



BNP once again vows national unity govt

Participants in the election, movement to be taken aboard, says Fakhrul

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

If voted to power, the BNP would form a government of national unity and ensure representation from the parties that would participate in the polls and those who protested against the last autocratic regime, said the party's Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday.

"We have talked about forming a national government with the participation of those who are involved in the elections as well as the movement," he said at the concluding session of the programme titled 'White paper and thereafter: Economic management, reforms and national budget'.

The BNP has been talking about a national unity government. Most recently, in September last year, its acting chairman Tarique Rahman

"We want both economic and political reforms. But as a democratic political party we want to place greater emphasis on political reforms."

BNP Secretary General MIRZA FAKHRUL ISLAM



said his party envisions a future where the country is governed by a national government to fully harness the power of national unity.

Yesterday's event was organised by the White Paper Committee 2024 in collaboration with Citizen's Platform for SDGs Bangladesh at the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre.

Fakhrul said, "We want both economic and political reforms. But as a democratic political party, we want to place greater emphasis on political reforms. The recent mass uprising made one thing clear: there is an intense desire among the people for change. They want to see Bangladesh as a truly happy and prosperous country, to improve their standard of living."

With the support of the people, the BNP would work to make Bangladesh a prosperous country.

But without changing the political structure, fulfilling the aspirations would be quite difficult, he said.

The party's 31-point reform agenda includes limiting the term of the prime minister to two terms, bringing in a balance of power between the PM and the president, and introducing the bicameral parliament system, which is a two-house legislative system similar to the British parliament.

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This photo of a construction site at TT Para, Kamalapur, shows the six-lane underpass project, which is being implemented at a cost of around Tk 100 crore. Upon completion, this infrastructure will allow vehicles to navigate smoothly via the underpass while trains can run uninterrupted on the railway lines above.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

65pc people want local polls before nat'l election

Finds BBS study on electoral reforms

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 66 percent of the people favour local government elections before the next national polls under the interim government, a Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics study has found.

The study also found 70 percent of the people support non-partisan local government elections, compared to 28 percent who prefer local elections to be partisan.

- BNP against holding local polls before nat'l election
- Nagorik Committee favours local polls under interim govt
- Yunus said govt preparing for both polls

The state statistics agency conducted the National Public Opinion Survey on Electoral Reforms at the request of the Electoral Reform Commission.

Conducted from December 20-22, the survey on 46,080 households picked one adult (18 or older) respondent per household. Published on Friday, the study is available on the reform commission's website.

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Add more female cops to the force

Police Reform Commission also proposes floating stations

SHARIFUL ISLAM

The Police Reform Commission has proposed floating police stations to combat crimes on waterways, increasing the number of female police for a women-friendly service, and modernising the force with technology-driven strategies and advanced forensic technology to enhance the accuracy and efficiency of case investigations.

The introduction of floating police stations has been suggested to ensure round-the-clock surveillance and swift action against crimes like robbery, smuggling, and trafficking on 24,140 km of waterways across riverine districts like Barishal, Chandpur, Shariatpur, Khulna, and Bhola.

The Police Headquarters would oversee the project's implementation, determining the location of these

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a beko state of mind

Govt will protect investments of new entrepreneurs: Yunus

UNB, Dhaka

Encouraging the country's young and new entrepreneurs, Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus yesterday said they want to make sure that new entrepreneurs do not face any problems with their investments and can work safely to significantly contribute to the country's economic growth.

"I learned a lot from your discussions and suggestions today. We want to build poverty-free Bangladesh," he said. Stating that he got ideas about the future path from the discussions, he said, "Please stay in touch with us."

Yunus held a meeting with young entrepreneurs at the state guest house Jamuna where 15 male and female entrepreneurs participated.

In the meeting with the chief adviser, the entrepreneurs shared the stories of their struggle to become financially independent and sought advice from the CA on various issues relevant to their journey ahead.

Thanking Yunus, the entrepreneurs described how the investment received from the Grameen Telecom Trust, formed in 2010 to promote social business, helped the entrepreneurs to become financially independent from zero.

Most of the entrepreneurs who participated in the meeting are doing business with investments from the Grameen Telecom Trust and Grameen Trust, according to the CA's press wing.

Some of them have received investments for the sixth and fifth time.

Yunus was excited to hear the stories of the At the If SEE PAGE 7 COL 6



Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal took out a procession from the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh, to the Central Shaheed Minar yesterday demanding the trial of "goons" of the recently banned Bangladesh Chhatra League for their crimes during the July uprising. The photo was taken on the Dhaka University campus in the afternoon.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

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Economic ills

FROM PAGE 12

and National Budget", organised by the White Paper Committee 2024 in collaboration with the Citizen's Platform for SDGs Bangladesh at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre.

Prof Sobhan described the Hasina-led government as "malfunctioning and unaccountable".

"Obviously, all the problems which built up in the years before have been strengthened and consolidated ... So, they now need deep, structural solutions."

Sobhan blamed the regulatory failures of the Bangladesh Bank for the mounting default loans. The non-functioning role of the central bank was in turn caused by the illusion of its autonomy, because of its dependence on the authority and patronage of the head of the government at that time, added Prof Sobhan, also chairman of the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

The regulatory system of banks, which was then politically managed, has now created a class of people called "crony capitalists", he said.

He said the problem is much deeper now as the crony capitalists have turned into oligarchs.

The real problem is that a very large portion of the borrowing community is now in a state of default.

"You will not repay your loan on time, and then you will seek to have it written off. And at the end of the day, you will get a cost of financing which is much lower than what would have happened if you were repaying it on time," he said.

He said the problems have been around for long enough to have become deeply embedded in the structures of society.

Fortunately for this interim government, and unfortunately for the prospective elected government, they are the ones who are going to have to deal with these problems, said Prof Sobhan, who is a former member of the interim government formed after the fall of autocrat H M Ershad.

Most of the problems are not going to be solved by so-called reforms, Prof Sobhan said, adding that a proper regulatory mechanism, discipline in the process of debt-free payment, and prevention of money laundering are needed.

He said the best use of time by the interim government would be to identify what they think to be a prospective solution.

Asked what should be the priorities for the interim government, Prof Sobhan said they could make some attempt to bring about more discipline in macroeconomic management.

"But even over here, I do not see them being able to effectively take care of the problem of inflation within the tenure ..."

He said the government could introduce some discipline into the regulatory system of the banking sector.

Regarding the problem of money laundering, Prof Sobhan thinks it will not be able to be taken care of anytime soon. After all, money laundering has been going on since the Pakistan period, according to him. About \$30 to 40 billion of remittance money is floating around in the hundi market, or illegal channels of remittance.

Right to speech

FROM PAGE 12

President Ziaur Rahman: Whose Story is Our Philosophy" at the Shaheed Abu Sayed International Convention Center, marking the 89th birth anniversary of BNP founder Ziaur Rahman.

"As a political activist, what I understand by democracy is the exercise of the right to express one's opinion. And people, in a democratic system express their opinion through voting," Tarique said.

Regardless of differences in ideologies and opinions, he said, these two principles – right to speech and voting – must be practised in Bangladesh for at least 20-25 years to strengthen the democratic process.

"If we can ensure this, we will be freed from autocracy," he said.

Tarique also recalled Ziaur Rahman's contributions to the nation, particularly in building the country and establishing multi-party democracy.

BNP once again vows national unity govt

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It has not been finalised yet who will be in the upper house, but the idea is to elect those who do not directly contest elections but can contribute to nation building, Fakhru said.

"Another crucial aspect we want to focus on is strengthening democratic institutions. One of our greatest weaknesses lies in the fragility of our institutions – institutions that are essential for democracy, the state, and the economy."

Over the past 15 years, the institutions have been completely dismantled.

"Therefore, we aim to prioritise rebuilding and strengthening them."

The BNP is working on a future course of action to move the country forward, taking lessons from past

experiences.

About the party's continued emphasis on the election roadmap, Fakhru said: "It is necessary because, through elections, we can connect with the people, involve them in the process and constitute a parliament where public interest issues can be discussed and addressed."

Only an elected government can properly resolve the country's problems and usher in reforms, he said.

In response to a question from CPD Chairman Rehman Sobhan about giving party tickets to loan defaulters, Fakhru said: "It cannot be changed overnight. We are committing to people that we will sincerely try to ensure that defaulters do not get nominations. We will be very careful in this regard."

Add more female cops to the force

FROM PAGE 1

stations, the number of boats required, and other logistical needs, reads the police reform commission report submitted to Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus on Wednesday.

For gender-inclusive and women-friendly policing, the commission also recommended increasing the proportion of women police officers from the current 8% to 13.29%, raising the number of posts for women from 16,801 to 29,248.

This initiative also aims to improve public service delivery, to women and children in particular, in units like police stations, victim support centres and cyber support for women.

The reform body also proposed creating new posts in the existing organogram to support this expansion.

Modern forensic technology is at the core of the recommendations, with plans to establish automated DNA labs and digital forensic laboratories in all divisional cities.

A forensic training institute has been proposed to enhance the police's ability to collect, preserve, and analyse evidence.

Additional digital forensic laboratories, automated DNA labs, crime scene units, ballistic branches, and units

for detecting counterfeit documents in every division are also suggested by the reform body to strengthen investigative capabilities.

To take advantage of the rapid advancements in technology, the commission recommended leveraging artificial intelligence, biometric systems, and digital forensics to combat cybercrime and enhance cybersecurity.

The commission said policemen would need targeted training to adapt to new technologies and manage modern technical equipment.

To develop a highly skilled police force, the commission proposed mandatory overseas training for trainers under the Training of Trainers programme.

Policemen trained abroad would be required to serve in training institutes and specialised units, ensuring the transfer of expertise.

Training programs would also emphasise human values, religious ethics, and human rights to foster a police culture of service and accountability.

The reform body also recommended the formulation of a new policy prioritising honest and dedicated police personnel for postings, transfers,

In response to a question on whether their party wants the Awami League to participate in the election, the 76-year-old said: "We have made this matter clear many times. The people of the country, not us, will decide on this matter."

While answering a query about the Rohingya issue, Fakhru criticised the AL government for not taking sufficient measures to resolve the crisis.

"The government did not hold discussions that were truly needed with India and China to resolve the Rohingya crisis. In fact, it was not a priority for them."

He promised that if voted to power, the BNP would try its best to find a suitable solution to the Rohingya crisis.

Tension flares

FROM PAGE 1

This led to a heated exchange, escalating into a scuffle. Subsequently, hundreds of people from both sides gathered along the border, engaging in chases and counter chases and throwing brick chips at each other.

At least three Bangladeshis were injured during the incident, said Md Badshah, a member of the Binodpur union parishad.

One of the injured, Mesbahul Haque, of Binodpur union's Kaliganj Namotola area, identified the two other casualties as Md Rony, and Md Farooq.

The Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) and Indian Border Security Force (BSF) deployed personnel to the area to control the situation and prevent further escalation.

Members of the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) used sound grenades to disperse unruly mobs in Bangladeshi territory, violating international law, said BGB.

Roll back hiked VAT, duties

FROM PAGE 12

the interim government's move would further increase the suffering of people, particularly the poor and middle class, amid the ongoing economic instability and high inflation.

Fakhru said the BNP was concerned about the impact of such a decision on the lives of ordinary people.

He urged the government to adopt alternative measures and reduce unnecessary development expenditures instead of imposing VAT and supplementary duties on essential items.

The BNP leader said the interim government should also take steps for holding the national election to establish an accountable administration.

Fakhru said the government has increased VAT to cover the first phase of the current fiscal year's budget deficit of Tk 42,000 crore, as well as the potential subsequent deficit, and to meet the Tax-GDP Ratio condition under the International Monetary Fund's loan programme, since the government is unable to meet budget expenses with the current revenue.

He said although the government had said at the beginning of its term that money would not be printed under any circumstances, like the Awami League government, it has taken the "extremely harmful" step of printing Tk 22,500 crore, which has further exacerbated the country's high inflation and increased the people's suffering.

Considering the current economic situation, Fakhru said the increased taxes would push the current inflation rate even higher. "Rising inflation will erode household savings and lead to increased bank withdrawals," he warned.

Besides, he said, the current downward trend in economic growth will continue, leading to a decrease in employment and an increase in the unemployment rate.

Fakhru warned that the cost of fuel would rise further due to high prices, compliance pressure on small businesses would intensify and business expenses and production costs in factories would increase.

As a result, he said, the purchasing power of consumers would decrease and the livelihood of the lower-

We'll bin July proclamation if it fails to recognise JCD contribution

Says pro-BNP body, takes out procession in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal yesterday demanded a ban on underground politics at all the educational institutions in the country and trial of activists of the recently banned Chhatra League for attacking students during the July uprising.

"Since the fall of the fascist regime of 'Killer Hasina', there is no longer any scope for underground politics here. However, if any political party is still engaged in underground politics, we will assume they are conspiring again, just like they did in 1971," said Rakibul Islam Rakib, president of JCD central unit.

He made the remarks at a rally held at the Central Shaheed Minar. Before arriving at the venue, hundreds of JCD leaders and activists took out a procession, which they called "March for Justice" from the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh.

Referring to the July Proclamation, SEE PAGE 7 COL 4

Mohammad said at a press briefing on January 11.

STUDY AT A GLANCE

In the study, about 74 percent of the

➔ 66pc want future local polls under caretaker govt

➔ 68pc prefer non-partisan president

➔ 83pc favour direct voting to elect president

➔ 74pc favour increasing number of seats for women

➔ 89pc want scrutiny of candidates' affidavits

➔ 63pc against political parties having student wings

respondents said they believe there is a risk of autocracy's resurgence if politics continues to be driven by business interests instead of public welfare.

