waged a bitter trade war with China during his first term, slapping onerous tariffs on imports from the world's second-largest economy.

He has threatened to impose more severe measures this time around, accusing Beijing of unfair trade practices and contributing to a devastating fentanyl crisis in the United States.

4 journos

FROM PAGE 12

in a popular uprising.

Countries were ranked based on the number of journalists jailed, with Bangladesh tying with Nigeria at 14th place.

With three journalists jailed, India was ranked at 15. Afghanistan jailed fewer journalists than Bangladesh and India.

China, Israel, and Myanmar emerged as the world's three worst offenders, jailing 50, 43 and 35 journalists respectively.

Asia remained the region with the highest number of journalists behind bars in 2024.

A global total of at least 361 journalists were incarcerated as of December 1, 2024, the report said.

Globally, reporters or journalists covering politics made up the highest number of jailed journalists, the report said.

"Governments holding journalists without charge must cease the practice of arbitrary detention and immediately release arbitrarily detained journalists," said the report.

It also urged governments to end the misuse of anti-state and financial crime laws to punish journalists.

It also asked governments to repeal existing laws or reform them to ensure that they contain appropriate guardrails to prevent oppression against journalists.

EU deepens probe into X after Musk outbursts

AFP, Brussels

The EU yesterday demanded X hand over more details about its algorithms and any future changes as part of its wide-ranging probe into the platform, as Elon Musk's outbursts on European politics ramp up pressure for the bloc to act.

Musk, who will be a part of Donald Trump's incoming administration in the United States, has angered Europe with a series of attacks on the continent's leaders as well as support for Germany's far-right AfD party before next month's vote.



People attend a protest in Damascus, Syria, yesterday to support Gaza and condemn Israeli aggression on Syrian territories. Chief prosecutor at the International Criminal Court Karim Khan met Syria's new leader Ahmed al-Sharaa yesterday, state media reported, as last month's ouster of Bashar al-Assad sparks hopes for justice.

PHOTO: REUTERS

INTERNATIONAL

US top court upholds law banning TikTok

REUTERS, Washington

The US Supreme Court yesterday refused to rescue TikTok from a law that required the popular short-video app to be sold by its Chinese parent company ByteDance or banned on Sunday in the United States on national security grounds - a major blow to a platform used by nearly half of all Americans.

The justices unanimously ruled that the law, passed by an overwhelming bipartisan majority in Congress last year and signed by Democratic President Joe Biden, did not violate the US Constitution's First Amendment protection against government abridgment of free speech.

The justices affirmed a lower court's decision that had upheld the measure after it was challenged by TikTok, ByteDance and some of the app's users.

"There is no doubt that, for more than 170 million Americans, TikTok offers a distinctive and expansive outlet for expression, means of engagement, and source of community. But Congress has determined that divestiture is necessary to address its well-supported national security concerns regarding TikTok's data collection practices and relationship with a foreign adversary," the court said in the unsigned opinion.

Indian troops kill 12 Maoist rebels

AFP, Raipur

Indian security forces shot dead at least 12 Maoist rebels in central India, police said, as New Delhi steps up efforts to quell the long running insurgency.

More than 10,000 people have died in the decades-long insurgency waged by the rebels, who say they are fighting for the rights of marginalised Indigenous people.

The firefight broke out Thursday in the forested areas of Bijapur district in the state of Chhattisgarh, known as the heartland of the insurgency.

"We have received information of the killing of 12 Maoists in encounters with the security forces," senior police official Sundarraj P told AFP.

A crackdown by security forces has killed more than 200 rebels in the past year, an overwhelming majority in Chhattisgarh, according to government data.

Amit Shah, India's interior minister, said last year the government expected to crush the rebellion by 2026.

The conflict has seen a number of deadly attacks on government forces over the years.

Earlier this month, a roadside bomb killed at least nine Indian troops.

Russia-Iran pact adds momentum to ties

Putin tells his Iranian counterpart amid stinging Western sanctions

AGENCIES



adding it should further boost trade and economic ties.

Moscow has cultivated closer ties with Iran and other countries hostile towards the US, such as North Korea, since the start of the Ukraine war, and already has strategic pacts with Pyongyang and close ally Belarus, as well as a strategic partnership agreement with China amid stinging Western sanctions.

The 20-year Russia-Iran agreement is

not expected to include a mutual defence clause of the kind sealed with Minsk and Pyongyang, but is still likely to concern the West which sees both countries as malign influences on the world stage.

Moscow and Tehran say their increasingly close ties are not directed against other countries, reports Reuters.

Russia has made extensive use of Iranian drones during the war in Ukraine and the US accused Tehran in September of delivering close-range ballistic missiles to Russia for use against Ukraine. Tehran denies supplying drones or missiles.

The Kremlin has declined to confirm it has received Iranian missiles.

Russia has supplied Iran with S-300 air defence missile systems in the past and there have been reports in Iranian media of potential interest in buying more advanced systems such as the S-400 and of acquiring advanced Russian fighter jets.

Bangladesh needs

FROM PAGE 12

In the report, HRW said Bangladesh's interim government has set up a commission to investigate enforced disappearances and pledged reforms and accountability for rights abuses and against former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's authoritarian rule.

During the crackdowns on student-led protests over three weeks in July and August, over 1,000 people were killed and many thousands injured due to excessive and indiscriminate use of ammunition by security forces, the report said.

However, activists have raised concerns that security forces have continued to carry out abuses, including arbitrary arrests of opposition supporters and journalists and denying them due process and proper access to legal counsel.

HRW said while the interim government acceded to the United Nations Convention on Enforced Disappearances, security forces have failed to release those unlawfully detained or provide answers to their families about what happened to them.

The HRW report pointed to hundreds of thousands of Rohingya who fled Myanmar and are living in refugee camps are at risk of violence at hands of armed groups and gangs, adding that unregistered refugees risk hunger and do not seek health care out of fear that they will be returned to Myanmar.

Armed groups and government forces unlawfully killed civilians, drove many from their homes, and blocked access to humanitarian aid.

In many of the more than

70 national elections in 2024, authoritarian leaders gained ground with their discriminatory rhetoric and policies.

In the World Report, HRW Executive Director Tirana Hassan writes in her introductory essay that in much of the world last year, governments cracked down and wrongfully arrested and imprisoned political opponents, activists, and journalists.

Armed groups and government forces unlawfully killed civilians, drove many from their homes, and blocked access to humanitarian aid.

In many of the more than

70 national elections in 2024, authoritarian leaders gained ground with their discriminatory rhetoric and policies.

We condemn both incidents and urgently demand justice,

TIB worried over exclusion

FROM PAGE 12

Iftekharuzzaman added that the NCTB, along with those opposing the self-identification of indigenous communities as "indigenous" and those who devised the bizarre theory that the term "indigenous" cannot be used in Bangladesh, is continuing the legacy of authoritarian governments.

TIB has called for accountability from the NCTB and urged the organisation to be restructured to eliminate authoritarian influences.

TIB also urged the government to clarify its position on recognising indigenous communities' self-identity as "indigenous" and ensuring their equal rights.

'NOT AN ISOLATED INCIDENT'

Meanwhile, the CHT Commission yesterday condemned the attack on indigenous students and their supporters on January 15 in Dhaka.

In a joint statement signed by the commission's co-chairs, Sultana Kamal, Elsa Stamatopoulou, and Myrna Cunningham Kain, it said that when a group under the banner "Aggrieved Student Masses" organised a march on January 16 to protest the attack, the police responded with excessive force, including baton charges, water cannons, and sound grenades to disperse them.

The commission urged the government to take swift and decisive action to curb the influence of extremist forces and settle groups, safeguard the rights and security of indigenous peoples both within and beyond the CHT, and honour its commitment to fostering a diverse and inclusive Bangladesh.

TORCH PROCESSION

Members of Democratic Rights Committee, Left Democratic Alliance, and indigenous communities yesterday

accountability for the perpetrators, proper medical treatment for the injured, and effective measures to prevent such occurrences in the future," the statement said.

The commission believes the attack on indigenous students is not an isolated incident but part of a systemic culture of impunity that exists in the CHT and for indigenous peoples across Bangladesh, which has enabled the rise of extreme fundamentalist groups throughout the country.

The commission warns the interim government that if it fails to take immediate steps to curb the rise of these extremist forces, the consequences will extend beyond harm to indigenous peoples.

"This malicious force will also destabilise the government itself and undermine its promised vision of a diverse and inclusive Bangladesh," the statement read.

The commission urged the government to take swift and decisive action to curb the influence of extremist forces and settle groups, safeguard the rights and security of indigenous peoples both within and beyond the CHT, and honour its commitment to fostering a diverse and inclusive Bangladesh.

Afterwards,

demonstrators brought out a torch procession from DU campus.

staged a demonstration at Dhaka University protesting Wednesday's assault on students and the subsequent use of excessive force on the protesters by police the following day.

Angkan Chakma, president of the Hill Students' Council, Abdullah Kafi, a leader of the Communist Party of Bangladesh, researcher Mahtab Uddin, author and researcher Maha Mirza, and Masud Imran Manna, a teacher at Jahangirnagar University, and eminent economist Anu Muhammad addressed the programme.

"During and after the July uprising, our youths painted colourful graffiti that depicted their dream of a discrimination-free, new Bangladesh. They dreamed of a Bangladesh where there would be no place for autocracy and discrimination and that Bangladesh would be full of people who would embrace diversity. However, we do not see any similarity between that dream and the reality nowadays," said Professor Anu Muhammad.

Author and researcher Maha Mirza said, "In this country, indigenous people have been brutally assaulted when they were speaking for their rights. Dhaka's streets have been stained by blood. We did not want this Bangladesh, so we must restart our struggle."

Afterwards, demonstrators brought out a torch procession from DU campus.

Economy to grow 4.1% in FY25: WB

FROM PAGE 12

multilateral agencies, Bangladesh's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth in FY25 would be the lowest since FY20, when the Covid-19 pandemic wreaked havoc on the globe.

Earlier this month, the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) said GDP growth was 1.81 percent in the July-September quarter of FY25.

The first-quarter growth was the lowest since the second quarter of FY21, when the pandemic continued to cripple the economy.

In the first quarter of FY24, GDP grew 6.04 percent.

The WB said inflation in Bangladesh has remained persistently high, and monetary policy has been tightened further.

The 12-month average inflation in Bangladesh rose to 10.34 percent in 2024, up from 9.48 percent a year earlier.

In 2022, the annual average inflation

was 7.7 percent, according to the BBS.

In December, the IMF kept its projection of inflation in Bangladesh elevated for the current fiscal year, ending on June 30, 2025.

The WB said political turmoil in mid-2024 damped economic activity and worsened investor confidence.

It said growth in FY24 is estimated to have slowed to 5 percent, a downward revision of 0.6 percentage points from previous projections.

"Supply constraints, including energy shortages and import restrictions, weakened industrial activity and led to increased price pressures."

"High inflation reduced the purchasing power of households, slowing services growth."

The WB also cautioned about the risk of social unrest in countries, including Bangladesh, where youth unemployment has risen since the

pre-pandemic decade.

It said elevated social unrest could weigh on productivity and investor confidence in South Asia.

"In addition, the incidence of political violence has increased in some countries in the region," it added.

More frequent or more severe weather events could reduce food production, drive up food price inflation, and raise living costs, the WB report added.

The Washington-based multilateral agency said slower-than-projected growth in major trading partners and the resulting weaker demand could dampen activity, particularly in countries with strong economic ties to Europe and the USA, including Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

"For example, countries in Europe account for about half of total goods exports in Bangladesh."

REVIEWING THE VIEW

Evaluating the Draft Supreme Court Judges Appointment Ordinance, 2024



While it is undoubtedly a commendable initiative, a critical analysis of the draft law reveals some issues that need to be addressed to ensure that a robust framework is prepared for appointing SC judges in Bangladesh to uphold the independence of the judiciary and rule of law.

DR. FARHANA HELAL MEHTAB and ALI MASHRAF

Recently, the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs (Ministry) has drafted the 'Supreme Court Judges Appointment Ordinance, 2024'. The draft Ordinance addresses all issues regarding the appointment of Supreme Court (SC) judges: the composition of a council for appointment, its working procedure, eligibility criteria for appointment of an advocate or a judicial officer as an SC judge, and the process of confirming such appointments by the President.

While it is undoubtedly a commendable initiative, a critical analysis of the draft law reveals some issues that need to be addressed to ensure that a robust framework is prepared for appointing SC judges in Bangladesh to uphold the independence of the judiciary and rule of law.

