



A new era in
elderly care



WR1

'When a govt
refuses to go,
people accept it
until they don't'
P9



What should we
expect from Nat'l
Constitutional
Council?
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33m school
children affected
by climate
change last year
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11 WB FUNDED PROJECTS

Govt set to repurpose \$670m loans

\$500m to be used as budget support

PROJECT NAME (TOP 5)	WB LOANS in million \$	AMOUNT TO BE REPURPOSED in million \$
Accelerating and strengthening skills for economic transformation	300	100.37
Resilient infrastructure for adaptation and vulnerability reduction	500	100
Enhancing digital government and economy	234	100
Livestock and dairy development	500	100
Bangladesh road safety	358	75

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

As much as \$670 million (around Tk 8,200 crore) from slow-moving World Bank funded projects will be repurposed, with most of the funds going towards budget support as the government looks to navigate the narrow fiscal space amid a slowing economy.

Of the amount, approximately \$500 million will go towards budget support and the remaining amount may be used for new projects. The Daily Star has learnt from finance ministry officials involved with the proceedings.

The Economic Relations Division submitted the new plan to the WB last week for the go-ahead; the matter will be discussed during the visit of a WB vice president to Bangladesh next month.

The move to re-direct funds from slow-moving projects comes at the WB's suggestion after the interim government sought fresh funding from development partners in August last year for budget support, and banking and energy sector reforms.

Subsequently, the ERD sat down with the WB and project officials on October 14 last year and decided to repurpose \$723.64 million from 11 ongoing projects.

After several meetings, it was decided that \$670 million could be redirected from the projects, the finance ministry officials said.

Over the years, the WB has approved about \$3.2 billion for 11 projects. However, as of June last year, only \$661.8 million could be disbursed due to delays in project implementation, according to ERD and project officials.

One of the slow-moving projects is a road safety project, conceived in the light of the alarming rise in road crashes and deaths over a decade.

The government took the Tk 4,988.14 crore project in April 2023, more than a year after the WB approved a \$358 million loan to help Bangladesh improve road safety and reduce fatalities and injuries from road accidents on selected high-risk highways and district roads.

The project will have several components and will be implemented by the Roads and Highways Department, Bangladesh Road Transport Authority, the Directorate General of Health Services and Bangladesh Police.

It will pilot comprehensive road safety measures, including improved engineering designs, road signs and markings, pedestrian facilities, speed enforcement, and emergency care from Gazipur to Elenga and Natore-Nawabganj highways.

The measures will help reduce road traffic deaths by more than 30 percent on the two highways, as per the WB's estimates.

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**Yunus for a
mechanism to
ensure free polls**

Addresses WEF event; WTO to support Bangladesh's LDC graduation

UNB, Davos

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus has emphasised the need for a mechanism to ensure that every citizen in Bangladesh can vote freely, fairly, and without fear or interference.

Speaking at the World Economic Forum's (WEF) annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland, on Thursday, Prof Yunus highlighted the plight of young voters, many of whom, he said, have been unable to exercise their voting rights over the last 16 years.

"This is deeply unfortunate," he remarked during his one-on-one discussion with WEF founder Klaus Schwab.

The chief adviser stated that they cannot proceed with the election unless they know what kind of polls the country's people want.

He added that they are waiting to hold an election, and now people must decide the process -- whether they will

PHOTO ON PAGE 3 SEE PAGE 2 COL 7

**16 BEXIMCO FACTORIES
Laid-off workers slide deep into uncertainty**

With no hope of getting jobs, many going back to their village homes

MD ABBAS and MONJURUL HAQUE

Fifty-year-old Arati Rani stood with others in despair at the entrance to Tetulitala Colony, which was home to 24 families of laid-off workers of Beximco Group factories in Gazipur.

They resided in the establishment in Bhabanipur in precarious harmony until the company shut its 16 textile and garment units at Beximco Industrial Park in Sarabo, citing a lack of export orders.