Regarding the so-called nomination business, 48 percent of the respondents believe that the political parties and their candidates should stop this practice, while 44 percent think the responsibility of nominating candidates should lie with the public.

The survey showed that 68 percent of the citizens prefer a non-partisan president, while around 29 percent

income people would become even more unbearable.

The BNP leader said investments would decline and export competitiveness would weaken because of the increased taxes.

In the current situation, he said, the government should first focus on reducing costs.

Fakhru suggested that the government can resolve ongoing financial problems by cutting public spending and reorganising the economic management of the current budget, without increasing direct taxes.

By reconsidering the development budget and cutting unnecessary or financially unfeasible projects, the BNP leader said, the government could save up to 20 percent of its expenses, potentially saving around Tk 60,000 crore.

The BNP leader also proposed cutting costs in local government budgets and subsidies which he said could reduce operational costs by 10 percent, saving at least Tk 50,000 crore.

Besides, he recommended reducing loan budgets for autonomous institutions as a means to temporarily cut costs.

Fakhru said the government could save at least Tk 1 lakh crore from the budget by cutting expenditures, which would reduce the fiscal deficit, contribute to economic stability, and promote long-term development, ultimately alleviating the tax burden on the public.

He slammed the government for a "lack of coordinated action" in monetary, fiscal, and market management to control inflation.

He said neighbouring countries effectively managed inflation, while Bangladesh's conflicting policies, such as raising interest rates and taxes, worsened the situation.

Fakhru also suggested that a significant amount of money can be saved by halting funding for unnecessary and corruption-riddled mega projects.

BNP Standing Committee member Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury said the government should focus on an interim budget that reflects the country's economic reality, scrapping the Awami League's budget "designed for looting".

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Reinstate the word 'adivasi' in textbooks

Demand indigenous students, supporters

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Indigenous students and their supporters held a demonstration at Dhaka University's Raju Memorial Sculpture yesterday, calling for the reinstatement of the word "indigenous" (adivasi in Bangla) in textbooks.

The protest, organised under the banner of "Aggrieved Indigenous Student-Masses," also demanded justice for the attack on fellow students on January 15 by a group identifying itself as "Students for Sovereignty."

Shurmi Chakma, a Dhaka University student, said, "Our demand was to reinstate indigenous graffiti in the textbooks. We were on our way to the NCTB building on January 15 when a group called Students for Sovereignty attacked us. Despite the

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People from the indigenous communities in Dinajpur form a human chain yesterday, protesting 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. Similar protests were held in Dhaka.

PHOTO: STAR

GOVT SOCIAL ALLOWANCES

'Discrepancies found in list of beneficiaries'

Says social welfare adviser

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The interim government has detected massive discrepancies in the list of beneficiaries of the government's social allowances, including old-age and widow allowances, said Sharmeen S Murshid, adviser to the Ministry of Social Welfare, yesterday.

"There are many ghosts, or corruption, sitting inside the list of beneficiaries in absence of any monitoring and quality control system. We are trying to correct it," she said.

The adviser said this while addressing a symposium titled "White Paper and Thereafter: Economic Management, Reforms, and National Budget", at the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in Dhaka.

"After the interim government took charge, a rumour spread that we [interim govt] would stop the allowances. But we didn't stop paying the allowances, rather, we have continued while trying to correct the discrepancies with help of digitalisation," she added.

Data discrepancies mostly happened during the past 15 years under the ousted Awami League government's regime.

Some prominent think-tanks have long been raising the issues of data discrepancies in allowances.

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'We escaped death by 20-25 minutes'

Says Hasina in audio clip shared by AL

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina has claimed that she and her sister, Sheikh Rehana, narrowly escaped death on August 5 last year.

The Awami League president said, "Rehana and I were able to get away [on August 5]. We probably dodged certain death by just about 20 or 25 minutes."

In a 49-second audio clip posted on the Awami League's official Facebook page on Friday evening, Hasina was heard addressing a group, though it is unclear whether she was speaking in person or over a speaker.

Reflecting on surviving attempts on her life, she said, "I keep thinking about coming out of the grenade attack on August 21 (2004) alive or escaping that huge bomb in Kotalipara or escaping death on August 5..."

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Air pollution kills 102,456 Bangladeshis every year

Says Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air study

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Air pollution is responsible for 102,456 deaths annually in Bangladesh, as per a new study by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA).

Titled "Public Health Impacts of Fine Particle Air Pollution in Bangladesh", the report highlights the severe consequences of particulate matter (PM2.5), which causes diseases such as ischemic heart disease, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), lower respiratory infections, and lung cancer.

Young children are particularly vulnerable, with 5,258 deaths annually from PM2.5-related lower respiratory infections.

PM2.5 refers to tiny pollution particles, smaller than a fraction of a human hair, that come from sources like cars, factories, and fires.

In Bangladesh, the amount of these harmful particles in the air averages 79.9 microgrammes per cubic metre, which is more than double the country's safety limit of 35, and 15 times higher than



the World Health Organization's recommended safe level of 5, the report finds.

The report, launched yesterday at the Jatiya Press Club, said Bangladesh ranked as the most polluted country in the world in 2023.

Urban areas face the highest pollution levels, with Dhaka and Chattogram accounting for 48 percent of air pollution-related deaths. Rural and coastal areas experience significantly lower levels of pollution.

The study suggests that controlling air pollution could prevent 5,254 child deaths annually and avert 29,920 deaths from heart disease, 23,075 from strokes, 20,976 from COPD, 9,720 from pneumonia, and 3,063 from lung cancer.

Air pollution-related illnesses lead 669,000 people to seek emergency hospital care annually and result in 263 million lost workdays each year, significantly harming the economy.

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Dev model continues to ignore public welfare

Says Kallol Mustafa

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government's reliance on foreign loans, often misrepresented as "donations," places a significant financial burden on citizens, said activist and writer Kallol Mustafa yesterday.

He was speaking at an event organised in support of the Tree Protection Movement, a group of activists who have been protesting for 37 days at Panthakunja Park in Dhaka's Bangla Motor area.

The activists are calling for the cancellation of a section of the Dhaka Elevated Expressway that passes through Tejgaon, Panthakunja Park, and Hatirjheel Lake, arguing that the project will have severe environmental and social consequences.

Addressing a discussion on development projects funded by foreign loans, Kallol criticised the damage

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Over 11,000 crossed Mediterranean to reach Italy in 2024

JAMIL MAHMUD

As many as 11,231 Bangladeshis reached Italy via the Mediterranean Sea between January and October last year, an increase from 10,152 during the same period in 2023, according to a recent UNHCR report.

Of last year's migrants, 11,091 left Libya, a key departure point on the perilous central Mediterranean route that frequently garners international attention due to fatal shipwrecks.



The report, published on January 3, as part of UNHCR's "Italy Sea Arrivals Dashboard" for October 2024, highlighted that Bangladeshis topped the list of migrants and refugees reaching Italy during the first 10 months of the year.

This increase occurred despite a significant overall decline in arrivals to Italy, which fell by 62 percent – from 1,44,098 people in 2023 to 55,413 in 2024. Between January and December 2023, 12,774 Bangladeshis made the journey to Italy by sea.

Experts in Bangladesh's labour migration sector attribute the continued flow of irregular migrants

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APPG report on Bangladesh 'one-sided'

Says British MP Rupa Huq

UNB, Dhaka

British parliamentarian Rupa Huq, who visited Bangladesh recently, criticised the report released by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for the Commonwealth, describing it a "one-sided account".

"This Autumn, a one-sided account of the Bangladeshi Yunus government surfaced in the name of the APPG for Commonwealth, pedalling falsehoods that was widely press-released, leading to confusion on UK govt policy," Huq said, sharing a video on her verified X, formerly known as Twitter.

Taking a floor on a point of order, she confirmed the House of Commons that it has "zero official relevance".

The UK public elects 650 members of parliament (MPs) to represent their interests and concerns in the House of Commons.

The Commonwealth All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) has released a comprehensive report detailing the aftermath of Bangladesh's political turmoil following the fall of Sheikh Hasina's government on August 5.

The report highlights a volatile mix of political, social, and security challenges under the interim administration led by Nobel laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus.

It paints a picture of violence, human rights abuses, and escalating sectarian tensions, threatening the nation's stability and international standing.

Nazrul's grandson burnt in gas explosion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Babul Kazi, grandson of National Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam, was admitted to Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery with severe burn injuries early yesterday.

Babul, 59, suffered 74 percent burns in a fire followed by an explosion at his Banani residence around 5:00am, Shaon Bin Rahman, a resident surgeon of the hospital, told The Daily Star.

Babul has been shifted to the ICU as his condition is critical, the doctor said.

The victim's elder sister Khilkhil Kazi said Babul was burnt in an explosion when he lit a gas-lighter to smoke in the bathroom.

Dr Md Maruful Islam, joint director of the National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery, said a 16-member medical board has been formed for his treatment.



Buses recklessly weave through Mirpur Road, overtaking each other and increasing the risk of accidents. This photo was taken in the capital's Shyamoli area yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Additionally, Tk 25 crore will be allocated for medical consultation services both domestically and abroad for the injured. For the families of the martyrs, the government will purchase monthly profit-based savings certificates worth Tk 10 lakh for each family, which will be redeemable at maturity.



However, illegal logging has drastically reduced the forest, leading to significant habitat loss for wildlife, he said. Dr Md Azharul Islam, professor of environmental science at Bangladesh Agricultural University, warned of serious ecological consequences if forest depletion continues. "Mymensingh is at high 71,000 acres, including 38,911 acres of reserved forest across Mymensingh, Jamalpur, Sherpur, and Natraka. Over the past three decades, vast portions have been lost to illegal activities. In Mymensingh alone, 24,895 acres have been grabbed with similar losses in other districts.

Over the past three decades, vast portions have been lost to illegal activities. In Mymensingh alone, 24,895 acres have been grabbed with similar losses in other districts.

Among the injured, two were admitted to Faridpur Medical College Hospital, eight were treated at Nagarkanda Upazila Health Complex, and the rest received primary treatment, said locals.

Police filed a case against 17 named and some 500 to 600 unnamed people, said Asaduzzaman.

communities would be completed within 12 years. "We will plant indigenous trees to restore the forest within a decade, ensuring food and shelter for wildlife," he said.

Kallol also slammed the government's portrayal of foreign loans as donations, arguing that they impose financial strains on the public. He pointed to the recent US \$4.5 billion loan from the IMF, which led to

Kallol condemned the public-private partnership model as a scheme to transfer public funds to private entities. "While land acquisition for infrastructure projects costs public funds, private companies collect tolls for years, giving the government only a minimal fee," he said.

Meanwhile, the elevated expressway project has already installed 41 pillars, damaging Hatirjheel Lake and cutting over 250 trees in Panthakunja Park, sparking ongoing protests, he said.

The seized items, valued at Tk 7.42 crore in the black market, were destroyed following legal procedures, he said.

Earlier in July 2023, the pipeline had cracked in the area due to similar reason.

CAPS Chairman Prof

Speakers, including Swedish Embassy First Secretary (Environment and Climate Change) Nayoka Martinez-Backstrom and Additional Secretary Tapan Kumar Biswas of the Ministry of Environment, called for urgent policy measures. These include promoting clean production.

[illegible]



Tk 9cr water supply centre left unused

MINTU DESHWARA

A municipal water supply centre in Habiganj's Shosanghat area, constructed at a cost of Tk 9 crore, remains non-functional, leaving local residents without its promised benefits.

Although inaugurated on November 11, 2023, the centre has yet to begin operations, with no clear timeline in sight.

The facility, designed to remove iron from water, has been stalled due to delays in completing essential work. The Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE) said the municipal authorities damaged several pipes during site work, further delaying progress.

The project, intended to provide iron-free water to 70 percent of Habiganj municipality's population, has failed to commence its intended service.

The infrastructure is already deteriorating due to a lack of maintenance. Equipment theft and criticisms of poor construction quality have added to the project's woes.

Md Sajedul, a resident of Shosanghat, said, "Although the project was inaugurated, it's not being used. The equipment is already falling apart."

Another resident, Miftaul Islam, said, "The project was launched with great fanfare, but it's clear that it was poorly planned. The people of the municipality are yet to benefit from it."

The project, which began in June 2015 and was scheduled for completion by June 30, 2023, was designed to purify 350 cubic feet of water per hour. Despite repeated correspondence from municipal officials to the DPHE, the issues remain unresolved.

Engineer Abdul Quddus Shamim of Habiganj municipality said, "We have informed the higher officials, but there has been no effective response. Several works remain unfinished, and the project has yet to start functioning."

Habiganj DPHE's Executive Engineer Tahmina Tanvin said, "Due to the damaged pipes, operations have not yet started."

Elephant found dead in Teknaf

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

An elephant was found dead in the hills of Hnila union under Teknaf upazila in Cox's Bazar yesterday morning.

The Forest Department could not immediately determine the cause of death of the female mammal.

Local villager Sona Mia said they found the elephant lying in the stream.

Assistant Forest Conservator Md Monirul Islam said the actual cause of death will be determined after receiving the autopsy report.



Large sections of forest in areas of Netrakona, adjacent to the Garo Hills of Mymensingh, have been destroyed due to illegal logging and encroachment over the years. The photo was taken at Gopalpur in Durgapur upazila recently.