The last caretaker government undertook a similar initiative by enacting the Supreme Judicial Commission Ordinance, 2008. The majority decision of a larger High Court Division (HCD) bench in *Idrisur Rahman v. Bangladesh* [(2008) 60 DLR 714] found one of its provisions unconstitutional but left the rest of the Ordinance intact. Nevertheless, the ninth Parliament did not pass the Ordinance as an Act, leading to

the Ordinance ceasing to have legal effect. Since then, the Awami League government always claimed that a law on appointing SC Judges was in the pipeline. However, it had been mere lip service. We must ensure that this Ordinance does not bear the same fate.

A glaring loophole is the omission of reference to Article 95(2)(c) in the preamble of the Ordinance, as the Ordinance is an exercise fulfilling that constitutional obligation.

There are multiple proposals (from SC, the Judiciary Reform Commission (JRC), and the Ministry) regarding the composition of the appointment council. The Ministry should also ask the Constitution Reform Commission about their proposals to understand all relevant proposals better. The draft Ordinance suggests the following composition of eight members: Chief Justice (CJ) of Bangladesh (chairman of the council), seniormost judge of the Appellate Division (AD), two seniormost judges of HCD (one of whom was elevated from the judicial service), one retired judge of the AD (to be appointed by CJ after consultation with other members of the council who are from SC).

Conversely, SC's proposal for a ten-member council, comprising CJ (chairman of the council), two seniormost judges of AD, two seniormost judges of HCD (one of whom was elevated from the judicial service), AG, President, SCBA, one Law Professor (nominated by the University Grants Commission (UGC)), and two citizens of Bangladesh, is rather apt for this purpose.

The necessity of including a Law Professor nominated by UGC is stated below. Bangladesh Judicial Services Association has argued that including the SCBA President may create a conflict of interest as such person is an elected representative of a professional body, which may lead to unethical or political interferences in the appointment procedure of SC judges. However, one can argue in favour of this inclusion from the point of view that advocates are better placed to assess the quality of their peers. Nonetheless, the SCBA President may be replaced by the Vice Chairman of the Bangladesh Bar Council.

Moreover, the drafters may consider appointing one citizen (out of the two positions) from any backward section of citizens, as was done in India in their now defunct National Judicial Appointment Commission, by reserving

that position to someone from the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, other backward classes, minorities or women. The Ordinance then needs to clarify the process of their appointment and tenure in the council.

A significant constitutional change is required by doing away with the provision of additional judges as outlined in Article 98 of the Constitution. The 118th report of the Law Commission (LC) of Bangladesh, titled 'The final report on the Law Commission's recommendations regarding the constitutional and statutory conditions for appointment to the post of a Judge of the Supreme Court' recommended (page 7) that the provision for appointing additional judges to HCD temporarily under Article 98 of the Constitution, and for a judge of HCD to temporarily sit in AD was understandably inconsistent with the concept of judicial independence. Thus, it needs to be abolished through constitutional amendment. It is evident that during a judge's tenure as an additional judge in either division of SC, the illusion of securing a permanent position as an SC judge hinders their ability to function independently. To ensure sustainable constitutional reforms, we must provide a process that upholds judicial independence and the rule of law.

Additionally, Article 95(2)(c) states: A person shall not be qualified for appointment as a Judge unless he is a citizen of Bangladesh and – has such qualifications as may be prescribed by law for appointment as a Judge of SC. The three sub-clauses in Article 95(2) are separated by 'or'. Hence, under this provision, a jurist, such as a law professor or a legal researcher with institutional affiliation, can be considered for appointment as an SC judge.

The 118th LC report (page 6) also proposed this and prescribed their minimum age to be 45 years. The report further justified their inclusion (pages 3–4) by stating that this is a practice in India and Nepal. It argued that for conducting judicial proceedings in apex courts, not only practical but also a sound theoretical knowledge of laws, their correct interpretation and application, a sound understanding of justice, etc., are necessary. These can be acquired not only through experience as a judge and a lawyer but also through other means. Hence, conditions such as an excellent academic career, along with a specified term of experience as a law professor at the university level or as a senior research officer at any renowned research institution, may also be attached for such persons to be eligible for appointment as SC judges. LC believed this exception and

distinction would contribute to the overall and collective improvement of SC's standards.

Hence, the drafters should evaluate this proposal and draw up further eligibility criteria for qualifications for these candidates, in addition to the qualification criteria drawn up in section 6 of the Ordinance. In this regard, including a law professor (nominated by UGC) to the appointment council is vital.

The malpractice of supersession of HCD judges during their elevation to AD has been a common practice in Bangladesh. Hence, this malpractice must be stopped moving forward. Seniority should be the predominant criterion for elevation. Hence, the relevant provisions in the draft Ordinance should be amended in light of this recommendation.

The provisions on the process of convening a meeting by the Chairperson, or immediately after a request by the President to do so, the selection process whereby the council prepares a list of eligible candidates and also invites applications from interested candidates, conducts interviews of the shortlisted candidates, and ultimately sends the finalized list of candidates along with a reasonable number of standby candidates to the President are indeed praiseworthy as they ensure a transparent and inclusive appointment process. The Ordinance may contain a provision for recording the interviews of the shortlisted candidates for greater transparency. Moreover, rather than fixing up a rigid percentage for appointing SC judges between two groups – judges from the district judiciary and advocates – it is better to follow the proposal forwarded by JRC: reasonable representation of the two classes will be reflected while recommending eligible candidates.

The draft Ordinance also ensures the primacy of the CJ's opinion over that of the President (sections 11–12), ensuring the continuity of the constitutional convention that has developed in Bangladesh over the years, as affirmed by AD in their latest decision in *ABM Altaf Hossain & others v. Bangladesh & others* [(2024) 19 SCOB (AD) 21]. Overall, it is a promising development, and addressing the abovementioned concerns will ensure a transparent and inclusive appointment process for SC judges in Bangladesh, paving the path for sustainable reforms in our apex judiciary.

Professor Dr. Farhana Helal Mehtab is the Dean of the School of Arts and Social Sciences at Southeast University and Ali Mashraf is a Lecturer at the Department of Law at East West University.

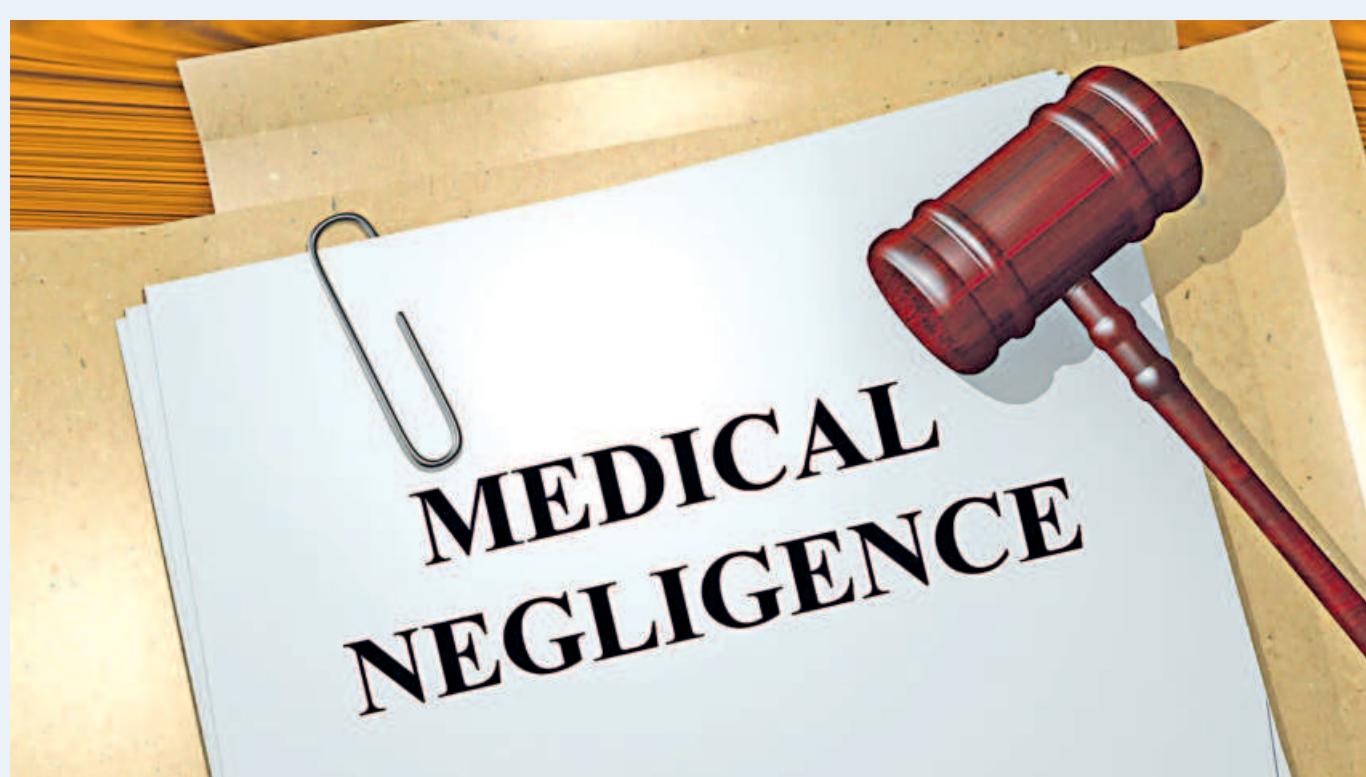
LAW ADVOCACY

Need for Medical Negligence Law

TASMIN JAHAN NEEHA

One year back, on 19 February 2024, the death of Raahib Reza due to a sudden cardiac arrest, at the capital's Labaid Hospital, Dharmundi, shocked the country. It was alleged that the cardiac arrest happened while undergoing endoscopy, a relevantly low-risk procedure. On 11 March same year a writ was filed on behalf of Raahib's family seeking an independent investigation into the death of victim and claiming Tk 10 crore in compensation for the alleged negligence of doctors. A High Court Division (HCD) bench issued a rule on the same day, ordering an investigation accordingly.

The inquiry report, submitted on 19 September 2024, was supplemented with a clarification letter from the Ministry of Health. The report found gross negligence before, after and during Raahib's endoscopy. It was also found that Raahib's consultant, Dr. Mamun conducted 67 endoscopy the day alone on which Raahib was admitted to the hospital. The report further revealed that seven out of the eight members of the team that conducted the endoscopy had no credible certification to conduct such procedures. The report however could not



determine whether anaesthetic (Propofol) or sedative (Merozolyn) was administered to the victim thus showing gross negligence on the part of the hospital administration as well.

Unfortunately, this is one of many cases where a patient's death owes to healthcare professionals. Such situation would be more avoidable and less fatal if we had a medical negligence tort law. Tort refers to an act or omission, other than a breach of contract, which gives rise to injury or harm

to another and amounts to a civil wrong, for which courts may impose damages or compensation.

However, there do exist a few legal provisions under which medical negligence may be addressed in Bangladesh. Our Constitution has incorporated the right to life and personal liberty as one of the fundamental rights in Article 32. However, the State is yet to enforce this fundamental right on a satisfactory level in respect of medical negligence. Again, Section 304A of

the Penal Code, 1860 is titled 'causing death by negligence' which mentions that a negligent act causing death not amounting to culpable homicide is an offence and provides maximum punishment of 5 years or fine or both. This section is not exclusive to negligence by medical professionals, but it is one of the predominant provisions that are invoked in case of medical negligence. Further provisions which are relevant, but not exclusive to dealing with medical negligence, include sections 314, 323, 325,

336–338, with the terms of imprisonment ranging from three months to ten years. But provisions such as sections 88 and 89 do excuse any such act done in good faith.

Another significant provision lies in section 53 of the Consumer Protection Act, 2009 which mentions that an act done in negligence by a 'service provider' which causes damage to the life or health of a 'service receiver' shall be subject to imprisonment up to 3 years or fine of not more than 2 lac taka or both. The term service provider undoubtedly is capable of including healthcare professionals, clinics and private hospitals. While the punitive remedy seems reasonable to some extent, it is to be noted that any loss to life or limb is worth much more than the said amount.