Unable to manage rent and daily expenses, five families have already left. Fourteen more families are preparing to leave for their villages next month, while the remaining few, like Arati, have nowhere else to go.

Arati has not slept in peace for weeks. Her fears weigh heavily on her heart as she contemplates an uncertain future.

"Most of those who lost their jobs due to the factory closures are planning to return to their villages. But I don't have a house in my village. Where would I go with my son?" she asked.

For her, the loss of her job was more than a financial setback—it shattered the fragile stability she had painstakingly built.

Her struggles began in 2021 when her husband passed away after a prolonged illness. During his treatment, Arati had to sell the only piece of land they owned in Jaldhaka, Nilphamari.

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'Will leave govt if we decide to contest polls'

Nahid tells BBC Bangla; says BNP, AL speaking in similar tones

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Adviser Nahid Islam has said if anyone from the interim government, be it a student leader or any other adviser, wants to run for office, they will relinquish their government position.



"No one will contest the polls while being in the government. If they want to join the race, they will definitely leave their post a certain time before the polls," he said in an interview with BBC Bangla broadcast last night.

Regarding BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir questioning the neutrality of the interim government, the adviser said he believed the interim government was neutral.

"Now the BNP should make it clear why it is not considering the government to be neutral," added Nahid, the telecom and ICT adviser.

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**RIFT WITH UPRISING LEADERS
BNP to continue pushing for govt neutrality**

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

While the BNP has been pressing for national elections for months, it has avoided conflicts with student leaders and the interim government.

However, after the BNP raised questions about the government's impartiality last week, and Adviser Nahid Islam issued a rebuttal that caught the party somewhat off guard, there have been many speculations about what comes next.

Party leaders say they won't stop commenting on issues regarding the government's neutrality and elections.

At the same time, BNP policymakers are trying to find out why Nahid made such a response.

Many leaders suspect that some advisers might have convinced Nahid to make the statement, and they are trying to identify the individuals.

Sources in the party say they wonder why Nahid reacted to the comment of BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam when he is not the spokesperson of the government.

"Why would he feel provoked by the [secretary general's] statement?" wondered a standing committee member while talking to this correspondent.

Following Nahid's lead, Adviser Asif Mahmud Sajib Bhuiyan and student leaders Hasnat Abdullah and Sarjis Alam also wrote on Facebook about the matter. "This indicates there is an attempt to make an issue out of it in a planned manner."

Another senior BNP leader said the current government

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A truck driver lost control due to poor visibility caused by dense fog, resulting in the goods-laden vehicle hitting the central reservation near Savar bus stand on Dhaka-Aricha highway around 5:30am yesterday. The driver and his assistant were injured in the incident. Accidents, caused by low visibility, are frequent in the winter.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