PHOTO: STAR

Forests reduced to bare lands

Netrakona woodlands face decades of devastation

AMINUL ISLAM, Mymensingh

The natural forest cover in Durgapur and Kalmakanda upazilas of Netrakona, adjacent to the Garo Hills of Mymensingh, is on the verge of disappearing due to decades of illegal logging and encroachment, alleged locals.

Despite the gradual loss of forested areas, no significant actions have been taken by the authorities to address the issue. Instead, a section of forest officials has reportedly been complicit in the actions of those responsible for cutting down trees and clearing forest lands, further accelerating the destruction, they claimed.

Large sections of forest in areas like Bijoypur, Maizpara, Laxmipur, Baromari, Lengura, Gobindapur, Panchgaon, and Mohishkhola have been destroyed over the years.



DECADES OF DEVASTATION

Illegal logging, encroachment continue unabated

Wildlife on brink of extinction

Human-elephant conflicts on rise

Expert warns of ecological, seismic risks

Locals allege authorities indifferent

"These forests were once home to over 100 wild species, including elephants, tigers, leopards, deer, and hanuman langurs. Today,

sightings of wildlife are rare, with only occasional visits by wild elephants crossing the border in search of food," said Rifat Ahmed Rasel, founder president of the animal rights organisation "Save the Animals of Susang".

"Indiscriminate logging, land grabbing, and the planting of harmful exotic species have left the forest barren over the past two decades, damaging its ecology, biodiversity, and geography," Rasel said.

Hillarious Nokrek, a resident of Kamarkhali village, said the destruction of forest land has led to increased human-elephant conflicts as elephants invade local areas due to food shortages, resulting in casualties on both sides.

Suranjan Hajong of Gopalpur expressed similar concerns.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

CANAL EXCAVATION

3 advisers slam CCC over delays Project unlikely to be completed before monsoon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Muhammad Fouzul Kabir Khan, adviser to the road transport and bridges ministry, yesterday expressed dissatisfaction over the sluggish progress in canal excavation project in Chattogram city.

Fouzul, accompanied by Environment Adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan and Disaster Management Adviser Faruk e-Azam, visited the excavation site in Bakalia in the afternoon.

The Chattogram City Corporation began the 2.9-kilometre canal excavation from Bahaddarhat Baroipara to the Karnaphuli river in 2014 as part of a Tk 1,362 crore project aimed at addressing waterlogging in the port city.

The project, initially slated for completion by June 2017, had its deadline extended to June 2024. Despite the six-month lapse since the revised deadline, the project remains incomplete.

Fouzul questioned CCC Chief Engineer Mohammad Abul Kashem about the delays.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

BGB destroys drugs worth Tk 7.42cr

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

The Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) yesterday destroyed drugs worth Tk 7.42 crore, which were seized in the last five months in Habiganj.

These drugs were officially destroyed at the BGB-55 Habiganj Battalion camp yesterday afternoon in the presence of officials from various departments.

The destroyed items included 24,756 bottles of foreign liquor, 36 litres of local liquor, 3,448 bottles of Phensedyl, 9,755kg of marijuana, 2,881 yaba tablets, 1,025 cans of beer, 898 bottles of cough syrup, and 20 packets of bidis.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6



Construction of the only bridge to Tangragiri Eco Park in Taltoli upazila, Barguna, has been stalled for two and a half years due to design complications. The Local Government Engineering Department began constructing the bridge over Fakirhat canal at a cost of Tk 7 crore in early 2021. Tourists are suffering due to the delay. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: SOHRAB HOSSAIN

Cracked pipeline disrupts Ctg water supply for hours

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Water supply in different areas of the Chattogram city was disrupted for around 10 hours yesterday due to a crack in the pipeline in Najumia Hat area under Hathazari upazila of the district.

The crack in the pipeline, which appeared after being hit by a vehicle, caused water to spill on the roads, causing waterlogging and vehicular congestion.

Water from Chattogram Wasa's Karnaphuli Water Treatment Plant in Rangunia upazila is supplied through the more than 25 kilometre-long pipeline to the port city.

"Water spilled from the pipeline entered many local shops and spoiled goods, causing

damages to traders including me," said Abdul Karim, owner of a stationery shop on the spot.

Ashraf Uddin, inspector of Madunghat Police Investigation Centre, said a private car hit and damaged a portion of the pipeline around 6:00am due to brake failure.

The vehicle has been recovered and its four injured passengers were taken to Chattogram Medical College Hospital for treatment, he added.

Mamunur Rashid, a resident of Agrabad area, said, "We were unable to complete our household chores as the water supply was cut off."

"Due to the crack, water supply through the pipeline remained suspended for around

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

16 including 4 cops hurt in Faridpur clash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

At least 16 people -- including four policemen -- were injured, and two shops and a house were vandalised during a clash between the people of two villages in Faridpur's Nagarkanda upazila yesterday.

The injured policemen are Nagarkanda Police Station Officer-in-Charge Md Sofar Ali, and constables Md Mostafa, Sazzadul, and Mohsin, said police.

Locals and police said there has been a longstanding rivalry between the residents of Solitha and Mirakanda villages over establishing supremacy.

A waz mahfil (Islamic religious gathering) at Solitha Madrasa on Friday night, attended by some Mirakanda

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

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Memo no. 57.03.5585.031.00.00.25-47 Date: 16/01/2025

Invitation of e-GP Tender

Tender is invited in the national e-GP system portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of Goods and related Services under following Tender ID:

Tender ID	Package no.	Package description	Last selling date and time	Closing date/ Opening date and time
1055816	tsc/rang/1312/01	Supply of Raw metirials and spare parts under Financial code: 3256105	02/02/2025 15.00	03/02/2025 12:00 PM
1055781	tsc/rang/1312/02	Supply of Cleaning products under Financial code: 3211102	02/02/2025 15.00	03/02/2025 12:00 PM
1055707	tsc/rang/1312/03	Supply of Engineering and other equipment under Financial code 4112304	02/02/2025 15.00	03/02/2025 12:00 PM
1055367	tsc/rang/1312/04	Supply of Office equipmen under Financial code 4112310	02/02/2025 15.00	03/02/2025 12:00 PM
1055380	tsc/rang/1312/05	Supply of Teaching & learnin Materials under Financial code 4112312	02/02/2025 15.00	03/02/2025 12:00 PM
1055357	tsc/rang/1312/06	Supply of Furniture under Financial code 4112314	02/02/2025 15.00	03/02/2025 12:00 PM
1055081	tsc/rang/1312/07	Supply of Other Stationary under Financial code 3256105	02/02/2025 15.00	03/02/2025 12:00 PM

These are online Tender where only e-Tender will be accepted in e-GP portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted.To submit e-Tender please register on e-GP system portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>). Further information and guidelines are available in the national e-GP system portal and from e-GP (helpdesk @eprocure.gov.bd).

(Md. Ayub Khan)
Principal
Rangpur Govt. Technical School and College
Rangpur.

GD-182

ART EXHIBITION

‘Satoborsher Dhaka’

A tribute to the evolution of OUR FAVOURITE CITY

AISHWARYA RAIHAN

Artist Al-Akhir Sarker's solo art exhibition *Satoborsher Dhaka* — a visual journal of our beloved Dhaka city and its transformation over the past few centuries — is underway at Bhumi Art Gallery in association with Shilpangan. Inaugurated last Friday, the ceremony was attended by the trustee of the Liberation War Museum and writer Mofidul Haque as the chief guest, and prominent architect Mustapha Khalid Palash as the special guest. The exhibition is dedicated to Foyez Ahmed, a Bikrampur-born legendary journalist, who grew up in Dhaka. Ahmed held onto the memoir of the city and its changes while becoming a pioneer of art galleries in Dhaka himself.

Al-Akhir Sarker, on the other hand,



Satoborsher Dhaka as an exhibition is like a trip down memory lane for individuals who have witnessed several decades of Dhaka's transformation. The details, brushstrokes, lines, use of light and shadowy hues, and angles of perceptions in Sarker's artworks visually indulged me, for a person who majored in architecture.



PHOTOS: RATUL CHOWDHURY

is a modern-day impressionist visual artist, who graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Dhaka. After taking part in various group exhibitions at home and abroad, and one prior solo exhibition in Dhaka, he decided to illustrate the city in remarkable ways. Mofidul Haque in his speech on Friday, mentioned that Sarker despite not being born in Dhaka, has looked at and painted the city with a true artist's soul — that in itself is the beauty of the capital, it embraces everyone. Mustapha Khalid Palash praised Sarker's artwork by explaining, "They possess graphical qualities that stand out in a crowd and are easily recognisable as his art."

The urban history of Dhaka dates back

to the seventh century CE. It has seen Hindu and Muslim rulers alike. It was made the capital of Bengal in the 17th century by the Mughals. Later, it was invaded by the British. Dhaka has maintained its glory for centuries with its nature, landscapes, and architecture. Moreover, West Asian, and European addition to our city added to its architecture. The artist explained that Dhaka city has versatile architecture, some parts have Hindu influences, whereas others have arches like Mughal, Persian, and overall Muslim architecture. He added that the Armenians, the British, and the French have also left their marks on our city, creating a blend that makes Dhaka a wonderful mix of art and cultures.



The walls of Bhumi Art Gallery are adorned with paintings, drawings, and sketches by Sarker. There are large paintings like that of Ahsan Manzil. There are narrow lanes and corners of Old Dhaka. There are glimpses of Beauty Boarding, Mridha Mosque, Barrister House, and Armenian structures on his canvases and papers. The river Buriganga, which is the heart of Dhaka city, flows in all its former glory in his paintings. I was pleased to see the interior staircases of Ruplal House. However, the most intricate, sensitive, and colourful paintings were those of Poush Sankranti, commonly known as Sakrain — depicting vivid scenes of people flying their striking kites on their rooftops.

Satoborsher Dhaka as an exhibition is like a trip down memory lane for individuals who have witnessed several decades of the city's transformation. The details, brushstrokes, lines, use of light and shadowy hues, and angles of perceptions in Sarker's artworks were visually indulging, especially for someone with a background in architecture, like myself. People from every generation can take a closer look at our heartwarming city that has harboured several centuries of history on its soil.

Bhumi Art Gallery will run this open-for-all exhibition until January 31.



EMON'S 'Bengal Symphony' debuts with 'Phul Neya Bhalo Noy'

Celebrated composer and singer Emon Chowdhury has introduced his latest musical venture, *Bengal Symphony*. The project's debut track, *Phul Neya Bhalo Noy*, came out yesterday.

Inspired by poet Jasimuddin's poem *Holud Boroni*, the song has been voiced, composed, and directed by Emon Chowdhury himself.

In 2023, Emon left the popular band Chirkut to focus on his solo career. With *Bengal Symphony*, he brings exciting news for his fans. The project has already launched its official Facebook page and YouTube channel to connect with listeners.

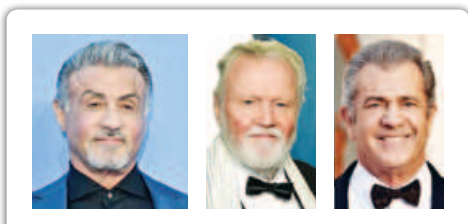
Apart from his contributions to band music, Emon has also made his mark in cinema. Songs like *Shada Shada Kala Kala*, *Atta Baje Deri Korish Na*, *Dhire Dhire*, *Ghumta Tule Bodon Khule*, *Teka Pakhi*, and *Tor Sathe Namlam Re Pothe*, have won widespread acclaim under his music direction.

Trump taps Stallone, Voight, and Gibson as 'Special Ambassadors' to revitalise Hollywood

President-elect Donald Trump has unveiled a plan to rejuvenate Hollywood's global influence by appointing Sylvester Stallone, Jon Voight, and Mel Gibson as "Special Ambassadors" to revive the entertainment industry.

In a statement shared on Truth Social, Trump expressed his confidence in the trio's abilities: "I am proud to announce Sylvester Stallone, Mel Gibson, and Jon Voight as Special Ambassadors to Hollywood, California—a region filled with potential but facing significant challenges. They aim to reverse the trend of losing business to foreign markets and restore Hollywood to its former glory."

"These remarkable individuals will be my trusted advisers, bringing me their insights and solutions. Together, we will usher in a new Golden Age for Hollywood, aligning it with the



greatness of America itself," Trump added.

Trump's announcement comes mere days ahead of his inauguration in Washington, DC, amidst a dire situation in Southern Los Angeles, where raging wildfires have left a trail of destruction. Thousands of homes and businesses lie in ruins, with recovery efforts facing significant hurdles as the estimated damages have soared to an alarming \$250 billion.

Tahsan visits Rohingya refugee camps after returning from honeymoon

Renowned Bangladeshi singer, actor, and UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador Tahsan Khan recently visited the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, just a few days after returning from his honeymoon in the Maldives with his newlywed wife, Roza Ahmed. The couple went on their honeymoon on January 7.

Tahsan toured the camps, including areas devastated by a massive fire that destroyed hundreds of shelters weeks ago. He described the visit as a disturbing experience, witnessing both the aftermath of the tragedy and the resilience of



the refugee community.

His post from his verified Facebook page reads, "I visited the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, including an area where a devastating fire tore through hundreds of shelters a few weeks ago."

"It was a humbling experience to see the aftermath of the tragic incident. It was also inspiring to see how the firefighters and emergency volunteers responded to save lives. Only a few weeks later, people have begun rebuilding their lives from the rubble, supported by refugees and other humanitarian organisations."