The framework is therefore a patchwork, and a codified law could have been far better in helping the claimants opt for a forum and a process to navigate. In recent years, medical negligence has been, notably, acknowledged by the High Court Division in several cases in the form of Public Interest Litigation (PIL). Seeking remedy through PIL skyrocketed in jurisprudential value throughout the last decade. But whether invoking PIL is sustainable in cases of medical negligence without a codified distinctive law is not clear. Articles 15 and 18 of the Constitution, if read together, provides ample scope for the State to legislate on medical negligence tort. Its high time Bangladesh introduced medical negligence tort to uphold the constitutionally guaranteed fundamental rights.

The writer is an LLM candidate at the University of Dhaka.

Recent police actions need explaining

Have the lessons of the July uprising been forgotten already?

The heavy-handed actions of the police, which resulted in at least seven injuries during a protest march towards the home ministry on January 16, are deeply troubling. Reportedly, police employed water cannons, fired sound grenades, and wielded batons against protesters demonstrating against an attack on an Indigenous group and its supporters the previous day—an attack that police notably failed to prevent—which left at least 20 people injured.

What transpired on January 16 raises a critical question: did the police truly need to resort to such extreme measures? Based on the available information, the protesters appear to have remained peaceful. Even if they reportedly attempted to dismantle police barricades blocking access to the home ministry, could the police force not have sought to de-escalate the situation through dialogue? Was using violence genuinely necessary? Video clips of the incident show police officers viciously beating protesters—including female ones—with batons as they tried to flee. Among the injured, at least six were students. Considering the traumatic experiences our students endured only months earlier at the hands of various law enforcement agencies and others, shouldn't the police have exercised greater restraint in handling this situation?

Police's inaction on January 15, when an Indigenous group of protesters and their supporters were attacked by another group "claiming" to defend the country's sovereignty, followed by their excessive force a day later, bears an unsettling resemblance to their actions under the Sheikh Hasina regime. This raises serious doubts about the government's promise of reform, particularly in the policing sector. How can the public trust the government's commitment to justice when its law enforcement agencies act with such inconsistency and disregard for basic human rights?

The recent conduct of the police clearly betrays the spirit of the July uprising. We, therefore, call on the government to conduct thorough investigations into the events of both days, as well as the police's response to these incidents. While two individuals responsible for the attack on January 15 have been arrested, we urge the government to identify and hold to account all others involved. We also demand that the authorities ensure proper oversight of police actions going forward to prevent the repetition of such incidents.

It is crucial to remember that the central demand of the July uprising was to create a discrimination-free Bangladesh. Yet, these incidents demonstrate that discrimination continues to persist in our society. If systemic failures like these are not addressed, they will only deepen public mistrust and undermine the nation's progress toward equality. The government must recognise these troubling signs and take immediate corrective action to uphold the principles of justice and fairness for all citizens.

Plight of street children still ignored

Govt must address systemic issues to protect them

It is disheartening to see that our street children continue to be victims of all kinds of abuses, the latest reported incident being that of a youth raping a 10-year-old flower seller under Dhaka's Shahbagh Metro Rail Station on Wednesday. We have regularly written about the plight of this marginalised group, but are yet to observe any comprehensive initiative to address this issue. Neglecting these children implies that their lives are of little value, but an egalitarian society—one we all wish to achieve—has no place for such negligence.

According to a UNICEF study, as many as 34 lakh street children live without parental care in Bangladesh, leaving them extremely vulnerable to abuse. Many of these children sleep alone or in groups for safety, but even then, one-third face violence during sleep. As per a study by the Ministry of Social Welfare, 46 percent of female children experience sexual abuse, and a 2022 survey by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) states that about 80 percent of street children face some form of harassment or torture. From inappropriate comments and physical contact to threats and exploitation, the victims of these heinous acts have no one to turn to.

About 36 percent of these children have never experienced any formal or informal education, according to the BBS survey. Furthermore, they don't have access to basic amenities and are forced to beg or do menial work to survive. All these point to systemic issues in our legal, institutional, and social structures; hence, ad-hoc measures cannot resolve this crisis. Although the 19-year-old charged with rape has been arrested, the extremely low conviction rate for sexual assault, the inaction of law enforcers, and societal tendencies to shame rape survivors prevent the child from getting the justice she deserves.

The interim government currently has great opportunities to introduce reforms in the sectors it oversees. While services like shelters can definitely help these children, they don't address the structural cracks. Mending the system will require a comprehensive legal framework surrounding child protection, a reformed police force, and a society that is sympathetic to the abused and marginalised. With the right safety nets, these children hold immense potential to contribute to the country's prosperity, but more importantly, they have the right to lead a dignified life, and the state has a duty to ensure that.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY



German Empire established

On this day in 1871, the German Empire was founded by Otto von Bismarck in the aftermath of three successful wars by the state of Prussia.

EDITORIAL

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An analysis of the constitutional reform recommendations

BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

Dr Shamsad Mortuza
is professor of English at Dhaka University.

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

"Politics is too serious a matter to be left to the politicians"—Charles de Gaulle, a French military officer-turned-statesman who led the resistance against the Nazis during World War II, famously said what has now become a truism. Earlier, another Frenchman, a physician-turned-journalist-turned politician named Georges Clemenceau, quipped, "War is too important to be left to the generals." Clemenceau, who later became the prime minister of France, was referring to the successive defeats of the military during World War I and asserted the influence of the national assembly for the eventual formation of the Third Republic. The French connection between the two statesmen implies a rejection of the professionals or experts dedicated in the field. Instead of assigning the tasks of war and politics, two important facets of

significant changes to our current constitution. There are academics, activists, lawyers, and writers in the team. Notable exclusions are the politicians who birthed the constitution and brought 17 different changes over the last five decades. The interim government formed the commission to reflect the wind of change through which the former government was ousted. It felt that the different provisions within the constitution compromised its democratic spirit and allowed the premier to turn into an autocrat. Whether the recommended changes can be implemented by the incumbent administration before the parliamentary election or by the incoming government after the election is a legal debate that needs to be sorted. But more importantly, the commission's report has brought many of the inherent contradictions

The country's four guiding principles for state governance—nationalism, socialism, democracy, and secularism—have been replaced by democracy, equality, human dignity, social justice, and pluralism. The essence of socialism can easily be subsumed under equality and social justice. The omission is thereby understandable. The contention lies

just recently shows that equality is a far cry if we don't truly practise pluralism.

Yet, countries from where the bicameral parliamentary model has been suggested recognise their Indigenous population as "First Nations." The special status is a way to integrate the marginal groups into the mainstream. Even

it concluded by observing, "We, the people of Bangladesh, who, in the continuity of the historical struggle for the liberation of this land, achieved independence through people's war and united against autocratic and fascist rule for the establishment of democracy, solemnly pledge, in utmost respect for the martyrs who sacrificed

Republic of Bangladesh" replaced with "Citizenship" and "People's Democratic Bangladesh" in all relevant sections of the constitution. In Bangla, they used the coinage "jono gono nagorikontro."

I don't see any reason as to why "projatontro," a widely understood term that conveys the idea of people's rule or governance by the people, needs to be changed. The Latin root of the word implies "public affairs," and in Chinese it means "shared harmony." The commission has unnecessarily rooted itself in semantics. May I also remind the commission of the financial, administrative, and logistical costs involved in changing the name of the country? Delivering democratic governance and reforms that benefit the people should be the priority at this point in time. The symbolic or semantic debates will hardly do us any good.

The seven key proposals made by the commission include: adoption of the new guiding principles for the constitution and the state; establishment of institutional balance of power; reduction of the absolute power of the office of the prime minister; clear proposals for the structure of the interim government; decentralisation of the judiciary; ensuring a robust local government system; and expansion of fundamental rights, with constitutional protection and enforceability. They all deserve serious attention.

Then again, we have hit the walls of legitimacy as we have yet to determine whether it is within the mandate of the interim government to bring such changes. A referendum is required before the foundational terms of the state or the structure of governance are altered. This could lead to legal challenges, public discontent, and long-term instability. Indeed, the commission might believe that drastic changes are too crucial to leave to the politicians. Then another republic may soon arise with an alternative diktum to dismiss the one that has been proposed. Such knowledge is too dangerous to be left with the academics.



FILE VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

in the removal of two categories: nationalism and secularism. The commission evidently tried to include them in their broad categorisation of citizenship and pluralism.

They redefined the term citizenship, replacing the existing Article 6 (2), "The people of Bangladesh are a nation of Bengalis," with "The citizens of Bangladesh will be known as 'Bangladeshis.'" This allows the commission to avoid Bangalee nationalism that worked as a mantra during our Liberation War. The proposed category of citizenship does not necessitate distinguishing citizens in terms of their ethnic groups. But the brute force with which some citizens from the hill tracts were beaten up for demanding their "Indigenous" status

from a geostrategic perspective, it is important for us to restore calm and peace in our hinterland that has been targeted by major stakeholders and neighbours with separatist agendas.

The committee head mentioned that they worked day and night for months under the image of Abu Sayeed and remained mindful of the sacrifices made by the students and members of the general public during the July uprising. The Proclamation of Independence on April 10, 1971 embodied their guiding spirit of anti-discrimination. I think the committee cherry-picked the three terms—equality, human dignity, and social justice—to create a counternarrative that cursorily mentions the Liberation War and equates it with the July uprising.

their lives, that the ideals of equality, human dignity, and social justice that inspired the people of Bangladesh in the Liberation War of 1971, and the ideals of democracy and anti-discrimination that united us against fascist rule in 2024, will be established in the state and society."

The whimsical interpretation of the term "projatontro" echoes the sweeping statement. The commission head has mentioned his reservation against the Bangla term for "Republic" in various forums. He did not pay heed to many observers who reminded that there was nothing wrong with the term, despite its shadowy connotation of being subject to a sovereign monarch. The commission head uses a royal "we" to say that they would like to see "Republic" and "People's

The country's four guiding principles for state governance—nationalism, socialism, democracy, and secularism—have been replaced by democracy, equality, human dignity, social justice, and pluralism. The essence of socialism can easily be subsumed under equality and social justice. The omission is thereby understandable. The contention lies in the removal of two categories: nationalism and secularism.

national life, to the so-called experts, both Clemenceau and de Gaulle wanted various stakeholders in formulating strategies for national life.

The nine-member Constitutional Reform Commission, headed by Prof Ali Riaz, has recommended

and inconsistencies within the constitution to the surface. Some of them were due to the Cold War realpolitik that conditioned our independence; socialism is a case in point. Many others were due to the self-serving interests and agendas of various governments.

the safety and dignity of all citizens, including those from the Indigenous communities, and raises serious concerns about the protection of human rights and social harmony in the country.

It is also deeply regrettable that, decades after the Liberation War, Indigenous people remain largely unrecognised, both in

According to the Indigenous student leaders, such open attacks in Dhaka are unheard of. Some leaders even said such violence against Indigenous individuals, in broad daylight in the capital city, might be the first of its kind. This alarming development highlights a troubling shift in the treatment of marginalised communities in Bangladesh.

Mathews Chiran
is a development practitioner from the Indigenous Mandi Garo community.

MATHEWS CHIRAN

Dhaka University campus towards the home ministry on January 16. But police intercepted the march with barricades, using water cannons and charging batons to disperse the protesters, injuring seven more.

According to the Indigenous student leaders, such open attacks in Dhaka are unheard of. Some leaders even said such violence against

beforehand. Was it a lack of preparation or was there a lack of willingness to act? The NCTB cannot absolve itself of responsibility either. Removing an artwork that symbolises the country's diversity and inclusive spirit is a blatant affront to the anti-discrimination movement and an insult to the memory of those whose sacrifices paved the way for the vision of a better Bangladesh.

Attacks on the Indigenous communities have occurred frequently over the years. Let's recall a recent incident: in September last year, a Bangalee man was killed by a mob in Khagrachhari over an alleged theft. His wife filed charges against three Bangalees and other unidentified individuals, but none against any Indigenous individuals. Nevertheless, this led to clashes between Bangalees and Indigenous people in the Chittagong Hill Tract (CHT) region, resulting in four Indigenous deaths, including 17-year-old Anik Chakma. Disinformation on social media targeting Indigenous people further exacerbated the situation. Let's not forget about Pirem Snal, a Garo leader who was shot at an anti-eco-park procession in Madhupur in 2004. We can't forget Kalpana Chakma, a young Indigenous rights activist who was abducted at gunpoint in 1996 and never returned.