**Businessman shot dead in Chattogram
BNP activist on FB live says he was the actual target**

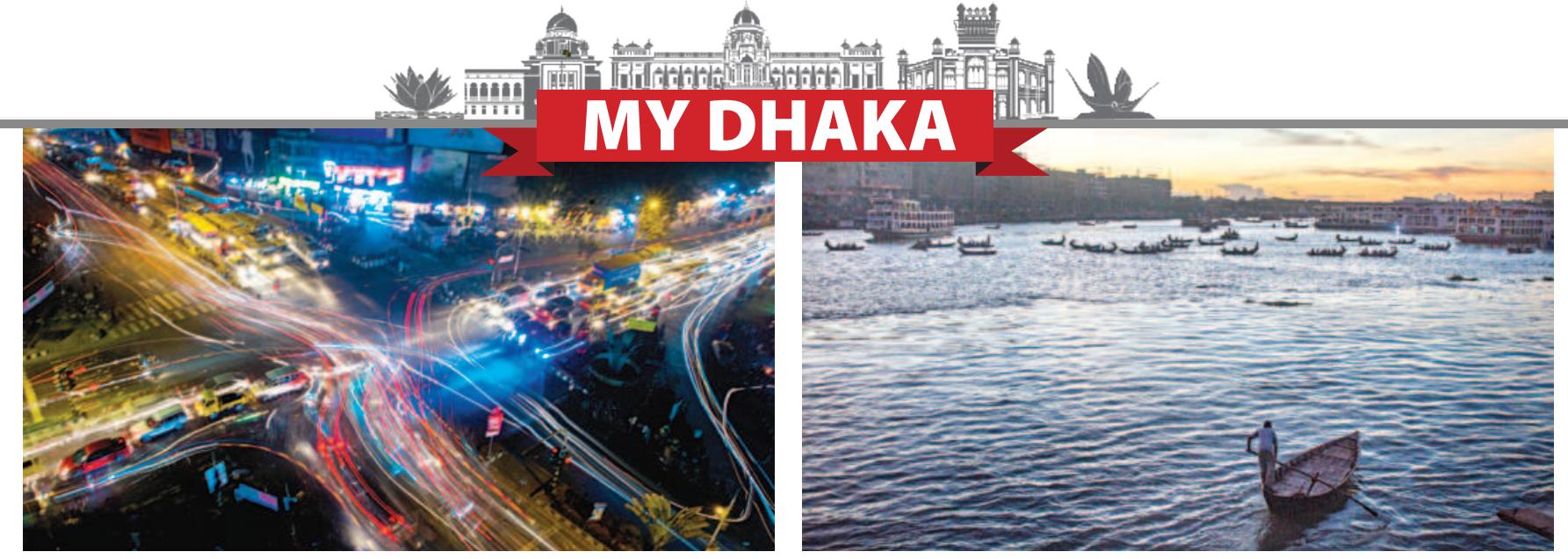
STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Armed criminals shot and killed businessman at Noapara village under Raozan upazila in Chattogram yesterday. Md Jahangir, identified as Md Jahangir, from Niramishpara of Noapara village in Raozan upazila, said police.

Two other men who were with him at the time were also injured.

After the incident, local BNP activist Kamal Uddin, on a live stream from his Facebook page, claimed that his opponent Fazal Haque's followers had intended to kill him but mistakenly killed businessman Jahangir because they had a slight resemblance in appearance.

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MY DHAKA

HASAN MEER

Living in Dhaka is an adventure like no other; a chaotic symphony where every moment feels like a test of resilience. The city thrives on contradictions, making survival an art form and endurance a badge of honour.

Traffic in Dhaka isn't just bad -- it's a way of life. Hours spent in gridlock have become a ritual of self reflection, a chance to catch up on podcasts, or simply an opportunity to watch time slip by. Pedestrians face their own challenges, navigating sidewalks that double as bustling marketplaces, complete with street vendors, and tea stalls. Walking here is less about reaching your destination and more about mastering the art of obstacle courses.

Dhaka's rivers tell a tragic story. Once lifelines of the city, they have become dumping grounds of epic proportions. Taking a dip in these polluted waters isn't just a health risk -- it's practically a death sentence. The air is no better, offering a smog-laden cocktail of dust and exhaust fumes. Breathing in Dhaka is a sensory experience no one signs up for, but must endure nonetheless.

Driving in Dhaka is less about getting somewhere and more about survival. Honking horns create the city's unofficial soundtrack, while traffic



rules are treated as mere suggestions. If you think being a passenger is safer, an electric rickshaw ride will swiftly redefine your understanding of fear.

Meanwhile, garbage disposal follows a simple philosophy: out of sight, out of mind. Trash piles up wherever it pleases, adding to the city's evolving landscape of debris.

The weather brings its own flair to life in Dhaka, shifting unpredictably between scorching heat, torrential rain,

and waterlogging. On any given day, you might need an umbrella, a boat, and industrial-strength sunscreen -- all at once.

Yet, amidst this chaos, there's an odd kind of entertainment. Public disputes, spontaneous rallies, and the sheer thrill of navigating overcrowded streets create a live-action drama that keeps life interesting.