PHOTO: COURTESY

'The Cage' unleashes a new generation of musical talents

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DESK

The roots of Bangladesh's band music scene stretch back to the 1970s, emerging from a spirit of rebellion and creativity that followed the Liberation War. Over decades, rock and roll became a defining feature of the nation's cultural identity, inspiring waves of young musicians to take the stage.

Band reality show *The Cage* offers a new kind of space for young musicians to explore their talent, connect with others, and grow under the guidance of industry stalwarts.

Over 500 talented musicians from all over the country auditioned, and were later integrated into bands that moved on to the later stages.

For Asif Asgar Ranjan, the lead

guitarist of Arbovirus and a judge for the programme, the experience was profoundly moving. "We didn't think these kids, who didn't know one another, could form such strong bands in such a short time. Their hard work and passion were undeniable. It was a reminder of the magic that happens when people come together to create music," he said.

This sense of community was central to *The Cage*. Judge Raef Al Hasan Rafa reflected on how the show reminded him of the early days of Bangladesh's band music scene. "It's incredible to see how the sense of community we grew up with is being revived here. These young talents have shown extraordinary skill, and I know many of them will become leading musicians in the years to come," he shared.

Tashfee, a rising star and judge at the show, stated, "Despite working with strangers and tight deadlines, they produced exceptional songs and displayed incredible talent. I'm excited to see where their hard work and originality take them, as this new wave of musicians is set to shape the future of our music industry."

Guest judges of this show included Saeef Al Nazi Cézanne from Artcell, journalist and singer Elita Karim, lyricist Shahab Kabondho, and Warfaze members Babna Karim, Palash Noor, Sheikh Monirul Alam Tipu.

Deepto TV is the broadcast partner of the show, while Femina Flaunt Salon is an event partner.

The Cage will be broadcast on Deepto TV on January 28, at 11:30pm.

Cops comb fire-charred LA for bodies

AFP, Los Angeles

Sheriff's deputies on horseback fanned out through charred brush on Friday, hunting for the remains of people who perished when huge wildfires raced through Los Angeles.

At least 27 people are known to have died in the two massive blazes, with dozens still missing.

Ten days after flames erupted, frustration was growing among the tens of thousands who remain in limbo, unable to return even to homes that were spared by the flames, because of unseen dangers like toxic pollution or the risk of landslides.

Nina Madok, who lost her home in the Palisades Fire, told AFP an information meeting for evacuees had been "worthless."

"We need local leaders from the Palisades to answer our questions now."

An emotional Los Angeles Assistant Fire Chief Joe Everett told those present: "It's extremely, extremely hard for me to look you in the eye knowing that, quite honestly, I feel like I failed you in some respect."

Officials said Thursday it would be at least a week until anyone could go home.

Los Angeles City Mayor Karen Bass, under pressure over her handling of the disaster, announced the appointment of a chief recovery officer.

Steve Soboroff, a former police commissioner, said he was devising an action plan for the path forward.

"There is an A to Z for each one of us, and A is today," he told a press conference. "We're going to get there step by step."

But with dangerous rubble strewn over a large swath and the final death toll still unknown, the area remained in emergency mode.

Urban search teams using cadaver dogs continued their painstaking trawl through Altadena, where whole blocks of homes were incinerated.

In the countryside above Malibu, Los Angeles County Sheriff's deputies on horseback were also looking for the dead.



A relative mourns over the bodies of four members of the Palestinian al-Qadra family killed in an Israeli strike in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

SAUDI ARABIA'S DILEMMA

Recognise Israel before a Palestinian state?

AFP, Dubai

With a pending Gaza ceasefire and Donald Trump returning as US president, Saudi Arabia's de facto leader must now decide whether to recognise Israel before a Palestinian state is created.

For Trump, normalisation of Israeli-Saudi ties would be the deal of all deals. But Riyadh has insisted a Palestinian state must be established before such a historic move can be agreed.

The announcement of a Gaza ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, due to begin the day before Trump takes the oath of office on Monday, only increases the pressure on Riyadh to edge towards a deal.

Saudi Arabia hailed the Gaza truce but insists on the "complete withdrawal of the Israeli occupation forces" from the devastated Palestinian territory.

Riyadh paused tentative talks on normalising ties with Israel early in the Gaza conflict and hardened its rhetoric as the war continued.

Trump's commitment to Israel was made clear during his first term when he moved the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

But his administration also brokered the Abraham Accords in 2020, which saw Israel establish relations with the United Arab Emirates, Morocco and Bahrain.

That raised hopes of a similar deal with Saudi Arabia, the Arab world's richest economy and guardian of Islam's two holiest sites.

Firas Maksad, of the Washington-based Middle East Institute, said Trump is focused on the deal that he likes to call the deal of the century.

Trump has cultivated close ties with "MBS" – Mohammed bin Salman, the Saudi crown prince and de facto ruler.

According to Saudi researcher Aziz Alghashian, after Trump is sworn in on Monday, he and the US pro-normalisation lobby "are just going to really focus their efforts, not only just speaking to Saudi Arabia, but in particular MBS."

Israel remains opposed to the internationally backed two-state solution of Israel and a Palestinian state co-existing.

Saudi Arabia does not recognise Israel, but since 2020 has been negotiating rapprochement in exchange for a US defence pact and Washington's help on a civilian nuclear programme.

The major obstacle for Riyadh would be turning the page on Gaza.

Anna Jacobs, non-resident fellow at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, says the Saudi people are strongly pro-Palestinian.



Two judges shot dead at Iran's SC

AFP, Tehran

Two judges were killed in a shooting attack yesterday at the Supreme Court building in Tehran, state media reported.

"This morning, a gunman infiltrated the Supreme Court in a planned act of assassination of two brave and experienced judges. The two judges were martyred in the act," the judiciary's Mizan Online website reported.

Mizan said the assailant "killed himself" after the shootings.

State news agency IRNA also reported that one other person was injured in the attack.

The deceased judges worked on cases "fighting crimes against national security, espionage and terrorism".

The motive behind their killing were not immediately clear. Authorities said an investigation into the incident was launched.

Russian attack kills 3 in Kyiv

AFP, Kyiv

A Russian missile strike on the Ukrainian capital killed three people yesterday, Ukrainian leaders said, branding it a "heinous" attack, while Moscow called it "retaliation" for bombardments on its territory.

Russia frequently targets Kyiv with aerial attacks, but deadly strikes there are rare, as the capital is heavily protected by air defences and better able to fend off attacks than elsewhere in the country.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky called on the world to up its pressure on the Kremlin to force it to end the nearly three-year invasion.

Russia's defence ministry said the strike had hit a rocket-maker based in the Ukrainian capital.

It called the attack "retaliation" for Ukraine's use of US-supplied ATACMS missiles in strikes on Russian territory.

At least three people were killed and three wounded, Zelensky said, revising down an earlier toll of four. City officials said the victims were two men, aged 43 and 25, and a 41-year-old woman.

Ukraine's air force said it had downed two Iskander ballistic missiles as well as 24 Russian attack drones overnight.

It said the downed missiles "fell" on Kyiv's central Shevchenkivskyi district, damaging an industrial building, a subway to the metro and residential buildings, and temporarily knocking out local water supplies.

Ten people were also wounded in a Russian strike on the southern city of Zaporizhzhia, officials said.



Trump admin plans mass immigrant raids

AFP, Washington

US immigration authorities will carry out mass arrests of undocumented immigrants across the country on Tuesday, a top border official in the incoming administration of Donald Trump has said.

The move would be among the first by Republican Trump, who returns to the White House on Monday, to uphold a campaign pledge to deport millions of undocumented immigrants from the United States.

The remarks on Friday by Trump's incoming "border czar" Tom Homan to Fox News came in response to reports in the Wall Street Journal and other US outlets that Trump's new administration planned to carry out an "immigration raid" in Chicago beginning Tuesday.

No action taken based

FROM PAGE 12

"There is no widespread discussion too -- it remains a big question to me," he added.

Regarding the current economic situation, Bhattacharya criticised the interim government for "inconsiderately" increasing value-added tax.

If the government intends to collect taxes effectively, it should gradually shift its focus to direct taxes.

"We have not seen any plan to collect direct taxes. Raising the VAT indicates a preference for indirect taxes over direct taxes, which is concerning," said Bhattacharya, also a distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

Meanwhile, the country's growth rate is slowing and the energy situation is expected to worsen.

Although the interim government has undertaken several initiatives in the banking and energy sectors, the efforts are ad hoc and lack coordination, Bhattacharya said.

Corruption in Aman paddy collection remains unchanged, with farmers still not receiving fair prices.

Food stock is not increasing in government warehouses even though the government has identified it as a means to tame inflation.

"While the government may increase allocations for education and healthcare, it remains unclear how these funds will be utilised or who will benefit from them," Bhattacharya added.

Commerce Adviser Sk. Bashir Uddin defended the interim government's decision to increase VAT, stating that VAT is crucial in an unregulated market where tax evasion is prevalent.

"Relying on direct taxes may be effective for developed economies. However, for an unregulated market like ours, indirect taxes are critically important."

Regarding the family card programme under the Trading

Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB), Bashir said digitisation uncovered about 37 lakh fake cardholders.

He suggested discussing whether the government should raise the prices of TCB products to expand its beneficiaries.

Commenting on the high interest rates, he said most banks reported substantial profits in 2024 due to higher interest income.

"It is clearly unethical to earn such high profits while businesses are struggling," he added.

Dissecting the notion of the fastest-growing economy, Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist at the World Bank's Dhaka office, said GDP growth estimates averaged 4.2 percent annually between fiscal 2008-09 and 2018-19 and not 7 percent as officially reported.

He attributed the disparity to underinvestment, a narrow export base, low human capital and resource misallocations, which caused growth trends to diverge from fiscal 2013-14 onwards.

With low revenue and forex earnings growth, the country became increasingly dependent on debt for its annual development programme. However, the development projects were marred by corruption and mismanagement, he said.

"Consequently, borrowed money (both in dollars and taka) ultimately moved into the accounts of cronies at home and abroad via ADP projects, burdening current and future generations with debt."

The path to reviving the economy depends on sound policies and political commitment to economic reforms. However, the cost of inaction is becoming increasingly evident, Hussain said.

Umama Fatima, spokesperson of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, criticised the bureaucracy for supporting the previous government, with most bureaucrats avoiding jail time.

While the public is suffering

from high inflation, bureaucrats are continuing to receive dearness allowances, she said, while stressing the need for increased government support for research and development.

In another session, Anu Muhammad, a former economics professor at Jahangirnagar University, said Sheikh Hasina's government received support from bureaucrats, business people and international agencies like the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, which propagated the narrative of the country's "development miracle".

"They must take responsibility," he said.

During her tenure, institutional degradation was rampant. The interim government must take steps to restore institutional integrity.

"We do not want the white paper to be ignored in policymaking," he added.

While it is possible to recover the siphoned funds, the process is challenging, said Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow at CPD.

Although the interim government is making efforts to recover the funds, resources must be allocated for special prosecution, forensic audits, staffing and data acquisition.

"These steps are crucial for proving cases in local courts before pursuing them internationally."

Rahman also recommended ensuring the independence and autonomy of the Implementation, Monitoring, and Evaluation Division to prevent further corruption in ADP projects.

Sayema Haque Bidisha, pro-vice Chancellor of Dhaka University; Ferdous Ara Begum, chief executive officer of Business Initiatives Leading Development; Owasis Parray, senior economic adviser at UNDP Bangladesh; and M Masrur Reaz, chairman and CEO of Policy Exchange Bangladesh, also spoke.

40 shrines attacked in over 5 months

FROM PAGE 12

17 attacks on shrines was reported in the Dhaka division. Chattogram and Mymensingh divisions saw 10 and seven attacks respectively. Four attacks were carried out on a single shrine in Sherpur under the Mymensingh division.

Legal actions have been taken in all the incidents since the interim government has taken a zero-tolerance policy towards any attacks on shrines, according to the statement.

These actions included the filing of 15 regular cases and 29 general diaries

(GDs) with different police stations on receiving complaints from the aggrieved persons or the police's own volition.

A total of 23 suspects have been arrested in those criminal cases. Charge sheets have already been submitted to the court in two regular cases. Investigations in 13 other regular cases and 29 GDs are currently ongoing.

The statement said all police units were ordered to investigate the cases stringently and arrest all those involved in the attacks.

The government has attached

are showing no willingness to hold them accountable. The government thinks that a mere nominal ban on Chhatra League will do."

Rakib said that investigation committees were formed at Dhaka University, Jahangirnagar University, and other campuses to identify those who attacked students during the July-August uprising.

"However, even after five and a half months, we have not seen any report. We demand a swift investigation report against the Chhatra League. Their student status must be revoked, and they must be brought under the law. The more you delay, the easier it will be for them to be rehabilitated."

We'll bin July proclamation

FROM PAGE 2

Rakib said, "If the 15 years of sacrifice, labour, and struggle of Chhatra Dal are not mentioned, it will be thrown into the dustbin."

"In July-August, all political parties united under the leadership of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement. We stand united against fascism."

"But those who seek to monopolise the July-August movement must act responsibly. I'm warning them not to take any actions that might destroy our unity."

Regarding the BCL, the JCD president said, "The administrations of Dhaka University and other universities

65pc of suicide victims

FROM PAGE 12

higher secondary (19.4 percent), honours (14.6 percent), master's (1.9 percent), and diploma students (0.6 percent). Dhaka division recorded the highest percentage of suicides (29 percent), while Sylhet had the lowest (2.9 percent).