There is also a tendency to label the Indigenous people as "anti-state" or "separatists," with claims that external forces are attempting to separate the country. As a result, the land rights of Indigenous people are viewed not with compassion, but as a threat. This has led to Indigenous people being labelled by some as "enemies of the nation." Meanwhile, there are misguided

attempts to create confusion about the Indigenous identity, despite the fact that the UN clearly outlines the term "Indigenous" based on several defining characteristics, including distinct self-identity, a historical connection to pre-colonial societies, a unique cultural identity, and a strong link to land and natural resources.

If such an appalling treatment persists, will the Indigenous people ever feel safe in this country? The way their rights are typically handled is not conducive to peaceful resolution. Tolerance and understanding are more crucial now than ever. Cultural exchanges and empathy towards the struggles of marginalised communities are essential. Going forward, the government must prioritise Indigenous rights and put an end to such tragic events.

The forces that attempt to demonise Indigenous people are often the same forces that fuel conspiracies to harm the country. Yielding to unjust, unfair demands is never the solution. If people have differing views and demands, they should present them to the authorities for discussion with stakeholders—this is the democratic way. Violence is never the answer.

The anti-discrimination movement, led by students and joined by the Indigenous people, was a beacon of hope for a better Bangladesh. During this movement, the word "Indigenous" was proudly displayed, with slogans like "Samatal theke pahar, ebar mukti shobar" (From the plains to the hills, freedom rings this time) resonating on the walls, symbolising unity and freedom for all. We hold on to that hope, believing in a future free from discrimination.



Police intercept a march by Indigenous protesters and their supporters and disperse them with water cannons and by charging batons, injuring seven people, in Dhaka on January 16, 2025.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

the NCTB office on January 15 to protest the graffiti's removal and to demand its reinstatement. This led to a brutal attack on the unarmed protesters, leaving at least 20 people including journalists seriously injured. The attackers used cricket stumps, indicating that the violence was premeditated and was probably supported by a powerful faction. Following this attack, Indigenous youth and their supporters, under the banner Aggrieved Students Masses, launched a protest march from the

Indigenous individuals, in broad daylight in the capital city, might be the first of its kind. This alarming development highlights a troubling shift in the treatment of marginalised communities in Bangladesh. Adding to the distress, reports emerged of Indigenous student leaders being followed by unidentified individuals while returning home after hospital visits. Such actions not only instil fear but also create a sense of insecurity and alienation. This appalling state of affairs also reflects a failure to ensure

What you need to know before PURCHASING A KINDLE

OHONA ANJUM

I first considered getting a Kindle when I started traveling frequently. Overtime, the idea grew more appealing as I realised how much time I spent commuting. On the way to university, the long hours on the bus often felt like wasted opportunities. Reading seemed like a good option, but my bags were always overloaded with study materials and textbooks, leaving little to no room for the books I actually wanted to read.

The idea of having an entire library condensed into a lightweight device started to seem not just convenient, but almost essential. Since then, I have started to read significantly more. It's a refreshing change from the constant distractions of traditional digital devices. According to findings

depending on the file size and formatting. It features an e-ink display designed to provide a glare-free reading experience, closely mimicking the appearance of real paper. This makes it ideal for use in both indoor and outdoor settings, including bright sunlight.

However, it's worth noting that not all Kindle models are waterproof. The Kindle Paperwhite series, which offers a step up from the Basic model, includes a range of versions starting from the Paperwhite 4 to the more recent Paperwhite 5 and Paperwhite 6 Signature Edition. These models come with additional features such as higher storage capacities, ranging from 8 GB to 32GB, and adjustable warm light settings for a more comfortable reading experience at night.

Each model in the Paperwhite lineup caters

compensating for the lack of a traditional headphone jack. This feature is particularly useful for those who enjoy audiobooks available through Amazon's Audible service. With a pair of Bluetooth-enabled headphones or a speaker, users can seamlessly switch between reading and listening.

When compared to other e-reading devices like Kobo and Nook, Kindle stands out primarily because of Amazon's ecosystem. The Kindle Store offers one of the largest selections of eBooks, including exclusive titles that are not available on other platforms.

Kindle users can take advantage of Kindle Unlimited, a subscription service that provides unlimited access to a rotating catalogue of over two million eBooks, audiobooks, and magazines. For Amazon Prime members, Prime Reading adds even more value, offering access to a curated selection of books and magazines at no additional cost.

Kindle also seamlessly integrates with library borrowing services like OverDrive and Libby, making it easy for users to borrow and read library eBooks directly on their devices. While competitors like Kobo also offer library integration and support for a broader range of file formats (such as EPUB without conversion), Kindle's simplicity and vast library of content often make it the preferred choice for many readers.

For those seeking more customisation and advanced features, devices like the Kobo Libra or Kobo Elipsa offer better PDF handling, stylus compatibility for note-taking, and support for side loaded content. Nook, however, has struggled to match Kindle's features and ecosystem, though it remains an option for readers tied to Barnes & Noble's ecosystem.

by Statista, internet users spent six hours and 36 minutes online daily as of the second quarter of 2024. A large fraction of this time involves endless notifications and distractions that make it hard to focus on anything meaningful for an extended period of time. This is where Kindle stands out, since it offers the benefits of a digital device while maintaining the simplicity and focus of reading a physical book, free from the noise of the digital world.

While it is not cheap, the variety of options make it easier to find the right fit for each reader. Starting off, the Kindle Basic (10th Generation) is an entry-level model and comes with 8 GB of storage, which can accommodate up to approximately 5,000 text-heavy eBooks,

to different user needs. For example, the Paperwhite 5 introduced a larger 6.8-inch display with thinner bezels, while the Signature Edition offers features like wireless charging and an auto-adjusting front light.

Kindle devices are renowned for their exceptional battery life, which can last up to a month or more on a single charge, depending on usage. This makes them incredibly travel-friendly and hassle-free, allowing users to read extensively without constantly worrying about finding a power outlet. Kindle's long battery life is a significant advantage for an avid reader like myself.

In addition to its portability, Kindle supports wireless listening devices via Bluetooth,

Ohona Anjum writes, rhymes, and studies English literature.

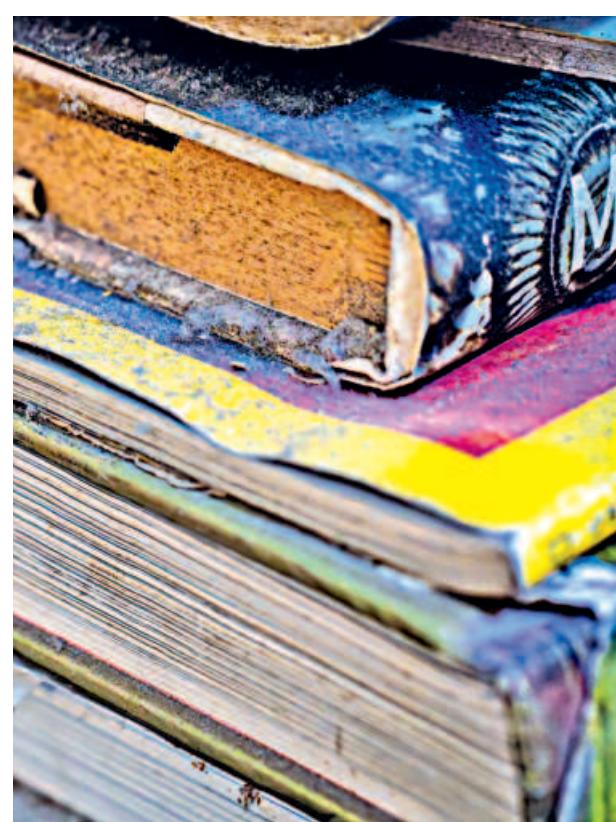


PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

Musings of a once avid reader

ANICA BUSHRA RAHMAAN

I pick up my copy of *Orlando*, poised to be swept away to Woolf's radical world, even though my eyes are bleary. I haven't gotten any reading done in the last two days. I have to read at least one page tonight. I must. It's a self-imposed insistence or, perhaps, defiance. Otherwise, I will be forced to face the bitter reality, that the bond I once shared with books is fading, like a flame flickering in the wind, no matter how hard I try to shield it with my hands.

I remember a family member once telling me that I would eventually grow out of my habit of reading and that life would, at some point, allow little space for it. I dismissed it with arrogance and barely concealed irritation. Books held a very precious place in my life, and that would always be the case. I would make sure of it.

And now, when I am not even halfway through the page, the weight of growing up hums persistently in the back of my mind. I have an early morning class the next day, I should just go to sleep. I have an assignment due soon. If I am staying up late, I might as well finish that. The quiet demands of adulthood have rendered reading – something that used to be so captivating, freeing, and easy – into a chore.

Sure, there are explanations and even solutions. I could blame it on how pervasive technology, social media, and phones have become. I could also try switching to a new genre or different medium. But they all feel hollow – only serving as a reminder of how hard it is to rekindle something that once came so naturally. It instills a sense of obligation instead of mere joy, making the distance feel even greater.

I remember a family member once telling me that I would eventually grow out of my habit of reading and that life would, at some point, allow little space for it. I dismissed it with arrogance and barely concealed irritation. Books held a very precious place in my life, and that would always be the case. I would make sure of it.

It might seem silly to be distraught over something like this. I mean, it's just books, right? Try telling that to the 15-year-old girl for whom books were a blissful escape and a constant. On the roads, no matter how much her mother scolded her, she would sneak glances at the book on her lap, the streetlights, flickering in and out, serving as her only guiding light. She would stay up through the quiet hours of the night, with burning eyes, consuming story after story as though the words might vanish. She had no worries about the obligations of the next day or the pending tasks festering away at the back of her mind. She simply let the words flow through and warm her heart.

She would read in between classes, during lunch breaks, and in any situation that warranted waiting. That teenager would be crushed at such an unfolding. It hurts to drift away from books and the warmth of words, and let my imagination lie dormant. It almost feels a little like grief.

A book still travels with me wherever I go. It's the one habit I have not been able to shake off – an empty comfort. In the end, I still try to read a page, close the book, and place it in my bag. Maybe, one day, the words will pull me back like they used to and I will finally be able to restore this fraying thread. For now, I will pretend just a little longer.

Anica Bushra Rahmaan has deluded herself into thinking hoarding books counts as reading. Perhaps, one day, she'll be able to read it all. Reach her at anicarahmaan@gmail.com



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

Saikat to get \$2k per BPL match

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladeshi umpire Sharfuddoula Ibne Shahid Saikat is the only ICC elite panel umpire in the country and this time he would be conducting quite a few matches in the BPL, unlike in previous years.

To honour the only ICC elite panel umpire, Saikat would be given 2000 dollars per match, umpires' committee chairman Iftekhar Ahmed Mithu informed yesterday.

Saikat, who began this BPL with the Chittagong Kings vs Khulna Tigers match on Thursday, will conduct six games overall. He would not, however, be able to conduct the final or playoffs as he is likely to conduct matches in the India-England series.

The per-match salary has been improved across the board for umpires. Local umpires were being paid Tk 35,000 TK per match previously and it has been bumped up to Tk 50,000 this tournament. For international umpires, salary has been increased from 500 dollars per game to 600 dollars.



SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh U-19 women's team skipper Sumaiya Akter insists they aren't taking Nepal lightly, mentioning that they will try to give their best during the ICC U-19 Women's T20 World Cup, scheduled to get underway in Malaysia today.

Bangladesh had beaten their Nepali counterparts by nine wickets in a Super Four game in the inaugural U-19 Women's T20 Asia Cup, in which Bangladesh emerged runners-up.

"Nepal are an up-and-coming team. They are always a challenging opponent. We are not taking them lightly. They will definitely try to give their best. We will also try to give our best," Sumaiya said in a video message yesterday.

Bangladesh will also face Australia and Scotland in their remaining Group D

WOMEN'S U-19 T20 WC

Bangladesh not taking Nepal lightly



matches on January 20 and 22, respectively, and Sumaiya sounded confident about overcoming those hurdles.

"Both Australia and Scotland are strong opponents. It's always challenging to play against them. But we also have a strong team. We always try to give our best on the field and will try to do the same in order to qualify for the next round.

We are also very confident about it," Sumaiya said.

The top three teams from each of the four groups will progress to the two groups of Super Six, the top two teams from which will then play in the semis. The final of the second edition of the global meet will be held on February 2.

Apart from having a few

camps and the U-19 Asia Cup campaign last December, the women's U-19 team also recently toured Sri Lanka where they finished the four-match T20 series 2-2. Meanwhile, players like Sumaiya, Habiba Islam Pinky and Nishita Akter Nishi already have experience representing the senior side.