Despite all this, Dhaka's people remain remarkably optimistic. The

city's residents continue to adapt, laugh at its absurdities, and find joy in its madness.

With all its imperfections, Dhaka is a city that pulses with life and energy. The vibrant street life, filled with the laughter of children playing and the chatter of neighbours, creates a sense of community that transcends the daily struggles. Each narrow alley and bustling market tell a story, revealing the heart and soul of its people. This city, rich in culture and tradition, invites you to embrace its quirks and idiosyncrasies, reminding us that beauty often lies in the unexpected. The resilience of its residents shines through in their unwavering spirit, proving that even amidst adversity, joy can flourish.

To truly appreciate Dhaka, one must look beyond the chaos and see the potential for transformation. This city needs our love and commitment to foster change, to advocate for cleaner air and revitalised rivers, and to support sustainable practices that honour its rich heritage.

Dhaka isn't just a city -- it's a trial by fire, a celebration of resilience, and a test of patience. If you can thrive in its chaos and embrace its contradictions, you'll find that Dhaka isn't like any other place.

Govt set to repurpose \$670m loans

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It will improve post-crash care, which is critical in saving lives, and will also set up an ambulance service via a toll-free number and upgrade emergency care services in selected district hospitals and upazila health complexes along the two national highway corridors.

More than 20 months after the project's approval, the authorities could not hire consultants. As of December last year, the project saw less than 1 percent financial progress, documents show. Subsequently, it was

decided that \$75 million from the project would be repurposed.

Another slow-moving project is the "Livestock and Dairy Development Project" involving Tk 4,280 crore.

The project was launched in January 2019 with the aim of boosting livestock and dairy farming in Bangladesh.

Under the project, 26 types of agricultural machinery alongside chemical products like pesticides would be provided to local farmers.

The WB was supposed to provide \$500 million for the project from December 2018

to September 2023. As the project authority failed to use the loan, the loan period was extended to July 2025.

As of June last year, a total of \$281.58 million was disbursed, according to WB documents.

Subsequently, it was decided that \$100 million from the project would be repurposed.

In May 2019, the government signed a \$100.5 million financing agreement with the WB to improve the condition of living in four large neighbourhoods in Dhaka city, benefitting about

a million residents.

The Dhaka City Neighbourhood Upgrading project will enhance public spaces and urban services in four neighbourhoods -- Kamrangir Char, Lalbagh, Sutrapur-Naya bazar-Gulistan, Khilgaon-Mugdhabazar -- under Dhaka South City Corporation.

As of June last year, only \$20.83 million was disbursed, according to documents.

Subsequently, it was decided that \$22 million from the project would be redirected.

The other eight slow-moving projects from

which funds will be repurposed are: higher education accreditation and transformation; accelerating and strengthening skills for economic transformation; environment sustainability and transformation; enhancing digital government economy; sustainable forest and livelihood; Bangladesh Private Investment and Digital Entrepreneurship; building resilient infrastructure for adaptation and vulnerability reduction; and developing climate smart agriculture and water management, according to a ERD document.

BNP to continue pushing for govt neutrality

FROM PAGE 1

formed as a result of the mass uprising must maintain neutrality. BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul's comments were about neutrality. However, the response to his remarks was aggressive.

BNP Standing Committee member Iqbal Hasan Mahmud Tuku said, "Leaders of the Students Against Discrimination, who are advisers to the interim government, cannot make statements against any political party. This compromises the neutrality of the interim government.

"We consider the interim government to be nonpartisan, but if any member of the government adopts a partisan approach, the government will no longer appear neutral.

"If advisers want to engage in politics, they must resign first. Then they can criticise other parties, but not while being in the government."

BNP's ally parties have also taken Nahid's comments as an affront. Leaders of allied parties believe his statement was aggressive. These parties will issue statements soon, sources said.

A BNP strategist said the students have somewhat deviated from the spirit of the movement. They are now in a "dream-like state" thinking of forming

Yunus for a mechanism

FROM PAGE 1
go for the short agenda or the long agenda.