In the virtual presser, Professor Jamal Uddin of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology attributed the issue to poor mental health

awareness among students, urging the introduction of mental health services in schools and colleges.

Dr Sayedul Islam of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University highlighted the stigma around failure and advised parents to monitor their children's mental health closely.

Aachol Foundation founder Tansen Rose and lawyer Nawfel Zamir called for collective action to address the alarming trend.

the highest importance to the safety and security of the shrines, reads the statement. Police have taken all appropriate measures to ensure the safety and security of the shrines. All the aggrieved persons have been requested to file complaints with the police.

The statement said steps were taken to solve the issues locally by arranging peace meetings with the confronting parties. Programmes were also organised with the participation of the people and Islamic leaders through community policing efforts.

Govt will protect investments

FROM PAGE 2

entrepreneurs' struggles and wanted to know what further steps could be taken for the entrepreneurs.

At the meeting, the entrepreneurs suggested increasing the publicity of the Grameen Telecom Trust and Grameen Trust's programmes for young entrepreneurs to promote social business.

They said most people do not know about these initiatives and many poor people will benefit if the publicity is increased.

They also urged Yunus to provide appropriate training to entrepreneurs in addition to investing in them.

The entrepreneurs said many cannot grow their businesses due to lack of skills.

If appropriate workshops can be organised, more skilled and successful entrepreneurs will be developed in each district, they said.

Principal Coordinator for SDGs Affairs Lamiya Morshed, Managing Director of Grameen Trust Tasmina Rahman and Managing Director and CEO of Grameen Telecom Trust Ashraful Hasan were, among others, present.

NCTB must fast-track delivery of books

Expedite printing, resolve PDF download issues

It is frustrating that weeks into the new academic year, primary and secondary school students are still waiting for their textbooks. According to a report by *The Daily Star*, as of mid-January, only 37 percent (or 15 crore) of the 40.15 crore books required for about 4 crore students have been distributed. Among them, those at primary schools have been more “fortunate”, with 75 percent of the required 9.19 crore books delivered. Conversely, only 30 percent of the nearly 31 crore books required for secondary schools (and Ebtedayee madrasas) have reached them. The delivery rates are said to be particularly low in regions like Chattogram, Barishal, and Rangpur, leaving their students disproportionately affected.

The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB), which is in charge of developing and distributing textbooks for pre-tertiary students, is distributing the books in phases. Even though the authorities initially promised to ensure timely delivery of books, it was never a realistic goal considering the disruptive effects of the July-August political upheaval and the reversion to the 2012 national curriculum—which necessitated additional work including revisions in 441 textbooks. Another challenge this year is that no printing work was outsourced to India to help in the process (from 2009 to 2023, a portion of the books was printed in India). However, it is reasonable to ask why there was no contingency plan to ensure timely printing even though these decisions were made months ago. Why were some printing presses allowed to take on more work than they could handle, allowing the backlog to pile up? And why are some bookstores in Dhaka illegally selling the books at inflated prices when the students should be getting them free at schools?

All this points to the lack of sound planning and execution, as a result of which students are losing valuable learning time. Apart from the academic disruptions caused by the lack of books, students from class 10 are also worried about preparations for their upcoming public exams with only a fraction of the books available. Adding salt to the injury, many students are also reportedly struggling with the download of PDFs from the NCTB website—an alternative to printed books not accessible to all—because of server issues, leaving them with no options.

This state of affairs has to change. The authorities now say that all the textbooks would be distributed within February, but such assurances are not enough. We urge them to step up their efforts to fix all the challenges facing textbook delivery. A thorough investigation is also needed into the inefficiencies and alleged corruption in the printing and distribution process, and those responsible must be held accountable. The government also must prioritise distributing books to regions with abysmal delivery rates as well as students who have public exams in the near future.

Will the ceasefire in Gaza be permanent?

The world must ensure Israel sticks to the deal

After fifteen months of relentless bombardment that has killed nearly 47,000 Palestinians—mostly women and children—the Israeli government has agreed to a ceasefire deal with Hamas, set to begin on Sunday morning. The agreement was brokered primarily by incoming US President Donald Trump (with support from the Biden administration), Egypt, and Qatar. While there is some relief that the horrific bloodshed in Gaza may finally come to an end, serious doubts still remain given the realities on the ground.

It is appalling that even after the ceasefire was announced on Wednesday night, at least 122 Palestinians, including 33 children, have been killed in Israeli attacks. What does this say about the future of the ceasefire deal, or the quality of the “peace” to be brought by it?

During the first and second stages of the deal, Israeli hostages will be released, with priority given to children, the sick, and the elderly, while hundreds of Palestinian women and children held in Israeli prisons will also be freed; humanitarian aid—largely withheld by Israel throughout the war—will also be allowed into Gaza. The third phase likely involves Gaza’s reconstruction, supervised by Qatar and the UN, along with a full Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. However, given Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s reliance on far-right coalition partners, there is reason to doubt whether Israel will fully relinquish control. Moreover, allowing Palestinians to return to northern Gaza—now reduced to rubble—feels like a cruel irony. What arrangements are being made to shelter them before their homes are rebuilt?

Israel’s history of overwhelming and disproportionate retaliation, along with the unwavering support it received from the US and other Western nations, leaves room for scepticism about whether Palestinians will be treated fairly in this process. Still, as delayed as it is, a ceasefire is something the world—and especially the Palestinian people—desperately needs.

The international community now must extend full support for Gaza’s reconstruction and recovery. The war’s catastrophic consequences—including thousands of disabled, injured, and traumatised children, women, and men—must be addressed with urgent medical care, psychological support, and financial aid. Palestinians must also have the right to choose their own leadership and be free from Israeli control. Most importantly, the US and other Western nations must ensure that Israel does not renege on its commitments under the deal using any pretext.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

The first BlackBerry is released

On this day in 1999, the first BlackBerry pager, BlackBerry 850, was released. Although BlackBerry devices dominated the market for much of the 2000s, they eventually lost their market share to Apple’s iPhone.



Aasha Mehreen Amin
is joint editor at The Daily Star.

AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

A 15-minute film has put together video clips of one of the most brutal crackdowns of the July-August uprising by the police. Many of us have seen some of these clips of shootings outside Jatrabari Police Station on August 5 when hundreds of protesters were marching towards the ousted Prime Minister’s official residence Gono Bhaban, sure of victory ahead. But to see them together with the narrator giving details of the horrific scenes makes it clear that the police action on August 5, the day Sheikh Hasina fled the country, was a well-orchestrated, cold-blooded massacre that had been given clearance from the very top.

The film, launched on January 14, after months of forensic investigation, by International Truth and Justice Project (ITJP), Tech Global Institute and The Outsider Movie Company, provides valuable evidence that can be used to bring the perpetrators to justice. In an exclusive interview, Yasmin Sooka, a human rights lawyer who has dedicated four decades to human rights and transitional justice and now is executive director of ITJP, shares how detailed forensic investigation is crucial, not only for the process of justice sought by each victim’s family but for the overall understanding of the systemic installation and perpetuation of brutal repression by the state.

ITJP, headed by Sooka with its London office run by journalist Frances Harrison, has been documenting human rights violations in Sri Lanka since 2014, focusing on the atrocities committed during the final phases of the Sri Lankan civil war. Sooka also chairs the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, established in 2016 by the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva. The commission is mandated to monitor the human rights situation and address accountability for serious crimes in South Sudan.

In early 2024, Sooka’s organisation was about to investigate economic crimes and corruption in Bangladesh. But while they were discussing which particular cases to look at, the student protests erupted in July and Sooka and her co-workers immediately directed their focus on documenting the violence unfolding. It was clear that evidence had to be collected in real time to ensure accuracy and authenticity. Collaborating with local researchers, such as British journalist David Bergman and a young team from the Tech Global Institute, Sooka’s organisation gathered testimonies

INTERVIEW WITH YASMIN SOOKA

Digital technology can bring clarity to the July-August atrocities

and cellphone footage from victims’ families. This evidence was crucial for truth recovery, as many families lacked first-hand knowledge of what had happened to their loved ones.

Sooka emphasises the revolutionary role digital technology plays in modern justice systems. As incriminating as the footage was, her team had to ensure that the evidence would be admissible in court—through proper authentication. This included using advanced methods like geolocation and chronolocation. Collaborating with experts experienced in documenting crimes in Sri Lanka, the team reconstructed events to establish

police forces acting on orders from the highest levels of government. “This was not panic-driven,” she says. “It was deliberate, calculated, and ordered by the highest levels (of authority).”

The team’s goal was not just to document the atrocities but to use the documentaries as part of evidence in the legal process. The team intends to have private screenings with victims’ families to provide them with a sense of justice and clarity, as well as public screenings to initiate critical conversations about accountability.

Sooka and her colleagues, including Spanish prosecutor Carlos Castresana Fernández and Swiss investigator Felix Weber, conducted training sessions for prosecutors (including the chief prosecutor) and investigators of Bangladesh’s International Crimes Tribunal (ICT). These sessions focused on modern methods of proving crimes against humanity. However, says Sooka, ICT faces significant challenges such as resource constraints and limited access to digital technology. She stresses that these challenges must be addressed to

Sooka stresses the importance of national dialogue in shaping Bangladesh’s future. “Understanding the past is not about creating a better past but building a foundation for a better future,” she said. She emphasises the role of students and civil society in building a Bangladesh free from repression and inequality. While trials can bring perpetrators to justice, Sooka believes they must be complemented by institutional reforms, reparations, and initiatives promoting historical memory. She points to South Africa’s approach to reconciliation, emphasising accountability, acknowledgment of violations, and societal healing over mere forgiveness.

Sooka says that there is some confusion regarding the term “truth commission” and many people think that it automatically means “reconciliation” which is not the case.

“We would call this a truth recovery process,” she says, “which is aimed at building a new narrative for the country around how it was possible for Bangladesh to have so many years of



Yasmin Sooka

PHOTO: NAIMUR RAHMAN

patterns of state-sponsored violence. “When you look at modern conflicts and the rise of social media you begin to see that this is going to play an important role in evidentiary material before any kind of trial or any kind of tribunal,” says Sooka. “The challenge,” Sooka explains, “is preserving the chain of custody and ensuring the footage is tamper-proof, especially in an era where AI manipulation is a possibility.”

These efforts culminated in two documentaries detailing police brutality during the protests, including incidents at Jatrabari Police Station and the killing of Hridoy Ali, a protester.

The documentaries made it quite clear that the violence had been orchestrated and sponsored by the state. Sooka recounted how unarmed protesters faced live ammunition from

ensure the effectiveness of the trials.

Sooka believes that the end goal is for Bangladesh to establish a broader truth recovery process. “Trials address individual accountability,” she explains, “but they don’t uncover the structural underpinnings that enable systemic violence.” Drawing from her experience in South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission where she was appointed by President Nelson Mandela in 1995, Sooka advocates for a state commission to investigate how institutional failures allowed for repression, corruption, and inequality. Such a commission could also investigate the role of corporations, media, and political parties in perpetuating injustices. For Bangladesh, this process could create a national narrative acknowledging past abuses and promoting a more equitable future.

repressive governments and how it was possible for this kind of institutionalised state-sponsored violence to happen. A truth commission would also allow you to look at the question of corruption which is another big factor in many of our countries.” Sooka believes the fact that the chief adviser has established several major commissions is a step in the process of truth recovery.

For Yasmin Sooka, justice is not just about holding the guilty accountable and punishing them but creating a society where such violations will never occur again. Through her commitment to seeking justice by unravelling the truth and advocating systemic reforms, Sooka gives hope to Bangladesh and many other nations that have had to bear the brunt of decades of state repression.

Why Bangladesh needs a child affairs reform commission



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RABIUL ALAM

The student-led July-August uprising that toppled the 15-year regime of the Awami League and installed the interim government on August 8, 2024, was a defining moment for Bangladesh. Led by Nobel Laureate Dr Muhammad Yunus, the administration has committed itself to the ambitious task of “state repair,” laying the groundwork by forming 11 independent commissions. Each commission has been tasked with addressing vital issues such as constitutional revision, judicial reform, electoral processes, public administration, police accountability, anti-corruption, health, mass media, workers’ rights, local government, and women’s affairs. Yet, amid this comprehensive reform agenda, a glaring omission has surfaced: the lack of a dedicated commission for child affairs.

This oversight is particularly troubling given the vulnerable condition of millions of children in Bangladesh, many of whom were

directly affected by the uprising and continue to suffer systemic neglect. According to a Child Rights Advocacy Coalition of Bangladesh report, at least 121 children were killed by law enforcement and other agencies during the uprising.

The exclusion of child-related concerns from the government’s agenda is deeply disheartening. Although a Women’s Affairs Reform Commission has been established, it has not incorporated issues affecting children. This exclusion raises pressing questions: why has the plight of children been overlooked? And why can’t child affairs be included in the existing Women’s Affairs Reform Commission or addressed through a separate entity? Children constitute a significant portion of Bangladesh’s population, and their well-being is inextricably linked to the country’s future. Their voices, however, are absent from public discourse, as they lack the ability and platform to advocate for their rights. It is, therefore, the moral

responsibility of the government to champion their cause.