"We had a very good preparation. We worked so hard and we worked on our fitness, technique, and mental aspects. Our coaching staff also guided us in the right direction," the skipper said.

"Many of our players have experience in international cricket. I think it will be helpful for us. They can help the team with their experience. They can teach how to play good cricket under pressure," added Sumaiya, claiming their primary target is to become champions in the event.



Mohammedan on a roll

SPORTS REPORTER

Title contenders Mohammedan consolidated their sole lead in the Bangladesh Premier League with an all-win record after handing a 1-0 defeat to Brothers Union in Mymensingh yesterday.

Nigerian forward Emmanuel Sunday continued his superb run, scoring in his fifth consecutive match with a placing shot in the 12th minute as Mohammedan moved to 24 points, eight ahead of Abahani, who have a game in hand.

Brothers Union, meanwhile, remained in fourth position with 14 points from eight matches.

From the outset, the charges of Alfaz Ahmed controlled the game before breaking the deadlock with Sunday beating Brothers' goalkeeper Ashraful Islam Rana with a diagonal shot.

Brothers came close to levelling the margin twice but Mohammedan goalkeeper Sujan Hossain frustrated Gambian forward Zakaria Darboe and defender Sushanta Tripura while Sunday and Jewel squandered two sitters in the stoppage time of the first half.

After resumption, Brothers' goalkeeper Rana denied Mohammedan from extending the lead by thwarting two shots from Emmanuel Tony and Muzaffarov Muzaffarjon while Brothers' Cheikh Sene drove miles off target on his second attempt after Sujan denied him from a one-on-one situation in the last minute of the match.

In the day's other match in Mymensingh, Chittagong Abahani bagged their first points of the season with a 1-0 win against Bangladesh Police while Fakirpool Young Men's Club thrashed Dhaka Wanderers Club 4-1 in Gazipur.

'Best I have played in the tournament'

A fired-up Novak Djokovic powered into the last 16 of the Australian Open on Friday in an ominous reminder of why he is a 10-time Melbourne champion. In his bid for a record 25th Grand Slam crown, Djokovic blew the 24-year-old Czech Tomas Machac off Rod Laver Arena 6-1, 6-4, 6-4 in 2hrs 22mins. "There's always something to improve, work on, but this is definitely the best match I've played in the tournament," Djokovic said.



Carlos Alcaraz suffered a wobble in the third set against Portugal's unseeded Nuno Borges but regained his focus to ease through 6-2, 6-4, 6-7 (3/7), 6-2 into the last 16.

Alcaraz and Djokovic are on a collision course for the quarterfinal.

Germany's second seed Alexander Zverev also booked his place in the second week with a methodical 6-3, 6-4, 6-4 win over Britain's Jacob Farnley.

Defending champion Aryna Sabalenka shrugged off a shaky display to fight her way into the fourth round with a 7-6(5), 6-4 victory over Clara Tauson.

What to WATCH

SONY SPORTS 2 AND 5
Australian Open
3rd round
Live from 6:00 am
A Sports and PTV
Pakistan vs West

Indies
1st Test, Day 2
Live from 10:30 am
SONY SPORTS 2
Big Bash League
Melbourne Renegades
vs Brisbane Heat

Live from 12:00 pm
SA20
Pretoria Capitals vs
Paarl Royals
Live from 5:00 pm
SELECT HD1
Premier League

Newcastle vs
Bournemouth
Live from 6:30 pm
Brentford vs Liverpool
Live from 9:00 pm
Arsenal vs Aston Villa
Live from 11:30 pm

Amorim cautious with Diallo praise

REUTERS, Manchester

Manchester United manager Ruben Amorim insisted he must be careful not to lavish Amad Diallo with too much praise after the Ivorian forward's late hat-trick earned his struggling team a 3-1 victory over Southampton on Thursday.

United were largely second best against bottom of the table Southampton, falling behind in the first half to a Manuel Ugarte own goal as the hosts looked to be heading for a fourth successive home league loss.

Diallo, however, single-handedly dragged his side to a much-needed success, becoming the second youngest United player to score a Premier League hat-trick after Wayne Rooney, with three goals in the final 10 minutes to earn his side victory.

"The important thing is to win and he helped us and then he is doing a very good season," Amorim said of Diallo. "But you have to be careful with the young kids. Congratulations to him, enjoy tonight and he needs to appreciate these moments."

"I will tell him tomorrow he has to rest, eat good food because Sunday we need him again. He did a great job, a good moment for a young kid to score a hat-trick for a club like this."

SHORT CORNER

'Women's BPL to increase standard of cricket'

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) director Nazmul Abedeen Fahim said that the Women's Bangladesh Premier League will help to improve women's cricket in the country. "The board has been thinking for a while about a way to take women's cricket forward. Keeping that in mind, we were thinking about the possibility of having a BPL for the women. We have decided today that we will do it," Fahim told reporters in Mirpur on Friday.

Pothas quits Bangladesh job citing family reasons

Bangladesh men's team's fielding coach Nic Pothas has resigned from his role, citing family reasons, a Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) official confirmed the matter on Friday. "During the West Indies series, he resigned from his role due to family reasons. It has been effective from December 20, 2024," BCB's cricket operations in-charge Shahriar Nafees told The Daily Star.

Liverpool's Slot braced for tough Brentford test

Arne Slot says the second half of the season will be even tougher than the first as he targets a record-equalling 20th English top-flight title for Liverpool in his first campaign at Anfield. Four points clear of second-placed Arsenal in the Premier League with a game in hand, they face a testing match against mid-table Brentford on Saturday.

Belgium sack national team coach Tedesco

Belgium's football association on Friday announced the sacking of national team coach Domenico Tedesco after disappointing performances at Euro 2024 and in the Nations League. "Unfortunately, the Red Devils did not perform as we hoped at Euro 2024, just as they did in the next Nations League campaign," the football association (RBFA) said on their website.

*Read full stories on The Daily Star website

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Economy to grow 4.1% in FY25: WB

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The World Bank has kept its forecast for Bangladesh's economic growth almost unchanged for the current fiscal year (FY) 2024-25, citing subdued investment and industrial activity amid heightened political uncertainty.

Bangladesh's economy may grow 4.1 percent in FY25, the WB said in its latest Global Economic Prospects released Thursday.

The growth projection is slightly higher than its October forecast of 4 percent for FY25.

Growth is projected to pick up to 5.4 percent in FY26, assuming broad political stability, successful reforms in the financial sector, an improved business climate, and increased trade, the WB report said.

"Easing inflation is expected to boost private consumption," said the multilateral lender.

The WB's latest forecast is also higher than the 3.8 percent growth projection made by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in December last year, which cited output losses caused by the July uprising, floods, and tighter policies.

As per the predictions of the two

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

CLASS-9,10 TEXTBOOKS

TIB worried over exclusion of the word 'indigenous'

CHT Commission slams attacks on students

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has expressed concern over the National Curriculum and Textbook Board's (NCTB) removal of the word "indigenous" from the graffiti on the back cover of textbooks for grades 9 and 10.

In a statement issued yesterday, TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said that this decision, along with subsequent attacks on peacefully protesting indigenous groups, betrays the ideals and aspirations of an equitable and discrimination-free Bangladesh, which was born from the bloodshed and sacrifices of student and public movements.

"Through this decision, NCTB has shown that despite the fall of 15 years of authoritarian rule, the practice of authoritarianism within this institution persists. Legitimate questions arise as to whether NCTB is actively conspiring to uphold the agenda of fallen authoritarianism," TIB executive director said.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

4 journos jailed for being seen as supporters of Hasina: CPJ

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least four journalists were jailed in Bangladesh last year as they were seen as supporters of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina, according to a Committee to Protect Journalists report.

CPJ's 2024 prison census published yesterday found that the primary drivers of journalist imprisonment in 2024 were ongoing authoritarian repression (China, Myanmar, Vietnam, Belarus, Russia), war (Israel, Russia), and political or economic instability (Egypt, Nicaragua, Bangladesh).

"Dozens of journalists whose reporting was considered favourable toward Hasina's government were subsequently targeted in criminal investigations," said the report, referring to the regime that was toppled in August last year.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1



"Aggrieved Students-Masses" brings out a torch procession at Dhaka University yesterday evening to protest against the attacks on indigenous people and their supporters on Wednesday and Thursday. The indigenous people were demonstrating against the removal of the term "adivasi" (indigenous) from textbooks.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

SEE PAGE 6 COL 2

Israeli security cabinet okays Gaza truce deal

Hamas set to release first hostages tomorrow

REUTERS, Jerusalem

The Israeli security cabinet has ratified the Gaza ceasefire and hostage return deal, ahead of a full cabinet meeting expected later yesterday, a statement from the prime minister's office said.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the deal is expected to take effect on Sunday (tomorrow), with the release of the first hostages by Hamas.

If successful, the ceasefire would halt fighting between Hamas and Israeli forces that has razed much of heavily urbanised Gaza, killed at least 46,876 people, and displaced most of the enclave's pre-war population of 2.3 million several times over, according to local authorities.

It could also ease hostilities in the Middle East, where the Gaza war spread to include Iran and its proxies - Lebanon's Hezbollah, Yemen's Houthis and armed groups in Iraq as well as the occupied West Bank.

In Gaza itself yesterday, Israeli warplanes kept up heavy strikes, and the Civil Emergency Service said that at least 101 Palestinians, including 58 women and children, had been killed since the deal was announced on Wednesday.

Under the six-week first phase of the three-stage deal, Hamas will release 33 Israeli hostages, including all women (soldiers and civilians),

children, and men over 50.

Israel will release all Palestinian women and children under 19 detained in Israeli jails by the end of the first phase. The total number of Palestinians released will depend on hostages released, and could be between 990 and 1,650 Palestinians, including men, women and children.

Hamas said in a statement yesterday that obstacles that arose in relation to the terms of the Gaza ceasefire agreement have been resolved.

A World Health Organization official said yesterday it should be possible to scale up aid imports into Gaza massively to about 600 trucks a day under the terms of the deal.

The aid surge requires more than a 10-fold daily increase in lorries from the daily average of 51 that UN data shows entered the enclave in early January.

"I think the possibility is very much there and specifically when other crossings will be opened up," Rik Peepkorn, WHO representative for the Occupied Palestinian Territory, told a press briefing in Geneva. "This can be built up very rapidly."

In Gaza, the airstrikes continued. In the aftermath of one strike on tents housing displaced people, a boy picked through damaged items on the floor that was littered with canned food and coffee pots.

- Gaza health ministry says 88 killed in 24 hours
- WHO upbeat on scaling up aid under ceasefire terms
- Death toll in Gaza rises to 46,876

LAND GRAFT CASE

Imran handed 14-year jail term
His wife sentenced to 7yrs in prison

REUTERS, Islamabad

A Pakistani court yesterday sentenced former prime minister Imran Khan to 14 years' imprisonment in a land corruption case, a setback to nascent talks between his party and the government aimed at cooling political instability in the south Asian nation.

The verdict in the case was delivered by an anti-graft court in a prison in the garrison city of Rawalpindi, where Khan has been jailed since August 2023.

Khan's wife Bushra Bibi was also found guilty and sentenced to 7 years in prison. She was out on bail but was taken into custody after the judgment was pronounced, Geo News reported.

Law Minister Azam Naeer Tarar told reporters that Khan's party could reach out to higher courts to appeal against the ruling, and that the former cricket star could also file a mercy petition to the president of Pakistan.

Omar Ayub, an aide of Khan, said the party will challenge the verdict in higher courts.

A post on Khan's account on social media platform X, citing his message from jail, asked his supporters not to panic and called the conviction a "joke."

"I will stay in the prison cell for as long as I have to in the struggle against this dictatorship," the post said, adding "We will not make any deals and will face all false cases."



Road crashes claim 6 lives

STAR REPORT

At least six people died in separate road collisions in Chattogram and Gopalganj yesterday.

In Chattogram, three friends were killed when an identified vehicle hit the motorcycle carrying them on the Dhaka-Chattogram highway in Mirsarai upazila in the early hours.

The deceased were identified as Rubel Barua, 40, Sunny Barua, 40, and Nipu Barua, 38, reports our Chattogram staff correspondent.

Borhan Uddin, sub-inspector of Zorargonj Police Station, said the three were returning home from a social event on a motorcycle.