Prof Yunus said they have targeted the end of this year for the election to take place if people go for a quick reform agenda. "If people say no, we need a carry out more reforms, then we need another six months."

The chief adviser also spoke of the student protests that led to the fall of Sheikh Hasina's 15-year rule in August last year.

Prof Yunus also described the reforms the interim government is undertaking to prepare the country of 171 million people for the elections.

He said technology has changed the young generation -- they are not Bangladeshi young people anymore; they are global young people.

The chief adviser said the demands from the student movement were that they do not want to go back to the "old Bangladesh," so they must make a "new Bangladesh".

The chief adviser also discussed about a "consensus commission" aimed at building agreement among all political parties and civil society organisations in Bangladesh about the reforms. This effort would culminate in a "July Charter," named after the month of the historic uprising in Bangladesh.

Encouraging the young people to become entrepreneurs, the chief adviser states, "This generation is a generation of entrepreneurs."

Klaus Schwab, impressed by the chief adviser's speech, expressed his satisfaction over the "exceptional" half-hour conversation with a "visionary" man.

BANGLADESH'S LDC GRADUATION

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, director general of World Trade Organisation, yesterday said the global trade body would help Bangladeshi graduate smoothly from Least Developed Country (LDC) and persuade top

businesses to shift their supply chains to the South Asian nation.

The DG made the comments when she met Prof Yunus on the sidelines of the WEF meeting.

"We have established principles. We will be working with you," Chief Adviser's Deputy Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad Majumder quoted Ngozi as saying.

The DG also said she was talking to top global businesses and trying to persuade them to relocate their supply chains to Bangladesh as part of global logistic decentralisation.

Prof Yunus said Bangladesh is now open for business, after years of misrule and oligarchs-linked business deals which ruined the country's economy.

He added that Bangladesh can easily be one of the largest manufacturing hubs with millions of young and tech-savvy skilled workers.

The chief adviser said the interim government was carrying out vital reforms in the economy and eased congestion in Chittagong Port in an effort to attract more foreign investment.

"We've also launched a fight against corruption," he said.

Ngozi said she was impressed by the spirits of the young protesters during the July mass uprising. "They have set an unprecedented example sending the most impactful messages."

She also praised the leadership of Prof Yunus in bringing stability to the country.

During the talks at a Davos hotel, Ngozi urged Bangladesh to ratify the fisheries subsidy agreement. Bangladesh will look into it, the chief adviser said.

Prof Yunus, who reached Switzerland on Tuesday afternoon to attend the WEF's annual meeting, is scheduled to leave Davos for Dhaka last night (Switzerland time) wrapping up his four-day visit with nearly 50 engagements. He will reach home today.

Laid-off workers slide deep into uncertainty

FROM PAGE 1

"My son is studying at a university. Where will I take him? What will I do?" she asked with tears rolling down her eyes.

Her shoulders slumped as she shared her plight with The Daily Star yesterday. "Other factories don't want to hire me because I'm old. What will happen to us?"

Arati is one of the over 40,000 workers left unemployed by the closures of the factories in mid-December.

Gloom was in the air of Bhabanipur, Tetulia, Mamun Nagar, Latipur, Sreepur, and Roptani, where many of the laid-off workers lived. Groups of men idled at tea stalls, discussing their bleak futures as they grappled with the

aftermath of the closures.

Among them were couple Dholu Roy and Joyonti Roy, who held on to a faint hope that the factories will reopen.

"If we return to the villages, what would we do? How will we survive?" Dholu asked.

Many families, unable to afford education for their children, have had to make heartbreaking sacrifices.

Others, like Manjila Begum and Aleya Begum, shared similar stories of being unable to admit their children to school this year.

Meanwhile, Tonna Ram, a day labourer whose wife was also a Beximco factory worker, said life had always been difficult, but now it has become unbearable.