According to the National Child Labour Survey 2022, there are some 35.4 lakh working children aged 5–17 in Bangladesh, with 17.6 lakh not in child labour and 17.8 lakh engaged in child labour, including 10.7 lakh in hazardous child labour. These children are deprived of education, healthcare, and the opportunity to experience a childhood free from exploitation. A significant proportion of these children are street children, and this number has only risen alarmingly in recent years. A recent UNICEF report estimates that over 34 lakh Bangladeshi children live on streets without parental care, and are exposed to abuse, neglect, and extreme poverty. These children, who bear the brunt of systemic failures, were among the most affected during the uprising against the previous regime. Many lost their lives or were injured in the violence, yet their sacrifices remain unacknowledged. Despite laws prohibiting child labour, enforcement remains weak, and children as young as six years old can be found working in factories, workshops, and households.

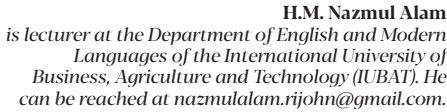
The interim government’s reform agenda offers a unique opportunity to address these longstanding issues, but this can only be achieved if children are given the attention they deserve. Establishing a dedicated child affairs reform commission or integrating

child-related concerns into the existing Women’s Affairs Reform Commission would be a step in the right direction. Such a commission could focus on critical issues such as eradicating child labour, ensuring birth registration for all children, including those who are orphans, improving access to education, ensuring healthcare for all children, and protecting street children from abuse and exploitation. It could also advocate for policy changes to uphold children’s rights and ensure their inclusion in national development strategies.

The argument for prioritising children in the state reform agenda is not merely ethical but also pragmatic. Children represent the future of Bangladesh, and investing in their well-being is essential for the country’s progress. Neglecting their needs will only exacerbate existing social and economic disparities, hindering the nation’s ability to achieve sustainable development. By addressing the systemic issues that affect children, the interim government can lay the foundation for a more just and equitable society.

It is crucial to recognise that true reform cannot be achieved without addressing the needs of its most vulnerable citizens. Children who lack the means to voice their concerns and demand their rights must not be left behind.

Trump's Greenland and Panama Canal ambition



H. M. NAZMUL ALAM

So let's all take a moment to appreciate the absurdity of it all. Because in a world where a former reality TV star can threaten to buy an island and reclaim a canal, sometimes all you can do is laugh—and maybe start stockpiling insulin, just in case.



And then there's the "nuclear option": military force. Experts have dismissed this as unlikely, but can we really rule out anything? The man once suggested nuking hurricanes. Deploying troops to Greenland or Panama might seem ridiculous to the rest of us, but to

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FILE PHOTO: **EUROPEAN SPACE AGENCY**

As the number of satellites in orbit increases—about 110 new launches each year and at least 10 satellites or other objects a year breaking—up into smaller fragments—the risk of severe collisions with space debris will escalate. The resulting consequences for all satellites and assets in space operating within a congested orbit, as well as for any spacecraft traversing these regions, will be disastrous. For example, the ISS has executed multiple evasive

Unfortunately, due to a lack of initiatives aimed at reducing the accumulation of space debris, the clutter persists in increasing. The situation has escalated to the point where we are staring at “an unsustainable environment in the long term.” Historical precedents indicate that all is not lost; we have previously come together in the face of considerable challenges.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism
Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka-1000
Admin-2
www.mocat.gov.bd

Memo No: 30.00.0000.011.07.028.23-22 Date: 16.01.2025

e-Tender Notice

e Tender is invited in the National e-GP portal (<https://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of goods mentioned below:

e Tender ID	Description of Items	Last Selling Date and Time	Opening Date and Time
1060745	Procurement of Cleaning Item	10 Feb 2025 10:30	10 Feb 2025 11:00
1060945	Procurement of Printer and Photocopier Toner	10 Feb 2025 10:30	10 Feb 2025 11:30
1060950	Procurement of Printing and Binding Items	10 Feb 2025 10:30	10 Feb 2025 12:30
1060971	Procurement of Stationary and Other Equipment	10 Feb 2025 10:30	10 Feb 2025 13:00
1060990	Procurement of ICT Equipment	10 Feb 2025 10:30	10 Feb 2025 13:30
1061013	Procurement of Computer Related Accessories	10 Feb 2025 10:30	10 Feb 2025 14:30
1061028	Procurement of Office Equipment	10 Feb 2025 10:30	10 Feb 2025 15:00
1061048	Procurement of Others Equipment	10 Feb 2025 10:30	10 Feb 2025 15:30
1065627	Procurement of Furniture	10 Feb 2025 10:30	10 Feb 2025 16:00
1061094	Room Interior Decoration	10 Feb 2025 10:30	10 Feb 2025 16:30

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP Portal (<https://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 registered banks within closing date and time. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).


Rosy Akter
 Deputy Secretary
 Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism

GD-185

Small steps, big changes: Your guide to achieving weight loss goals

Losing weight and improving your health often require lifestyle changes, and setting clear, realistic goals can make a big difference in your success. Effective weight loss goals include a long term objective—like shedding 10 pounds in six months—supported by smaller, actionable steps, such as daily 20-minute walks after dinner.

Create SMART goals: Successful weight management often starts with SMART goals:

- *Specific:* Define exactly what you will do.
- *Measurable:* Track your progress easily.
- *Action-based:* Focus on actions you control.
- *Realistic:* Ensure your goals are achievable.
- *Timely:* Set deadlines to keep yourself motivated.

For instance, instead of vague goals like “exercise more,” commit to walking 8,000 steps daily. Replace “eat healthier” with specifics, such as including a salad in your lunch each weekday.

Keep goals realistic: Ambitious targets, like losing 10 pounds in two weeks, may set you up for frustration. Instead, focus on sustainable habits, such as exercising 30 minutes a day, five days a week. Gradual progress, like losing 5% of your body weight over several months, can significantly improve your health and reduce the risk of conditions like diabetes and heart disease.

Celebrate progress: Reward yourself for achieving milestones to stay motivated. Small rewards like a relaxing bath or a new book can keep you on track, while bigger rewards—like a weekend trip—can celebrate major successes.

By breaking down your goals into manageable steps and celebrating your progress, you can build lasting habits that lead to long-term weight loss and better health.



STAR HEALTH DESK

As winter takes hold in many parts of the world, there is a predictable rise in acute respiratory infections (ARIs). These increases are typically driven by seasonal epidemics of common pathogens such as influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), human metapneumovirus (hMPV), and mycoplasma pneumoniae. The co-circulation of these respiratory pathogens during the colder months can pose challenges for healthcare systems, as they work to manage the additional burden of seasonal illnesses.

Global surveillance systems have recorded a rise in influenza-like illness (ILI) and ARI rates in recent weeks. This trend aligns with typical seasonal patterns. Influenza activity has elevated, with variations in the dominant influenza subtype depending on the region. RSV activity shows variability, with some areas observing declines while others report increases. Although routine hMPV surveillance is not conducted in all countries, available data suggest a seasonal rise in cases, reflecting global patterns seen during this time of year.

Attention has also turned to the global implications of respiratory virus transmission. Reports highlight a seasonal increase in infections caused by influenza, RSV, hMPV, and other common respiratory pathogens. Influenza remains the most frequently detected cause

of ARIs, particularly affecting vulnerable populations, with other pathogens like mycoplasma pneumoniae impacting specific age groups. SARS-CoV-2 activity, while generally low, is being monitored closely for any indications of surges.

The seasonal rise in ARIs and respiratory pathogen detections is consistent with expectations for this time of year. There have been no reports of unusual outbreaks, and healthcare systems across the globe have managed to maintain operations without significant strain. Public health authorities in various countries have responded by intensifying preventive measures and providing health messaging to minimise the impact of these illnesses.

Preventing and reducing the spread of respiratory infections relies heavily on public health strategies. The World Health Organisation (WHO) advises individuals to stay home if they have mild symptoms to avoid spreading the infection to others. For those in high-risk groups or experiencing severe or complicated symptoms, seeking timely medical care is critical. Additional preventive measures include wearing masks in crowded or poorly ventilated spaces, practicing regular handwashing, covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or bent elbow, and getting recommended vaccinations.

WHO continues to work with global surveillance networks to track respiratory illnesses and their impact.

Integrated surveillance of respiratory pathogens allows countries to allocate resources effectively and implement targeted responses. Guidance from WHO helps assess the severity of influenza and other respiratory epidemics, ensuring healthcare systems can respond promptly to any sudden changes in disease patterns.

Vaccination remains a cornerstone of prevention, particularly for high-risk populations, including the elderly, young children, and individuals with preexisting conditions. Seasonal influenza vaccines and other recommended immunisations can significantly reduce the risk of severe illness and associated complications.

While the global community faces the usual seasonal increase in respiratory infections, these trends remain within expected ranges. Collaborative surveillance and proactive public health measures play vital roles in mitigating the burden of these diseases and protecting vulnerable populations. WHO continues to provide updates and support as needed, emphasising the importance of maintaining vigilance against seasonal respiratory pathogens.

By taking simple but effective preventive measures and adhering to public health advice, communities worldwide can navigate the season with resilience and minimise the impact of respiratory illnesses.

Source: World Health Organisation

KNEE OSTEOARTHRITIS Managing pain and moving freely

DR M EASIN ALI

Osteoarthritis (OA) is a degenerative disease where bone erosion occurs, leading to rough joint surfaces and reduced joint space due to osteophyte formation. Commonly affected areas include the cervical and lumbar vertebrae, hip, and knee joints. As the most weight-bearing joint in the body, the knee is frequently affected, especially in individuals aged 45-50 and older.

Symptoms of OA in the knee joint:

- Pain and swelling in the knee
- Difficulty bending the knee, affecting sitting, toileting, and stair use
- Reduced ability to stand or walk for prolonged periods

Treatment and management:

While OA cannot be cured, pain-free movement can be maintained through physiotherapy and supplements like glucosamine, chondroitin, hyaluronic acid, calcium, and vitamin D.

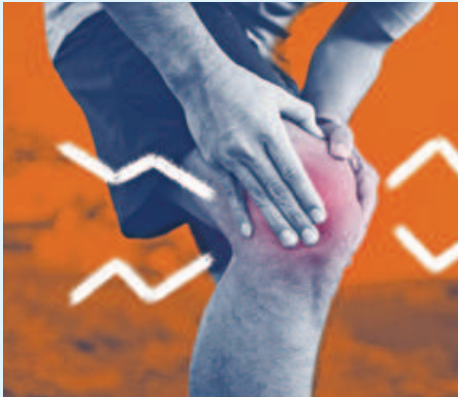
Physiotherapy treatments:

- Manual therapy, Mulligan technique, ultrasound therapy
- Short-wave diathermy, laser therapy, and therapeutic exercises

Daily life advice for OA patients:

1. Avoid frequent stair use and prolonged standing.
2. Maintain a healthy weight
3. Use knee caps or walking aids
4. Exercise regularly to strengthen knee muscles.

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Winter migraine: A curse

RAISA MEHZABEEN

Winter, otherwise known for its crisp air and merriment, is quite a difficult time for migraine-prone people. These debilitating headaches are not just a neurological disorder but also a condition influenced by lifestyle, environmental factors, and diet. As the mercury goes down, so does the resilience of many who find their migraines worsening during this season.

Triggers of winter migraines: Cold weather and sudden temperature changes are known to trigger such headaches. The dry air in winter, combined with minimal sun exposure, leads to easy dehydration and vitamin D deficiency, both of which are potent triggers for migraine attacks. Also, overindulgence in seasonal feasting with rich, processed foods containing preservatives, artificial sweeteners, or tyramine—a chemical occurring in aged cheese and cured meats—aggravates symptoms.

The season becomes even more intolerable for people who develop various sensitivities to commonly consumed food items during this season, which include citrus fruits and hot drinks containing caffeine. The excess consumption of caffeine to essentially warm the body during winter months temporarily eases the symptoms but leads eventually to rebound headaches.

Nutritional defence against migraine:

Dietary changes can be a first line of defence against winter migraines. A diet rich in magnesium, omega-3 fatty acids, and hydration is important. Magnesium, one of the most documented nutrients for reducing migraine frequency, is found in leafy greens, nuts, seeds, and whole grains. Omega-3 fatty acids found in fatty fish like salmon, walnuts, and flaxseeds help combat inflammation, one of the known triggers for migraines.

Adequate hydration is important and cannot be overemphasised. Winter air is deceptively dehydrating, and dehydration can exacerbate migraine symptoms. Warm herbal teas, such as ginger or chamomile, hydrate and offer anti-inflammatory and soothing properties.

Vitamin D's role: Poor winter sunlight exposure can easily lead to a lack of vitamin D. Vitamin D has a close relationship with migraine attacks; a low level raises the frequency. Improvement in its level is highly necessary, and supplementation or dietary changes may be helpful. It is always better to consult a doctor before starting this supplement.

Lifestyle matters: Apart from nutrition, maintaining a consistent eating schedule is vital. Skipping meals or fasting can trigger migraines due to blood sugar fluctuations. Regular, small meals with a low glycaemic index can keep blood sugar levels stable. Additionally, managing stress, engaging in light exercise, and getting sufficient sleep are essential for overall well-being and migraine management.

Winter migraines can be a curse, but with the right approach, they are eminently controllable. A considerate and well-balanced diet that keeps away from the most common triggers and covers the minimum nutritional intake goes a long way in avoiding debilitating episodes. Nutritional wisdom coupled with lifestyle changes will help change this winter curse into a controllable malady that does not take away the joys of winter.

Let us not let migraines dampen the winter spirit. It is now time to adopt a nourishing, migraine-friendly lifestyle for a healthier and happier winter.