When they reached Sufia Raster Matha around 3:00am, an identified vehicle hit their motorcycle, leaving the three dead on the spot, he added.

Biplab Barua, brother of Rubel Barua, said, "My brother and two others were childhood friends. They were returning from a wedding ceremony when the accident occurred."

The police said the vehicle that hit the bike was yet to be identified.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 2



Durbar Rajshahi batter Ryan Burl smashed four sixes and a four in a 27-ball 41-run blitz to propel his side to 184-7 in a Bangladesh Premier League group-stage fixture against Sylhet Sixers at the Zahir Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram yesterday. Left-arm spinner Sunzamul Islam starred with the ball with three wickets as Rajshahi bundled out Sylhet for 119 to clinch their fourth win of the tournament.

PHOTO: DURBAR RAJSHAMI

Women led early British society 2,000 years ago

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Women were at the centre of early Iron Age British communities, a new analysis of 2,000-year-old DNA reveals.

The research, published in the journal Nature on Wednesday, found that British Celtic societies were matrilocal with married women staying in their ancestral communities.

Human societies have often been shaped by where married couples choose to reside culturally.

For instance, in patrilocal communities partners mainly reside with or near the families of the male, whereas in matrilocal societies, couples live near the female's parents.

Previous studies confirm that patrilocality was widely followed in the European Neolithic, Copper and Bronze ages.

However, earlier research hinted that in the case of Celtic societies, women had higher status.

Romans documented their astonishment at finding women occupying positions of power, writing about queens - Boudica and Cartimandua - who commanded armies and finding the empowerment of Celtic women remarkable.



REIMAGINING DHAKA'S PARKS

Rasulbagh shows the way

MD ZAHIDUR RABBI

The Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) opened the "Rasulbagh Shishu Park" to the public after completion of the modernisation work in 2020. The 0.59-acre park has a range of amenities, from a library and gym to a mosque.

I love this field very much. We have a football club, and we practise here after school. It's like our second home.

Tahsin
A ninth-grader

When we started, the park was in a terrible state. There was no grass, just mud and debris. Illegal structures had taken over parts of the park, including a political office and a veterinary centre. It was a challenge to convince the authorities and the community to support our vision.

**Professor Rafiq Azam
Principal Architect of Shatotto**

Tucked into the narrow confusing lanes of Lalbagh is Rasulbagh Children's Park -- a rare slice of serenity in a city that often forgets to breathe. A place that once stood as a neglected corner of urban decay has now transformed into a vibrant hub of life, laughter, and hope. It's a story of how a small patch of land became a symbol of what Dhaka could be, if only we dared to dream bigger.

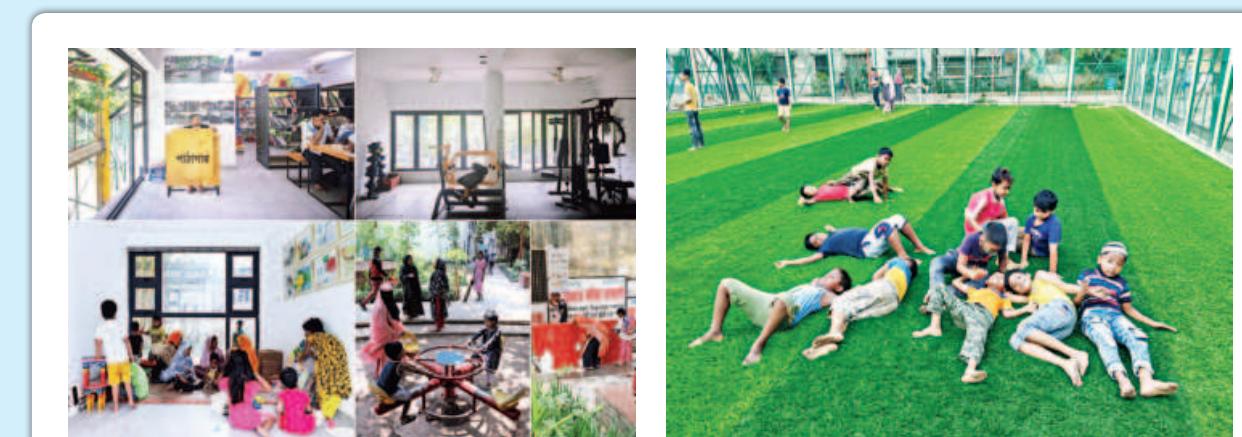
For decades, the park was an abandoned muddy plot, infamous for being a hangout for drug addicts and a waterlogged mess after every monsoon rain. It was the kind of place you hurried past, avoiding the accusing stares of its shabby walls and the uneasy whispers of its shady reputation. But today, Rasulbagh Children's Park tells a different story -- one of children playing football on artificial turf, elders strolling along shaded walkways, and neighbours gathering under the leafy embrace of a banyan tree. It is a space that has come alive, defying the odds stacked against it.

The heartbeat of a community

"I love this field very much," said Tahsin, a ninth-grade student with an infectious smile. "We have a football club, and we practise here after school. It's like our second home." Around him, kids darted across the AstroTurf installed in the park, kicking footballs and cheering each other on. Nearby, others played badminton, while a group of friends huddled together, engrossed in mobile games. For Niloy, a student of class 10, the park offers more than just a place to play. "I enjoy being here with my friends. The fresh air makes it even better," he said, glancing at the vibrant scene around him.

Outside the children's play area, Rony, a second grader, spun a *latim*, with unbridled enthusiasm. "Even after dark, I can play here," he said with a grin. "My parents don't mind because they know it's safe." The park's floodlights, installed as part of its renovation, ensure that the fun doesn't end with the setting sun.

Nasir, a shopkeeper whose small business sits adjacent to the park, has seen firsthand how the transformation has uplifted the neighbourhood. "After the park was renovated, I've had customers of all ages. Monthly sales of my shop also increased. It's wonderful



Facilities on the park premises.



Children having fun inside the park.



Before installing Astroturf at the park.



An aerial view of the Rasulbagh Park before it was renovated and the Astroturf was set up.

to see so much energy and joy here," he shared.

The vision behind the change

The park's transformation owes much to the vision of Professor Rafiq Azam, principal architect of Shatotto, a Dhaka-based firm. With over 30 years of experience, Professor Azam saw the potential for Rasulbagh Children's Park to become more than just a recreational space.

"When we started, the park was in a terrible state," Azam recalled. "There was no grass, just mud and debris. Illegal structures had taken over parts of the park, including a political office and a veterinary centre. It was a challenge to convince the authorities and the community to support our vision."

The project began as part of the "Jol Shobuje Dhaka" initiative, a city corporation effort to revitalise 31 parks and playgrounds across the capital.

For Rasulbagh, the vision was

clear: an open, welcoming space that encouraged community engagement and addressed the area's long-standing issues with waterlogging. "We decided to break down the old walls surrounding the park," Azam explained. "This 'unboxing' approach created a sense of openness and ownership among the local residents. It was important for the park to feel like it belonged to everyone," he said.

A community-centric approach

From the outset, community involvement was central to the park's redesign. Meetings were held with local residents on a regular basis to address their concerns and incorporate their ideas. Separate sessions were organised for younger and older residents, recognising that their needs and perspectives often differed.

"The older people were initially sceptical," Azam said. "But once they saw the plans and understood how the park could benefit everyone, they

became our strongest allies."

One of the most significant challenges was addressing the area's poor drainage system. Collaborating with experts, the team designed trenches beneath the walkways to collect and store rainwater. With a capacity of 1 lakh litres, these trenches not only prevent waterlogging but also supply filtered drinking water to the surrounding community. "It's a sustainable solution," Azam noted. "The water has been successfully used for the past few years."

Features that make it a bit special

The Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) opened the "Rasulbagh Shishu Park" to the public after completion of the modernisation work in 2020. The 0.59-acre park has a range of amenities, from a library and gym to a mosque. Its AstroTurf field, installed in 2021 at a personal cost of Tk 50 lakh by Rafiq Azam, has become a focal point for sports and recreation.

Beneath the turf, a network of pipes aids in rainwater drainage, ensuring the field remains usable even during heavy rains.

"AstroTurf is expensive initially," Azam admitted. "But in the long run, it's the best option for a park like this. It's durable and easy to maintain."

Native trees line the park's edges, creating a sense of belonging and continuity with the area's heritage. Benches under the shade of trees offer a place for quiet reflection, while the mosque's perforated brick screen integrates seamlessly into the park's design, providing a serene space for prayer.

Challenges and lessons

Despite its success, the project was not without its hurdles. Bureaucratic red tape, resistance from local politicians, and the apathy of city authorities posed significant challenges. "We didn't receive all the funding that was promised," Azam revealed. "In fact, we had to use our own resources to complete some of the work," he further shared.

Maintenance remains an ongoing issue. While the city corporation and former mayor initially pledged to provide a dedicated team for upkeep, this promise has not been fully realised. Azam said, "We've had to hire two personnel ourselves to ensure the park is maintained. It is a common problem in Bangladesh - once a project is completed, there is very little follow-up."

A glimpse of what could be

For those who grew up in Dhaka, Rasulbagh Park feels like a slice of the city's past, reimagined for the future. It is a place where neighbours meet, children grow, and life slows down for a moment.

In a city known for its chaos, this small park offers a vision of what could be - a Dhaka where open spaces bring people together, where clean water flows, and where thoughtful planning creates lasting change. As Rafiq Azam puts it, "This park is not just about space - it is about joy, connection, and hope."

As the city continues to grapple with unplanned growth, pollution, and environmental challenges, Rasulbagh Children's Park reminds us that with proper urban planning, and even in the most crowded and chaotic corners of Dhaka, spaces of beauty and belonging can emerge - if only we have the courage to imagine them.



REFLECTIONS

The Doppelgänger

Atef was not dismissive of Egyptian culture as he was of Egyptian politics and, hearing that we were ready to be taken as the artistic types he had initially taken us for, waxed eloquent about the songs of celebrated singer Umm Kulthum such as he felt Rani's ear would be particularly attuned to.

JOHN DREW

It was actually a bit of a relief to sit on the terrace of the Gezira Pension and have a quiet breakfast before plunging back once more into the traffic of Cairo in search of a carriage to the museum.

Typical the day before had been our experience in the imposing Al-Azhar, our delight while wandering through the cool courts of this ancient centre of learning brought to an untimely end by two men in jallabiya hustling us into an enclosed room and hassling us for money in a particularly menacing manner.

Undoubtedly it was this, along with an accumulation of little brushes further up the Nile, quite apart from centuries of non-believer prejudice concerning Islam, that caused us to jib when a stranger came across the terrace and, oh-so-politely, interrupted our breakfast to ask would we mind if he took our photograph.

We declined his request equally politely and turned back. Atef, for so was the name he gave us, refused to disengage. He understood our reluctance, he said, but he really was a keen amateur photographer, a guest in the same pension and looking across from his own breakfast table, he had been struck by the unusual picture we made under the wrought iron lamps.

Several coffees later we had become familiar with Atef's story. A Cairene who was a good tennis player, he had met up and often played with an American from the US Embassy at the club and, being one of those "enamoured by the promise of America", had emigrated with the help of this friend. After the usual setbacks experienced by an immigrant, he had established his own small business.

I interjected at this point to recall the welcome I got on my own first border crossing into the US as a hitchhiker from Canada. A huge poster on the wall at Immigration depicted a smiling hitchhiker on the roadside accompanied by a cadaverous figure at his shoulder holding a knife. "His happy smile", the caption ran, "may hide a murderer's grin. Don't pick him up".

Atef's paean of praise for the American way was more trenchantly countered by my wife Rani, a committed Nehruvian socialist. Atef was dismissive of his native country's experiments with socialism and the two broke several lances on the subject before Rani switched the subject to ask him why he was staying in the pension; did he have no family left in Egypt?

Atef's reply was rueful: He had several siblings in Cairo itself but they were always falling out with one another and his arrival and billeting with one or the other invariably occasioned a further falling out. On his recent visits he had taken the strategic step of staying at the best pension in Cairo, one we had done well to identify for ourselves.

The Gezira Pension, to which we had actually been directed by the neighbouring owner of another whose own was full, was conspicuous for a cleanliness that probably was next to godliness since its owner was a stern, discomfiting figure in a jallabiya. He

appeared silently in doorways only when required: rather forbidding.

Atef was not dismissive of Egyptian culture as he was of Egyptian politics and, hearing that we were ready to be taken as the artistic types he had initially taken us for, waxed eloquent about the songs of celebrated singer Umm Kulthum such as he felt Rani's ear would be particularly attuned to.