"We're planning to move to our village in Dinajpur's

Parbatipur. We used to support my parents with our earnings. I don't know what we'll do in the village, but we can't survive here anymore," he said.

Workers desperate for employment have been turned away by nearby factories, as many refuse to hire former Beximco employees.

"I've visited all the nearby factories, but they won't hire me because I worked for Beximco. What's our fault?" asked Milan Roy.

"I've spent all my savings. If I can't find work soon, my family will have to live on the street," he said.

The ripple effects of the closures extend to small businesses in the area.

Rifat Khan, a grocer in

Tutulatala, said the exodus of workers has jeopardised his livelihood.

"If the workers leave, it will be difficult to keep my shop running. I've been here for four years. I don't know what I'll do if my business collapses. My family lives here, and we can't suddenly move elsewhere," Rifat said.

Most of the residents of these areas said that the factory closures have left entire communities in turmoil, their futures uncertain, and their dreams shattered.

"As they face these challenges, people of these areas cling to one hope -- that the factories will reopen and life will regain some semblance of normalcy," said Jashim Mandal, a local.

BNP's tone is similar to that of AL's Arafat, the adviser said.

However, having a neutral government or holding an impartial election does not mean creating space for the Awami League, or treating them neutrally, he added. "We will not accept any conspiracy hatched to provide shelter to the Awami League in the name of neutrality."

Mentioning that legal proceedings are underway against the AL perpetrators, Nahid said, "From the very beginning, we have stated that we want a reconciliation process. For that to happen, the Awami League has to apologise, but we see no such inclination on its part."

Nahid referred to former Awami League minister Rafiqul Islam's Facebook post seeking a neutral government to hold fair elections, describing the interim government as illegal and unelected.

Nahid said when power

'Will leave govt if we decide to contest polls'

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In an interview with BBC Bangla published on Wednesday, Fakhrul said, "The interim government cannot oversee the election if it fails to remain neutral. In that case, a neutral government will be needed."

He added that questions of neutrality might arise given some student leaders' plan to form a political party.

Nahid said if any allegation or statement about neutrality arises during the election, it should be clearly stated what specific changes the government needs to make to ensure neutrality.

At the same time, it should be considered whether the question of neutrality will arise over pro-BNP individuals holding various administrative or constitutional positions, he said.

But it is too early for such

considerations, Nahid added. Asked about Fakhrul's reference to another 1/II styled government, he said discussions about such a 1/II styled government and the "minus two" formula were actually introduced by the BNP in the political arena.

"For us, holding trials and reforms are equally important. We, the students, joined the government to act as a watchdog and to see whether the government can properly implement commitments made during the uprising," he said.

Nahid referred to former Awami League minister Rafiqul Islam's Facebook post seeking a neutral government to hold fair elections, describing the interim government as illegal and unelected.

Nahid said when power

However, indemnity could be given to the grassroots leaders and activists who supported those crimes but had no direct involvement. They can join any other political party, and their political and civil rights will be protected. A reconciliation process could be initiated in this way. But the judicial process should be completed before that.

"The Awami League has no moral or political right to engage in politics in Bangladesh."

Nahid hoped that the International Crimes Tribunal and the Election Commission would take steps and issue clear statements on this issue before the polls.

Asked about forming a political party, Nahid said the student leaders currently in the government are not directly involved in that process.

When his motorcycle

reached a mosque near

Asad Ali Matbar Bari at Noapara village around 1:00pm, a group of criminals shot him, Saiful Islam, superintendent of police in Chattogram.

When asked about Kamal Uddin's claim on Facebook, the police superintendent said he had not seen the video. "The police are investigating the incident and trying to arrest the criminals."

Locals rescued critically

DHAKA



Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus joined a dialogue led by World Economic Forum Founder Prof Klaus Schwab at the Congress Centre yesterday, on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in Davos, Switzerland.