The writer is the founder & CEO of Nutrition For Change and a student in the Department of Food and Nutrition at the Government College of Applied Human Science. Email: raisameh20@gmail.com



Caring for your liver: Key steps to stay healthy

Your liver is a vital organ that supports digestion, cleans toxins from your blood, produces bile to break down fats, and stores glucose for energy. Protecting it is essential for long-term health.

Healthy habits for liver health:

- **Limit alcohol:** Excessive drinking damages liver cells, leading to conditions like cirrhosis. Stick to one drink per day for women and two for men.
- **Balanced diet and exercise:** A healthy lifestyle helps prevent metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease (MASLD), formerly known as nonalcoholic fatty liver disease.
- **Medication and toxin awareness:**
 - **Safe medicine use:** Overuse of acetaminophen (Tylenol) or combining alcohol with certain drugs can harm your liver. Always check with your doctor about safe medication use.
 - **Avoid toxins:** Limit exposure to harmful chemicals in cleaning products, insecticides, and cigarette smoke.

Preventing viral hepatitis:

- **Hepatitis A:** Spread through contaminated food or water, it is preventable with a vaccine.
- **Hepatitis B and C:** Transmitted through blood and bodily fluids. Practice safe hygiene, use protection during sex, and avoid sharing personal items.

Herbal remedies and coffee: Be cautious with supplements like green tea extract or ginseng, which may harm the liver. Interestingly, research suggests coffee may lower liver disease risk.

A healthy lifestyle and proactive care ensure your liver continues its vital work, helping you live a healthier life.



ONE HEALTH, ONE FIGHT

Addressing the Nipah virus threat in Bangladesh

DR MAHBUBA MUSLIMA MIM

One Health is an integrated approach that recognises the interconnectedness of human, animal, and environmental health. This concept became widely acknowledged in the early 1900s, and in recent years, outbreaks such as Ebola, SARS, and COVID-19 have further highlighted its significance.

One Health aims to tackle complex health challenges, such as zoonotic diseases (those that spread from animals to humans), antibiotic resistance, and environmental degradation. The approach fosters collaboration across various sectors, encouraging coordinated efforts to address health threats at the interface of humans, animals, and ecosystems.

In Bangladesh, where humans, animals, and the environment are in constant contact, One Health is vital to managing health risks. The country is highly vulnerable to zoonotic diseases like avian flu, leptospirosis, and, notably, Nipah virus.

Nipah virus (NiV), which emerged as a zoonotic threat over the past 25 years, is one of the most dangerous pathogens, with a high fatality rate. Bangladesh has experienced the highest number of NiV cases, reporting 341 cases and 241 deaths, leading to a

fatality rate of 71%. This deadly virus is primarily transmitted by fruit bats, which can infect animals such as pigs. Humans become infected through direct contact with infected animals or contaminated food sources.

One of the major routes of transmission of NiV in Bangladesh is through the consumption of raw date palm sap contaminated by bat saliva or urine. This sap, commonly consumed in the region, can cause severe symptoms, including fever, headache,



dizziness, nausea, and vomiting. In severe cases, the infection can lead to encephalitis (brain inflammation), respiratory distress, seizures, and coma. The virus can rapidly progress to brain swelling and respiratory failure, often resulting in death. While some survivors recover, they may experience long-term neurological complications.

The importance of the One Health

approach in addressing Nipah virus cannot be overstated. Efforts to prevent outbreaks must focus on monitoring bat populations, improving surveillance systems, and raising public awareness. Educating the public about the risks of consuming raw date palm sap and encouraging boiling the sap before consumption can significantly reduce the risk of infection.

There is currently no specific antiviral treatment for Nipah virus, and management primarily involves supportive care. Governments, both nationally and globally, must continue to collaborate to improve surveillance, share data, and enhance early warning systems.

The Nipah virus outbreaks in Bangladesh highlight the critical importance of the One Health approach. Addressing the complex interaction between human, animal, and environmental health is essential for preventing future outbreaks and protecting public health. By working together across sectors and borders, countries can reduce the risk of zoonotic diseases and strengthen global health security.

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Winter immunity boost: Eat right, stay strong

As winter sets in, strengthening your immune system is essential, especially in Bangladesh, where cold weather can make people more vulnerable to respiratory infections like the flu and common colds. A well-balanced diet plays a key role in supporting the immune system during this season.

Nutritionist Serena Poon emphasises the importance of antioxidant-rich foods, such as vegetables, fruits, and nuts, to protect against oxidative stress, which can weaken immune function. In Bangladesh, locally available root vegetables like carrots, sweet potatoes, and radishes are excellent sources of vitamins A, C, and K. These vegetables are not only nutritious but are also commonly grown in winter.

Leafy greens, including spinach and mustard leaves, are rich in essential nutrients and antioxidants. They are



widely available in local markets and can easily be incorporated into daily meals. Citrus fruits like oranges and lemons, available during winter, are packed with vitamin C, a key nutrient for boosting immunity.

Berries, although not as common in local diets, can be substituted with fruits like guavas and papayas, which are rich in vitamins and antioxidants. Nuts, such as almonds and walnuts, are a great addition to winter diets and

can be found in many local markets.

In Bangladesh, fermented foods like yoghurt, which are commonly consumed, support gut health and contribute to better immune function. Local dishes made with garlic, ginger, and turmeric are also valuable, as these spices have anti-inflammatory and immune-boosting properties.

To support overall health, staying hydrated, ensuring adequate sleep, and incorporating regular physical activity into daily routines are essential. For those recovering from illness, traditional remedies such as chicken soup, herbal teas, and vitamin D-rich foods like fish are widely used and helpful.

By focusing on a nutritious winter diet, Bangladeshis can better protect themselves from seasonal illnesses and maintain a strong immune system throughout the colder months.

This is a big thing for the country because he's [Hamza Choudhury] playing at the highest level – the English Premier League. It would be better for the country if we had three or four more Hamzas. Hamza coming to Bangladesh would be a good thing for everyone.

Bangladesh football team captain Jamal Bhuiyan



Jannatul Maoua celebrates one of her two wickets during Bangladesh's five-wicket victory against Nepal in their opening match of the ICC Women's Under-19 T20 World Cup at the YSD-UKM Cricket Oval in Bangi, Malaysia, yesterday. Maoua claimed two wickets for 11 runs in her four overs while five batters got run out as Nepal were bundled out for just 52 in 18.2 overs, a total the young Tigresses overtook in 13.2 overs.

PHOTO: ICC

Tigresses aim series win in Windies for WC direct entry

SPORTS REPORTER

In a bid to secure a direct spot in this year's ICC Women's World Cup in India, Bangladesh women's team will take on West Indies in the opening game of a three-match WODI series in St Kitts today.

As per the tournament qualification rules, the hosts and the top five teams in the ongoing ICC Women's Championship will make a direct entry in the main event. Hosts India, Australia, England, South Africa and Sri Lanka have already qualified for the World Cup.

Bangladesh, who are currently seventh with 19 points, need to win at least two out of their three matches against West Indies to leapfrog New Zealand and ensure direct qualification to the tournament.

However, it will be a monumental task for the Tigresses, who are yet to win against the Caribbean side in any format despite playing four WT20Is and one WODI against them – all in ICC events. This will also be the first bilateral series between Bangladesh and West Indies, which consists three WT20Is as well.

‘I hope Tamim bhai wasn’t saying it seriously’

After a training session at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chattogram yesterday, most of the Dhaka Capitals cricketers had exited the ground, but not Sabbir Rahman. Sabbir, who remains a fan favourite despite not playing for Bangladesh since 2022, stayed back to work on his power hitting – something he has shown glimpses of in the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League (BPL). In an interview with **The Daily Star's Abdullah Al Mehdi**, Sabbir spoke about the Dhaka Capitals franchise, the state of domestic cricket in Rajshahi and an on-field incident involving him and Tamim Iqbal. Here are the excerpts:

The Daily Star (DS): Your team Dhaka Capitals are having a rough campaign with just one win in eight games. But on a personal note, how has the experience been for you so far with the Dhaka franchise?

Sabbir Rahman (SR): Everything has been really well organised and I don't think anyone has any complaints. We are trying to win but unfortunately it hasn't happened for us. But I feel respected here and I feel proud to represent them. There have been no complaints regarding payments either. Fifty percent payment is done and we are regularly getting our daily allowances.

DS: You were one of the first power hitters from Bangladesh, how do you rate yourself as a power hitter now?

SR: When I started playing, Aftab Ahmed was there and he showed me how to do it. Junaid Siddique was there too. In the beginning, I learnt by watching and following them. I also try to utilise my strength. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't.

DS: How important was it to score that 82 off 33 deliveries against Chittagong Kings?

SR: I felt that it could be my last opportunity. I took it as a do-or-die match and I like taking that challenge. I was fortunate to pass that challenge.

DS: You were not selected in the Rajshahi squad in last

year's NCL. How do you feel about the state of cricket in Rajshahi right now?

SR: There are some people who are trying to ruin Rajshahi cricket. I hope the BCB will find them. In the past, Rajshahi players dominated in the domestic circuit and played for the national team. It doesn't happen now because local tournaments are not taking place. Obviously, there are people who don't want good things for others and bring bad things into the game.

DS: Fans at the venue hurled abuse at Liton Das recently in Chattogram. What are your thoughts on that?

SR: It's a franchise tournament, so some harsh words are expected. Obviously, Barishal fans would say the Dhaka players are bhua [bad] and our supporters would say that they are bad. It's nothing personal. I hope Liton does not think too much about it. For us, it doesn't matter who is saying what. It's important that we perform on the field.

DS: There was an incident between you and Tamim Iqbal during a match. Can you shed some light on it?

SR: Actually, I was pretty far away and couldn't hear what Tamim bhai was saying. I heard it later. But I feel he is my senior and a legendary player. We have a lot to learn from him and we learn every day. It happened in the heat of the moment. I obviously didn't take it personally and I hope Tamim bhai did not say it seriously.



PHOTO: FACEBOOK

Underused Rishad ‘one hell of a talent’

SPORTS REPORTER FROM CHATTOGRAM

Rishad Hossain last year had secured clearance to participate in Australia's Big Bash League, but his tight schedule, balancing national team duties and Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) commitments, prevented him from taking up the opportunity. Despite his potential, Rishad has only featured in three of Fortune Barishal's six matches so far this season.

Rishad's Barishal teammate David Malan, appearing in his fifth BPL, knows a thing or two about being benched, as the former England batter has played in only one game this edition. During a press conference yesterday, Malan gave his views on playing in foreign leagues and on Rishad.

“We have a really big squad. Feels like we've got fifty players, and when you have so many players, it's tough to get a lot of them in,” Malan said about his lack of appearances.

“You don't want to sign up for a tournament and then sit on the bench when you are competing with others. From that point of view, it's a bit frustrating. I guess that's the challenge for Bangladesh. If you want to attract the best players, they don't want to be sitting on the bench,” he added.

A lot of Malan's early experience in the subcontinent was gathered in Bangladesh's Dhaka Premier League and BPL. He argued that Rishad should be playing in other leagues as much as possible.

“He [Rishad] is a hell of a talent, tall, turns the ball both ways, and has got a lot of skills. He can bat as well, which is a massive bonus.

“I guess the challenge is to get him to play as much as you can. The more competitions he can play, the more his development is going to progress. Same as me being able to play in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and the Big Bash. It develops your game in different conditions against different batters. Your bank of knowledge gets picked up. He should be encouraged that, when he is not playing in Bangladesh, he plays in every single league possible, because it's the only way to keep improving.”



Dhaka clubs boycott leagues over alleged ‘conspiracies’

SPORTS REPORTER

The trophy unveiling ceremony for the upcoming Dhaka First Division Cricket League (DFDCL) 2024-25 was scheduled to take place at the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) premises yesterday. However, despite captains from many of the 20 participating clubs showing up, the event could not take place as representatives and officials from clubs under the Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolis (CCDM) announced an indefinite boycott of all cricket leagues.

The protest has all but confirmed a delayed start for the DFDCL, which was initially scheduled to begin on January 20. The next edition of the Dhaka Premier League (DPL), originally planned for late February, may also face similar delays.

Over the past week, club officials have raised concerns regarding certain proposals made by the constitution amendment committee, led by BCB director Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, which they believe could harm the country's cricket.

Club representatives yesterday met BCB president Faruque Ahmed, presenting him with a memorandum and requesting a meeting to discuss a three-point demand. This included the immediate cancellation of the proposed amendments, the dissolution of the committee, and the resignation of the committee convener.

Reports indicate that the proposed changes involve dissolving the CCDM, reducing Category 2 councillor positions to 30, and cutting the number of directors representing Dhaka-based clubs from 12 to 4.

Lutfur Rahman Badal, a club organiser, speaking to reporters in Mirpur yesterday, said: “If our demands aren't fulfilled, we will not play any game. We definitely want to play, but with the kind of conspiracies happening against us, we will not support cricket until this stop. And we won't be part of cricket in the future either.”

Meanwhile, Rafiqul Islam Babu, another club organiser, informed that the BCB boss had assured them he would discuss the matter with other board directors soon, and they are now awaiting further communication.

AUSTRALIAN OPEN

Tien youngest since Nadal into last 16

Ruthless defending champion Jannik Sinner was in the zone Saturday as he powered into the last 16 with a straight-sets thrashing of American Marcos Giron.

In a one-sided battle of former US Open champions, Iga Swiatek romped to a 6-1, 6-0 triumph in a statement victory over Raducanu as she pursues a first Melbourne crown.