Before we went our separate ways a day or two later, he gave us a tape of her songs along with our photograph looking imperiously Victorian in sepia, we gave him some slim volumes of our verse and, after he had complimented Rani on her command of English while lamenting his own failure to grasp it after so many years in America, we said goodbye. And that was that.

Except it wasn't. Unexpectedly, we did hear from Atef again not so long after. He was coming to London on his way from Boston to see an American feminist friend in Lisbon, an admirer of Umm Kulthum. He had a few hours between flights. Was there any chance of a meeting?

Surprised to hear from him at all, we welcomed his proposal. What notable landmark should we propose where he couldn't miss us? We suggested he take the Tube to Westminster and we meet on the pavement directly beneath Big Ben.

Safely met up, we picked up where we had left off. Atef laughed at our choice of Big Ben: "a symbolic choice typical of poets", he said. We all laughed at our choice of restaurant for lunch. Just across Westminster Bridge was the one time London County Hall, the HQ, where Herbert Morrison had presided over Labour's plans to turn perennially free-for-all London into a socialist bastion.

A posh and distinctly unproletarian restaurant now fronted up County Hall and Atef caused further laughter by choosing to order the fish and chips. It was served decorously on a plate attended by special fish cutlery and a cotton napkin, not wrapped up in a page from an old newspaper he twitted Rani he had expected her to find for him. Whenever we were in Boston, he promised, he would return the compliment with bowls of clam chowder down on the waterfront.

Only one incident ever so slightly ruffled the tenor of our little riverside idyll. Towards the end of the meal, beer having been our tipple, I needed to use the toilet. It was reached along a carpeted corridor lined with prints and cartoons redolent of London over the years.

Outside the toilets a man was loitering, though evidently without intent in the sexual sense. Intent he was though, perhaps waiting for someone. But why there? He seemed out of place. If he was Egyptian, as it struck me casually he could have been, he wasn't there to enjoy a plate of fish and chips.

The man was still marking time when I came out again. When I returned to our table, Atef, remarking that travellers wisely take every opportunity to make use of good facilities, also got up to use the toilet. There was a lull that Rani and I took advantage of to settle the bill.

On Atef's return, we proposed strolling

along the South Bank to enjoy the river and its vistas until, somewhat belatedly, we realized we needed to hurry him over Hungerford Bridge and put him on the dilatory District Line if he was to be in time for his flight.

And that really was that. We never did hear from Atef again, beyond an email of profuse thanks from the airport in his usual broken English. Not much of a story, is it? Just a description of a casual acquaintanceship.

The next day this pleasant encounter with Atef was quickly forgotten.

News came through on the radio that there had been an attack on several iconic buildings in the United States. Photos began to appear on television of smoke billowing out of the Twin Towers in New York after planes had been driven into them.

Wasn't it just another of those dreadful horror films? That so many lives had been lost and in such a ghastly fashion did not register at first but as photos began to come in of people fleeing pell-mell through the streets, New York more resembled some war-torn place in the Middle East, Gaza perhaps, Benghazi, Beirut or, as the list has grown longer over the years, Baghdad or Damascus.

I was caught up with prolonged contretemps at an employment tribunal and I must confess I did not follow the endlessly headlined story of the astounding attack on America and its life-style so dear to Atef's heart. I did note our Prime Minister's wise comment that the attack required a thoughtful and quite different response from the usual knee-jerk bomb somebody, anybody.

There was one other marginal detail falling out from the attack that did catch my eye. Some days later, fed by who knows what intelligence source, a down-column piece in *The Guardian* reported there had been operatives on the ground in the United States who had planned and coordinated the 9/11 as we all now call the 11/9-attack.

These operatives, the report added, had quietly and separately slipped out of airports on the East Coast in the days leading up to the attack, flying to London before taking onward flights to diverse destinations in Iberia.

This snippet of information has intermittently niggled at my mind ever since, now a quarter of a century on. What does this persistent itch say about me? Does my sociable self have a shadow alter ego nagging at my shoulder as ready as the poster-boy hitchhiker's to stick the knife into some unsuspecting soul, here the hapless Atef?

Is this heartless doppelgänger so set on telling a sensational story it would seize on a couple of stray meetings with a stranger, drag from the shadows a pair of fleeting figures, one in a doorway in Cairo, the other outside a toilet in London, and wrap the whole lot up in a page from an old newspaper?

John Drew is an occasional contributor to The Daily Star. A collection of his articles, *Bangla File*, was published in 2024 by ULAB Press.



PHOTO: JOHN DREW

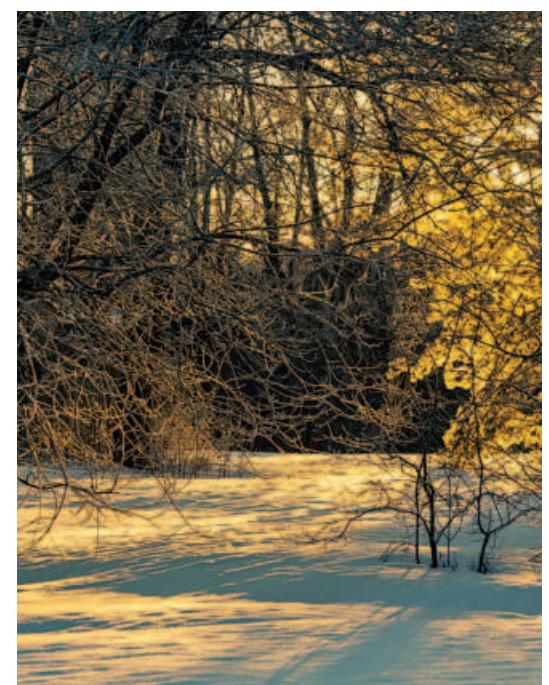


PHOTO: COLLECTED

POETRY

Reserved winter kiss

RAZIA AKTER

The soft touch of a winter morning breeze
A gentle ray of sunlight touches me
It's not the harsh touch of summer's day
Nor the dampness of the rainy days
It's like the warm hug of a mother's chest
Where there's no scent of mother, but only a sweet
sense of comfort in the touch I remember the
warmth of my mother's lap
Under the winter sun's soft touch.
Once the smoke rising from burning hay
The sun swallowing its light to stay
Spreading its glow across the sky
Filling the fields where we'd laugh and lie
That light would bring us all together
Around the fire—
Farmers, elders, children
All colored by the sun's soft hue
It healed our bodies, soothed our minds
And gave us hope of many kinds.
Such a light once brightened our small town
A glow that lifted every frown
Even today, that light still touches me
But the joy it once brought is hard to see The smell
of hay, those mornings
bright Are gone, like the sun at night
Now, only memories fill my heart The city sun, so
sharp and bright But give me a reserved kiss
Still I see the warmth in it that's lost.

Razia Akter is a fourth year student at the Department of English at Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP).

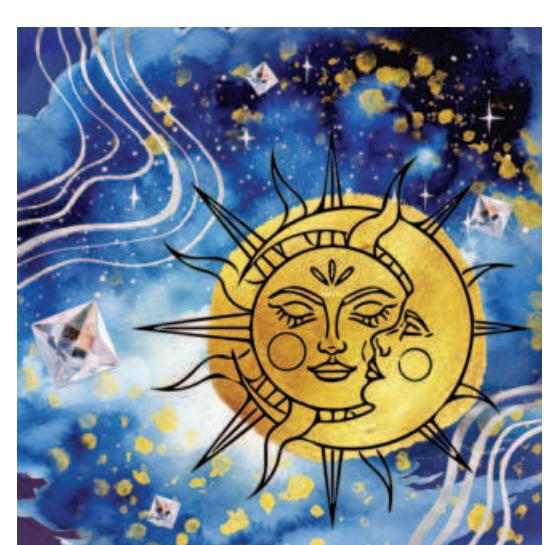


ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

POETRY

Diamanté

MITALI CHAKRAVARTY

As the silver in my hair
turns pale with cold,
my legs hurt. It's difficult
to walk. But my spirit soars
to the sun, to the moon.
I flit, I float among the stars.
I waft on clouds across the
seven seas and swing
from the mast of a sail ship.
I jump from ship to ship,
fly dangling from the claws
of a huge bird in the sky
till my toes scrape mountain tips.
And then, I plop on the sand
by the sea and gaze and gaze
at distant dreams. My legs
are fine and the silver in my hair
has turned gold. I am smarter
than Rapunzel for unbraided,
I let my hair splay across
the universe till it becomes
part of the sunshine.
I had always wanted locks
as dark as night to become
star spangled ebony. Diamanté.
Maybe, that too will be and I,
weaving sinuous realms
across a magic lamp,
ageless, timeless—forevermore.

Mitali Chakravarty founded the borderlessjournal.com. She has edited *Monalisa No Longer Smiles: An Anthology of Writings from across the World* (2022) and *Our Stories, Our Struggle: Violence and the Lives of Women* (2024). She has a book of poems, *Flight of the Angsana Orioles: Poems* (2023) and a book of essays on *China, in the Land of Dragons* (2014).

NUHASH HUMAYUN at a crossroads

SADI MOHAMMAD SHAHNEWAZ

Whether it's by crafting a groundbreaking IP with 'Pett Kata Shaw,' making history by working with Hollywood juggernaut Jordan Peele, or by being a revered member of the Writers' Guild of America, Nuhash Humayun's journey in Bangladeshi showbiz is nothing short of remarkable. We sat down with the ambitious director days after the release of 'Dui Shaw,' the second iteration of his horror phenomenon.



It must feel good knowing that you've created a franchise that arguably outgrew you in popularity?

Definitely does. I'll tell you a story: We needed a photographer to do a BTS for *Dui Shaw*. When one of them was told that it was for a Chorki project, he declined. When he got to know that it was mine, he said that he was still not sure. After he realised that it was for *Dui Shaw*, he was there in the blink of an eye!

Where exactly are you in your journey?

At a crossroads. My life significantly changed in 2022, when *Pett Kata Shaw* and *Moshari* were released.

Moshari brought me so much fame in international circuits – it unlocked a whole new path for me. I joined the Writers' Guild of America this year – the upward trajectory definitely started from there.

So, I am at a point where I see my career going in the direction of Korean director Bong Joon-ho, who made *Parasite* in his own language, but also *Snowpiercer* with Chris Evans. I'm not saying that I'm at his level, but he is someone that I would love to emulate.

I can see that happening, since after 'Pett Kata Shaw,' you ceased being the 'niche' director, and became much more accessible for people in the industry.

It was always easy for me to access talent in the industry, because remember, I come from a family of directors – there's a level of accessibility and privilege in that. But you're right, having something that I can call distinctly my own really gives me a form of credibility that I did not have before.

Did you ever think of releasing the 'Shaw' series on an international streaming platform?

Look, we did not send season 1 to any international festivals, but Rotterdam

approached me after hearing of it. We played at Rotterdam, Fantasia, and even won Best Film at Fantasia in London (We had edited the series into a film for it). In the end, it did not matter that it was on Chorki and not on Netflix. I hear from the platform that certain people subscribe to only watch *Pett Kata Shaw* and *Dui Shaw*. If your content is good, it can reach the ends of the earth, and I want to keep contributing to platforms belonging to Bangladesh, not just the international ones. After all, your content is good, it can reach the ends of the earth, and I want to keep contributing to platforms belonging to Bangladesh, not just the international ones.

Do you feel 'unburdened' from the high expectations of your family name?

I think the 'super-high' expectations are generated by the media. Growing up, I was never treated differently because I was Humayun Ahmed's son. People really misunderstand my relationship with my family, and some even think that I am 'burdened' by my last name. The very first thing I had ever written was a long piece on my father. I love him a lot, and it's also very humbling the way that people revere my father. For some people, I will always be Humayun Ahmed's son, and for others, I will be Gultekin Khan's son, and I am at peace okay with that. At the same time, I am an award-winning director on my own right.

Would you like to adapt any of Humayun Ahmed's legendary characters?

I am not opposed to it, as one of the rightful owners of that IP. However, I also want Bangladeshi directors to come to me and ask to adapt those characters – I want different artists to take his work and interpret it in their own way.