PHOTO: PID

'Don't create division with 1/11 accusations'

Mirza Abbas slams Nahid Islam

UNB, Dhaka

Accusing BNP of paving the way for another 1/11-style government will only create division and harm democracy in Bangladesh, said the party's standing committee member Mirza Abbas yesterday.

Speaking at a doa and milad mahfil marking the 10th death anniversary of Arafat Rahman Koko, the younger son of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, Abbas criticised Information Adviser Nahid Islam for accusing BNP of trying to establish a regime similar to that of 1/11.

"If you continue to make statements that lead to division and conflict, democracy will never be restored in the country," Abbas said.

"No one has suffered more from the horrific consequences of 1/11 than BNP. From Khaleda Zia to our grassroots activists, none were spared," he added.

The remarks came after BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir raised concerns about the neutrality of the interim government during elections, which Nahid Islam later linked to a

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4,813 bodies of migrant workers arrived in 2024

The number is record high, shows statistics from Wage Earners' Welfare Board

JAMIL MAHMUD

The number of bodies of Bangladeshi migrants arriving from abroad rose to a record high in 2024, with a total of 4,813 corpses received by the authorities last year.

The figure is 261 more than the 4,552 corpses received in 2023, according to statistics from the Wage Earners' Welfare Board.

The number has increased every year since 2021, when 3,818 corpses were received. In 2022, WEWB received 3,904 such bodies.

4,552 bodies arrived in 2023

Deaths increased yearly since 2021

67.4% of deaths occurred in Gulf countries

Many labeled as heart attacks without proper probe

The latest statistics was published on January 14 on the WEWB website.

However, accurate reasons behind their deaths, many of whom die at a young age, remain unexplained.

The statistics shows that from 1993 until last year, WEWB received 56,769 dead bodies of migrants.

Jasiya Khatoon, director of



Welfare Association for the Rights of Bangladeshi Emigrants (WARBE) Development Foundation, said there could be multiple reasons behind the untimely deaths of many Bangladeshi migrant workers abroad.

There are issues related to workplace safety and substandard accommodation. Moreover, they remain under extreme pressure to regain the money they invested as migration costs. So they work for additional hours and do not consume enough food, she told this newspaper over the phone.

"Heart attack is commonly mentioned [in the death certificates issued by the receiving countries] as a cause of death. But there should be further medical examination to know the cause of death accurately," she added.

Jasiya suggested the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas

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Employment and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should work together to enhance monitoring on migrant workers to prevent their untimely deaths.

Bangladeshi missions abroad also have a big role to play to this end, she added.

WEWB maintains the statistics of migrant deaths as it issues a cheque for Tk 35,000 against each dead body as burial and transportation costs as part of its welfare activities.

Besides, it gives Tk 3 lakh against each death as compensation.

The WEWB statistics, however, did not segregate how many dead bodies arrived from which countries last year.

Between July 2016 and June 2022, according to WEWB annual reports, Bangladesh received 17,871 dead bodies, 67.4 percent

'72 constitution an obstacle to multi-party democracy

Says Nasir Uddin Patwary

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

It is not possible to have a multi-party democracy under the 1972 constitution, said Nasir Uddin Patwary, convenor of the Jatiya Nagrik Committee, yesterday.

"We want a constitution, formed through a constituent assembly, that will ensure fascism can never return to this country," Nasir said at a rally titled "March for Unity and Justice" in the capital.

The rally, organised by the private university unit of Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, took place in front of the National Museum. Participants called for the recognition of the July mass uprising and justice for those killed during the movement.

"In order to resolve the country's crisis, we must unite and move towards elections for a constituent assembly. The constitution that emerges from the assembly must honour the sacrifices of the workers who were martyred during the 2024 mass uprising, as well as the voices of mothers and women," Nasir added.

He said that anyone attempting to obstruct the

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CLIMATE CRISIS

33m schoolchildren affected last year

Says Unicef report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Extreme weather events, fueled by climate change, disrupted the education of at least 247 million schoolchildren across 77 countries in 2024.