Swiatek faces world number 128 German Eva Lys, who beat Jaqueline Cristian of Romania in three sets to become the first women's singles “lucky loser” to reach the fourth round since the event moved to Melbourne Park in 1988.

AFP, MELBOURNE

Teenage qualifier Learner Tien said it was “pretty crazy” after becoming the youngest man to reach the Australian Open fourth round since Rafael Nadal in 2005 when he overcame Frenchman Corentin Moutet on Saturday.

The American 19-year-old won 7-6 (12/10), 6-3, 6-3 in Melbourne with Moutet collapsing clutching his leg in the third set before gamely carrying on.

The victory extended Tien's remarkable tournament after he stunned last year's runner-up and fifth seed Daniil Medvedev in a five-set thriller in round two.

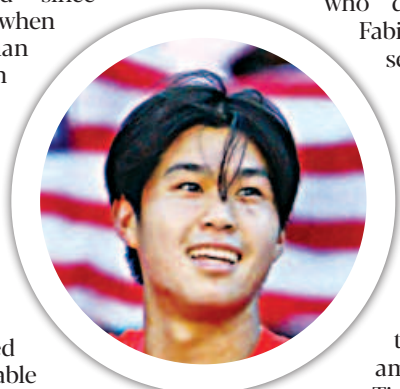
“Honestly it feels pretty crazy to be in the second week. Going through Qs

(qualifying),” he said.

No other American man his age has gone so far in Melbourne since Pete Sampras in 1990, with Tien's reward a clash against Italian Lorenzo Sonego, who dispatched Hungary's Fabian Marozsan in four sets.

“This has exceeded my expectations, what I was hoping for coming into this week,” added Tien. “You go into every match believing you can win, but to be in the second week is amazing.”

Tien is one of a trio of teens who set the Australian Open alight with wins over top-10 players, alongside Brazil's Joao Fonseca and Jakub Mensik, who have both been knocked out since.



Abahani keep up chase as Kings lose more ground

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani kept up the chase of leaders Mohammedan with a 1-0 win against Rahmatganj MFS while defending champions Bashundhara Kings lost more ground with a 1-1 draw against Fortis FC in the two matches of the Bangladesh Premier League yesterday.

Abahani, chasing a seventh professional league title, got the all-important goal through defender Shakil Hossain's volley from inside the box following a tee-up from Asaduzzaman Bablu in the 67th minute of the match at the Shaheed Bir Shrestha Flight Lt Matiur Rahman Stadium in Munshiganj.

Maruful Haque's charges, who have scored only 11 goals in eight matches, could have doubled the lead three minutes later Mahadi Yousuf Khan was brought down by Taaj Uddin inside the Rahmatganj box. But Mohammad Ibrahim, who has scored two goals in the league including a spot-kick, failed to keep his shot on target from 12 yards.

Despite the miss, Abahani held on to their slender lead and took their tally to 19 points from eight matches, five behind Mohammedan and four clear of Rahmatganj.

Five-time defending champions Bashundhara, meanwhile, were held by a spirited Fortis FC at the Bashundhara Kings Arena.



Topu Barman gave the hosts an 11th-minute lead with a glancing header at near post on a corner from Miguel Ferreira for his second goal of the campaign but Mohammad Abdullah's fine finish in the 63rd minute – a curling effort from the left side of the box – earned Fortis their first points against Kings in the history of the Bangladesh Premier League.

Both teams had chances to get a winning goal in the frantic final stages of the match, but neither found the net as Kings fell 10 points behind Mohammedan with 14 points in fourth position. Fortis, meanwhile, moved to sixth with eight points from eight matches.



Right to speech, vote needed to thwart autocracy

Says Tarique on Ziaur Rahman's 89th birth anniv

UNB, Dhaka

The re-emergence of autocracy in Bangladesh can be prevented if freedom of expression and voting rights of people can be protected, said BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman yesterday.

"People's rights to vote must be ensured at any cost. Secondly, people should have the right to speak or express their opinions. These two rights cannot be violated. If we can agree on this, we will gradually be able to develop a system free from autocracy," he said at a discussion.

The Ziaur Rahman Foundation (ZRF) organised the programme titled "Martyred

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

A footpath is covered with umbrellas of makeshift stalls of street vendors. Despite strict warnings from police and city corporation, vendors continue to occupy the street in front of Shah Ali Super Market in Mirpur 1. The photo was taken yesterday.

Roll back hiked VAT, duties

BNP demands

UNB, Dhaka

The BNP yesterday demanded immediate rollback of recently hiked Value Added Tax and supplementary duties on more than 100 products, considering public suffering.

Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir made the demand to withdraw the decision to raise the VAT and duty or indirect taxes on the common people, calling it "imprudent and irresponsible."

He said at a press conference at the BNP chairperson's Gulshan office that

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

No action taken based on white paper

Economists say govt preference for indirect taxes concerning

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The interim government has not taken any of the measures recommended by the white paper on the state of the Bangladesh economy even after a month and a half of the report's submission, said economists yesterday.

"Many people ask about the future actions regarding the white paper -- this question evokes a sense of helplessness

due to uncertainty," said Debapriya Bhattacharya, who led the 12-member committee that prepared the white paper.

Bhattacharya's comments came at a symposium titled "White Paper and Thereafter: Economic Management, Reforms, and National Budget", held yesterday at the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre.

"Our aim is to ensure that the

government incorporates the white paper's recommendations into its policymaking," he added.

The white paper committee submitted the report one and half months ago, but the government has no programme yet that will show that it owns the paper, said Selim Raihan, executive director of the South Asian Network on Economic Modelling.

SEE PAGE 7 COL 1

Economic ills were entrenched during AL regime

Says Prof Rehman Sobhan, suggests deep, structural solutions

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The long-term problems in the economic sector were exacerbated and entrenched during the tenure of the Awami League regime, pushing many issues to the point of no return, said Prof Rehman Sobhan yesterday.

Low revenue mobilisation, corruption, default loans, money laundering, project time and cost overruns, fall in Foreign Direct Investment, and over-estimation were among the long-term problems, he said.

He made the comments at the concluding session of a programme titled "White Paper and Thereafter: Economic Management, Reforms

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



40 shrines attacked in over 5 months

Govt says 23 suspects held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 40 shrines (mazar, sufi graveyards, dargahs) in the country have been targeted in 44 incidents of attack since August 4 last year, the government has said, citing police reports.

The incidents included vandalism and attacks on shrines and the devotees, looting of shrine properties, and arson, the Chief Adviser's Press Wing said in a media statement yesterday.

According to the police, the highest number of

SEE PAGE 7 COL 4



Hundreds of people from India and Bangladesh gathered along the Chapainawabganj border yesterday and engaged in chases and counter chases and throwing brick chunks at each other. The photo was taken near BGB's Chouka and Kironganj border outposts in Binodpur union under Shibganj upazila.

PHOTO: TV GRAB

65pc of suicide victims among students are teens: survey

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Teenagers accounted for 65.7 percent of 310 student suicides in 2024, according to a survey by the Aachol Foundation.

The findings were presented yesterday during a virtual press conference titled "Student Suicides in 2024: The Need for Collective Action."

The survey noted that student suicides declined from 532 in 2022 and 513 in 2023, possibly due to reduced media focus during the 2024 political unrest (July uprising). Data was compiled from 105 national newspapers.

Teenagers (13-19) had the highest suicide rate, followed by young adults aged 20-25 (24 percent) and children aged 1-12 (7.4 percent). Those aged 26-30 had the lowest rate (2.9 percent). Females accounted for 61 percent of deaths by suicide, males 38.4 percent, and third-gender and transgender individuals each made up 0.3 percent.

Secondary-level students had the highest share (46 percent), followed by

SEE PAGE 7 COL 4

Ruined, Gaza hopes for respite

42-day ceasefire to take effect at 0630 GMT

AGENCIES

A ceasefire in the Gaza war will begin today morning, mediator Qatar said after Israel's cabinet voted to approve the truce and hostage-prisoner release deal.

Since Qatar and the United States, which mediated the deal along with Egypt, announced the agreement on Wednesday, Israeli strikes on Gaza have continued.

Ahead of the truce, Gaza's civil defence rescue agency said at least five members of a family were killed when a strike hit their tent in Khan Yunis, in southern Gaza.

Explosions were heard over Jerusalem after air raid sirens blared and the military said a projectile had been launched from Yemen, whose Iran-backed Huthi rebels say they support the Palestinians.

The Huthis said they targeted the Israeli defence ministry, before air raid sirens sounded again in southern Israel in the afternoon and the military said it intercepted a missile launched from Yemen.

"As coordinated by the parties to the agreement and the mediators, the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip will begin at 8:30 am (0630 GMT) on Sunday," Qatar's foreign ministry spokesman Majed al-Ansari said.

In more than 15 months of war between Hamas and Israel, there has been only one previous truce, for one week, in November 2023. That deal also saw the release of hostages held by the militants in exchange for Palestinian prisoners.

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গণবিজ্ঞপ্তি

এতদ্বারা সংশ্লিষ্ট সকলের অবগতির জন্য জানানো যাচ্ছে যে, জাতীয় রাজস্ব বোর্ড কর্তৃক বাস্তবায়নাধীন প্রকল্পের আওতায় Bangladesh Single Window (BSW) System ইতোমধ্যে কার্যকর করা হয়েছে। BSW মূলত একটি অনলাইন প্ল্যাটফর্ম যা ব্যবহার করে একজন আমদানিকারক-রপ্তানিকারক পণ্য খালাসের জন্য প্রয়োজ্য সব ধরনের সার্টিফিকেট, লাইসেন্স ও পারমিট (CLP) এর জন্য অনলাইনে আবেদন করে স্বয়ংক্রিয়ভাবে CLP সংগ্রহ করতে পারবেন। CLP গ্রহণের পূর্বে Business Identification Number (BIN) ব্যবহার করে BSW সিস্টেমে (Website: bswnbr.gov.bd) নিবন্ধন করতে হবে। এ সিস্টেম ব্যবহারের ফলে আমদানি-রপ্তানি কার্যক্রমে যে সুবিধা সমূহ পাওয়া যাবে সেগুলো হলো:

- একটি কমন প্ল্যাটফর্মে আমদানি-রপ্তানি পণ্যের জন্য প্রয়োজ্য সার্টিফিকেট, লাইসেন্স এবং পারমিট সংক্রান্ত সকল কার্যক্রম সংশ্লিষ্ট সকল সংস্থা কর্তৃক যুগপৎভাবে অনলাইনে সম্পন্ন করা হবে;
- সরকারী কাজে ব্যক্তিগত যোগাযোগ (হিউম্যান ইন্টারেকশন) না থাকায় স্বচ্ছতা ও জবাবদিহিতা নিশ্চিত হবে;
- পণ্য আমদানি-রপ্তানির ক্ষেত্রে সময় ও ব্যয় হ্রাস পাবে;
- দেশি-বিদেশী ব্যবসায়ীদের মধ্যে আস্থা সৃষ্টির মাধ্যমে বিনিয়োগ ও বাণিজ্যের প্রসার ঘটবে।

০২। প্রাথমিক পর্যায়ে সার্টিফিকেট, লাইসেন্স ও পারমিট ইস্যুকারী ১৯টি সংস্থার মধ্যে নিম্নবর্ণিত ৭টি সংস্থার ক্ষেত্রে গত ০২ জানুয়ারি ২০২৫ খ্রি. তারিখে সরাসরি BSW সিস্টেমের মাধ্যমে CLP এর আবেদন দাখিল ও ইস্যু করার কার্যক্রম শুরু করা হয়েছেঃ

১. ঔষধ প্রশাসন অধিদপ্তর (DGDA);
২. বিস্ফোরক পরিদপ্তর (DoEX);
৩. রপ্তানি উন্নয়ন ব্যুরো (EPB);
৪. বাংলাদেশ জাতীয় কর্তৃপক্ষ, রাসায়নিক অস্ত্র কনভেনশন (BNACWC);
৫. বাংলাদেশ অর্থনৈতিক অঞ্চল কর্তৃপক্ষ (BEZA);
৬. বাংলাদেশ রপ্তানি প্রক্রিয়াকরণ অঞ্চল কর্তৃপক্ষ (BEPZA); এবং
৭. পরিবেশ অধিদপ্তর (DoE)।

০৩। জাতীয় রাজস্ব বোর্ডের পরিপত্র নং: ১(৩৩) NSW প্রকল্প/মন্ত্রণালয়ের সাথে যোগাযোগ/২০১৮/২৪১৮, তারিখ: ১৪ জানুয়ারি ২০২৫ অনুযায়ী, ৩১ জানুয়ারী ২০২৫ খ্রি. তারিখের পর হতে আমদানি ও রপ্তানি পণ্যচালান শুদ্ধায়নের ক্ষেত্রে উক্ত ০৭টি সংস্থা কর্তৃক ইস্যুকৃত সার্টিফিকেট, লাইসেন্স ও পারমিট BSW সিস্টেমের মাধ্যমে দাখিল বাধ্যতামূলক করা হলো। উল্লিখিত তারিখের পর কোন ধরনের ম্যানুয়াল সার্টিফিকেট, লাইসেন্স ও পারমিট গ্রহণ করা হবে না। আমদানি-রপ্তানি বাণিজ্যে যুক্ত সকল অংশীজনকে Bangladesh Single Window বাস্তবায়নে সহযোগিতা করার জন্য অনুরোধ জানানো হলো।

[জুয়েল আহমেদ]
প্রকল্প পরিচালক
ন্যাশনাল সিঙ্গেল উইন্ডো প্রকল্প

GD-183