Out and About in DHAKA



138th WFMP: The British Comedy Show

January 19-20 | 11 am-7 pm
British Council Bangladesh



Leemonade Live @ Dhaka Sessions

January 23 | 7 pm-9 pm
Jatra Biroti



National Film Conference 2025

January 29 | 2:30 pm-6 pm
Senate Bhaban, Dhaka University

TRENDY STREAMS

Netflix:
American Primeval



Apple TV+:
Severance



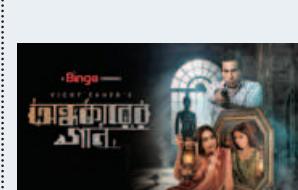
Prime Video:
Paatal Lok



Binge:
Ondhokarer Gaan



Bongo:
Pratiddhwani



TV TALKIES

'Black Warrant': A fresh and feisty dive into Tihar jail

Since the hit Netflix series *Sacred Games*, versatile director and producer Vikramaditya Motwane recently returned to the same platform with another fresh take on raw brutality with *Black Warrant*.

The seven-episode series is adapted from a book of the same name, co-written by jailer Sunil Kumar Gupta and journalist Sunetra Chowdhary.

The show is well-crafted, with each episode centring around a different case. It is a tough yet compelling watch as it exposes the flaws in the system – offering a refreshing counterpoint to the exaggerated cop dramas often produced for the big screen.

within.

Set in the mid-1980s, the series chronicles several shocking cases, such as the time spent by the infamous 'bikini killer' Charles Sobhraj (Siddhant Gupta) in Tihar Jail, as well as the chilling story of Billa and Ranga, who were sentenced to death for the brutal rape and murder of two teenagers in 1982.

The show is well-crafted, with each episode centring around a different case. It is a tough yet compelling watch as it exposes the flaws in the system – offering a refreshing counterpoint to the exaggerated cop dramas often produced for the big screen.



WHAT'S PLAYING

'Matha Ta Fatabo' by Bhanga Bangla

Musical group Bhanga Bangla's *Matha Ta Fatabo* is an unapologetic anthem of defiance, aggression, and resilience, encapsulating the raw energy of the Bangladeshi hip hop scene. The track's pounding beats and razor-sharp lyrics exude an unfiltered sense of rebellion. The music video of *Matha Ta Fatabo* is set in a dystopian, sci-fi-inspired narrative. It presents a grim future in the year 2041, where a global crisis has unfolded. Borders have collapsed, and no government or authority remains

to protect the people. A private military force gets deployed to hunt down immigrants and so-called aliens, enforcing a brutal "capture or kill" operation. *Matha Ta Fatabo* isn't just about attitude – it's about making noise, standing your ground, and refusing to be ignored. And in moments of demanding unabated justice, music, and reality can efficiently collide, amplifying the voices that demand to be heard.

WHAT'S ON THE GRAM

Wamiqa Gabbi

Bollywood actress Wamiqa Gabbi radiated sheer elegance and bold sophistication in a stunning red off-shoulder gown. The full-length dress featured exquisite gathers at the waist, accentuating her silhouette, and a daring thigh-high slit that added a touch of drama.

Her ensemble was elevated by the sparkle of multiple rings adorning her fingers, while sleek black stilettos complemented her look with effortless charm. To heighten the visual appeal, she introduced a striking twist with vibrant pink strappy heels, a bold contrast that amplified the allure of her glamourous presence. This look of Wamiqa's truly owned the spotlight with her style and confidence.





POLYTHENE BAN

A litmus test for will and eco-innovation

The use of poly bags is particularly rampant at local kitchen markets, indicating that Bangladesh is still struggling with the change despite being the globe's second largest producer of jute fibre, a widely accepted alternative.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

JAGARAN CHAKMA

Although Bangladesh became the first country in the world to announce a complete ban on the use of polythene bags in 2002, strict enforcement of the much-lauded initiative has only started taking shape recently.

In 2002, former environment minister Shahjahan Siraj, a lawmaker of the then ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party, made the declaration on grounds that continuing the use of poly bags would pose severe risks to human health and the environment.

The move was initially accepted by most, leading to a steady decline in the pile up of associated plastic waste. However, this early momentum soon fizzled out as people started switching back to poly bags for a myriad of reasons.

These include the authorities' unwillingness to enforce the law as poly bag makers cried foul for their losses and lobbied political quarters to stay the order while the lack of acceptable alternatives was also scarce.

And with more than two decades having passed since then, the interim government decided that it would revive the ban and implement it in full from November 2024.

But roughly two and a half months on, the lone achievement to this end is that around 1,500 supershops across the country now offer jute, paper and cloth bags for shoppers to carry their purchases.

The use of poly bags is particularly rampant at local kitchen markets, indicating that Bangladesh is still struggling with the change despite being the globe's second largest producer of jute fibre, a widely accepted alternative.

WHY THOUGH?

Ironically, it is largely because there are not enough alternatives to plastic bags currently available.

Around 20 small-scale manufacturers of alternative bags are

According to small-scale eco-bag manufacturers, there is no guarantee that future political governments will continue to enforce the ban, let alone strengthen it.

This same uncertainty -- a stable policy environment -- deters small firms from investing in eco bags.

Meanwhile, the government said traders decrying the lack of poly bag alternatives are, in fact, promoting the use of plastic bags.

According to environmentalists, implementation of the polythene ban faltered in 2002 because suitable alternatives were not available in adequate supply. So, it is essential to focus on developing alternatives that are both readily available and affordable to solve the polythene problem.

SUPERMARKETS ADAPTING TO CHANGE

Major supermarket chains, including Shwapno, Agora, Unimart, and Meena Bazar, swiftly adapted to the new regulations.

Jute and paper bags are now available at checkout counters while customers are being encouraged to bring their own reusable bags. Posters and announcements throughout the stores remind shoppers of the importance of reducing plastic consumption.

For those who forget their reusable bags, these stores offer eco-friendly alternatives priced between Tk 20 and Tk 25.

Sabir Hasan Nasir, managing director of supershop Shwapno, sounded hopeful about phasing out poly bags.

"We welcome this initiative and have been encouraging customers to use eco-friendly bags instead of polythene," he said.

However, a major cause of concern is customer behaviour and their shopping habits.

Many shoppers are reluctant to buy reusable bags as they used to get poly bags for free whereas a typical jute bag often costs them around Tk 22. Besides,

of the Bangladesh Jute Diversified Products Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said the jute industry was not ready for the sudden increase in demand for affordable eco-friendly bags.

"Separate materials and investments are needed to produce such bags," he added.

Munna urged the government to issue a gazette ensuring the ban remains in effect for at least three years, arguing that this would encourage investment and create employment opportunities in the industry.

He also suggested lifting the value-added tax (VAT) on supermarket sales to make jute bags more accessible to both businesses and consumers.

Munna said the absence of financial incentives and supporting infrastructure for jute bag production is a major challenge for the long-term success of the ban.

Meanwhile, eco-friendly bag producers like Tahmidul Islam, owner of Baiki Centre, are already feeling the strain of keeping up with the sudden spike in demand.

Previously focused on making promotional items, Baiki Centre is now churning out biodegradable bags.

Since the enforcement of the ban, the company has been supplying more than 30,000 bags to various supermarkets every day.

However, Islam claimed the journey has been fraught with obstacles, like delayed payments from superstores.

"Some retailers are trying to clear bills many months after delivery. This makes it difficult to sustain production," he said.

Moreover, the rising price of raw jute and the unfortunate timing of the ban -- which coincided with the end of the jute harvesting season -- have made it nearly impossible to manufacture low-cost bags, he added.

Islam also expressed frustration over inadequate enforcement of the ban.

"Despite the government's directives, mobile courts are not being conducted regularly to ensure compliance," he said. "Without stricter oversight, the effectiveness of the ban could be seriously compromised."

SHOPPERS SLOW ON SWITCHING

Khandaker Nur-E-Burhan, chief operating officer of Agora Limited, said a massive public awareness campaign is necessary to educate consumers and businesses about the environmental benefits of reducing plastic use.

Unlike many other countries, the trend of shopping with reusable bags is not yet common practice in Bangladesh, he said.

Consumers are often hesitant to purchase reusable bags, which usually cost between Tk 15 and Tk 25, depending on quality and size.

"This added cost, plus the inconvenience of carrying bags to the



struggling to produce enough eco-friendly bags to meet the daily demand from supershops. No major investments have come in, nor are entrepreneurs showing interest in pouring money into alternative bag-making.

In wet kitchen markets, grocery shops and roadside stalls, there have been no visible changes in the use of poly bags before and after the ban took effect.

Factories in the narrow alleys of Lalbagh, Sahid Nagar and Chawkbazar -- roughly four kilometres from the government's executive headquarters at the Bangladesh Secretariat -- continue to produce poly bags of various shapes, sizes and colours, as they have for years.

the jute bag itself can be a bother, especially for carrying heavy items like rice or wet foods like fish and meat.

Nasir said the government should come up with subsidies to make high-quality, durable eco-friendly bags that are more affordable for consumers.

He also highlighted the surging demand for jute bags, saying that Shwapno currently requires around 100,000 bags of different sizes daily. With the expansion of their outlets, this demand is increasing by 30 percent each month.

CAN ECO BAG PRODUCERS KEEP UP?

Md Rashedul Karim Munna, president

market repeatedly, annoys many shoppers."

Burhan said low-cost, single-use eco-friendly bags, ideally priced between Tk 5 and Tk 7, were necessary.

However, he admitted that such affordable and high-quality options are currently unavailable.

Besides, the continued use of polythene bags in wet markets creates an uneven playing field for supermarkets. This disparity is impacting the profitability of businesses.

Against this backdrop, Burhan said he is in favour of the government implementing similar policies for both wet markets and superstores to ensure a level playing field for all businesses.

He also suggested providing financial assistance to eco-friendly bag makers to reduce production costs and make these alternatives more affordable for consumers.

KITCHEN MARKETS REMAIN PLASTIC BAN BATTLEGROUND

During a recent visit to a kitchen market in Utara, an affluent neighbourhood of the capital Dhaka, a widespread reliance on plastic bags was found.

Grocers and vendors said customers rarely bring their own reusable bags, forcing them to provide plastic bags for carrying goods.

"There are eco-friendly bags available in the market," a vegetable vendor said. "But they are expensive, and customers are reluctant to buy those."

The shopkeepers all agreed that despite the government's ban on single-use plastic bags, there are no readily available alternatives that can offer the same convenience.

For instance, take the case of Asad Rahman who bought fish and vegetables from the kitchen market. He bought

1.5 kilogrammes of Rui fish and half a kilogramme of smaller fish, placing each type in separate plastic bags and then bundling them together in a larger one.

His shopping continued. Onions, green chillies and some vegetables were added to the growing basket, each in its separate poly bag. By the time he left the market, he was carrying a total of eight plastic bags.

"How is it possible to keep fish and meat in the fridge without polythene bags?" Rahman questioned. "And is there a viable alternative for transporting wet items from the market?"

Rahman informed that he is well aware of the dangers of non-biodegradable plastic bags, citing them as the main culprit for clogging drains and waterways, causing them to overflow even after a brief shower.

But when asked if he could have used fewer bags, his tone shifted.

"Plastic has become an integral part of our lives," he said. "It's incredibly convenient to use. So, the government must introduce a viable alternative before enforcing a complete ban."

Md Abdur Rouf, secretary of the Ministry of Textiles and Jute, also said he believes there is no alternative to using poly bags in absence of a proper substitute.

But while informing that the ministry does not have any dedicated research wing for developing potential alternatives to poly bags, he admitted that biodegradable cloth and jute bags could serve this purpose for now.

Regarding the extra cost to consumers, he said they have no choice but to accept it as there is little scope to provide eco-friendly bags free of cost.

NO ALTERNATIVE IS NO EXCUSE

Farhina Ahmed, secretary at the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, dismissed claims that a lack of alternatives is the main obstacle to phasing out polythene bags.

"Traditionally, Bangladesh has always had alternatives to plastic," she said. "It doesn't have to be jute as cotton and paper bags are also viable options."

According to her, the process must be simultaneous: consistent monitoring and enforcement alongside a search for alternatives.

"The government is implementing the ban in phases," she said. "While using plastic bags has become deeply ingrained in our daily lives, perceived as safe, convenient, and free -- which it is not -- this shift will take time. If you currently require 10 million plastic bags per day, you would need significantly fewer reusable alternatives."

Ahmed also said the country has no choice but to transition to alternatives, not only because it is the law, but because the continued use of plastic will irrevocably damage people's health and the environment.

"If Chennai, Rwanda and Tanzania can successfully implement a plastic ban, then there is no reason why Bangladesh cannot do the same," she added.