Children in Bangladesh were among the worst affected, with around 33 million facing multiple rounds of school closures.

This was revealed in a first of its kind Unicef report, released yesterday, titled "Learning Interrupted: Global Snapshot of Climate-Related School Disruptions in 2024". According to the report, South Asia was the most affected region.

In Bangladesh, schools were closed nationwide for around two weeks between April and May in 2024 due to nationwide heatwaves that left children at risk of dehydration and heat strokes. Subsequent disruptions happened in several districts later due to cyclone Remal, followed by intense flooding in June, which affected around 18.4 million people in the country, including 7 million children.



Schools were closed for around two weeks between April and May in 2024 due to heatwaves that left children at risk of dehydration and heat strokes. Subsequent disruptions happened in several districts later due to cyclone Remal, followed by intense flooding in June, which affected around 18.4 million people, including 7 million children.

Khulna, Chattogram and Rangpur districts also suffered around six weeks of climate-induced school closures in 2024.

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College student dies at RU campus Doctor suspects foul play

RU CORRESPONDENT

The death of a Rajshahi College student on the Rajshahi University campus on Thursday night has sparked confusion with differing accounts surrounding the cause of death.

Further complicating the matter, university authorities have been reluctant to release the CCTV footage from the scene, citing police orders.

The incident occurred near the Third Science Building of the RU campus. The deceased, Shimul Shihab, 19, was a resident of the Meherchandi Budhpura area in Rajshahi and a first-year student at the political science department at Rajshahi College.

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Shimul Shihab

Khaleda may be discharged from London clinic today

UNB, Dhaka

BNP Chairperson and former prime minister Khaleda Zia is likely to leave the London clinic, where she had been under medical observation for 17 days, for her son Tarique Rahman's residence today.

She might be discharged from the hospital in the evening (London time), Khaleda's personal physician Prof Dr AZM Zahid Hossain said while talking to reporters on Thursday.

"If everything goes well and the reports come in as expected... There is a possibility of madam (Khaleda) being discharged from the hospital. The doctors here are yet to provide a discharge

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Hit by train, 2 bikers die at level crossing

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Two motorcyclists were killed on Thursday night when a train hit them at the Konabari Khola Para level crossing in Gazipur.

Ujjwal Chowdhury, 35, and Ripon Mahmud, 45, died on the spot, said Nazrul Islam, officer-in-charge of Konabari Police Station.

The two motorcyclists were heading towards Sakashwar around 11:00pm when a Dhaka-bound train from Rajshahi hit their bike as they were crossing the rail gate.

SI Nadiruzzaman of Joydevpur Railway Police said, "There is no gatekeeper, rail barrier, or security system at this crossing."

Asked, Hanif Ali, station master of Joydevpur Junction, said, "I need to check with the neighbouring Mouchak station before providing any information."

Nadir Uzzaman, sub-inspector of Joydevpur Railway Station Police, said they will take necessary legal actions in this regard.

Honouring the heroes of July uprising

Prothom Alo launches photo exhibition

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangla daily Prothom Alo launched an eight-day photo exhibition titled "July Uprising" yesterday to honour the courage and sacrifices of students and the public during the July uprising.

The exhibition was inaugurated at the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy by Syeda Rizwana Hasan, environmental adviser; Sharmin S Murshid, adviser to the ministries of social welfare and women and children's affairs; and British High Commissioner to Bangladesh Sarah Cooke.

The exhibition highlights the July uprising and Prothom Alo's journalism during the movement. It features photographs by the newspaper's photojournalists, significant news reports from print and online platforms, investigative video reports, artworks, special supplements, and various documentary materials related to the uprising.

A dedicated section showcases personal items belonging to the martyrs of the uprising, including clothes, books, sports equipment, and other belongings of Abu Sayed, Mir Mahfuzur Rahman Mugdha, Mahmudur Rahman Saikat, Naima Sultana, Shafiq Uddin Ahmed Ahnaf, and child martyr Jabir Ibrahim.

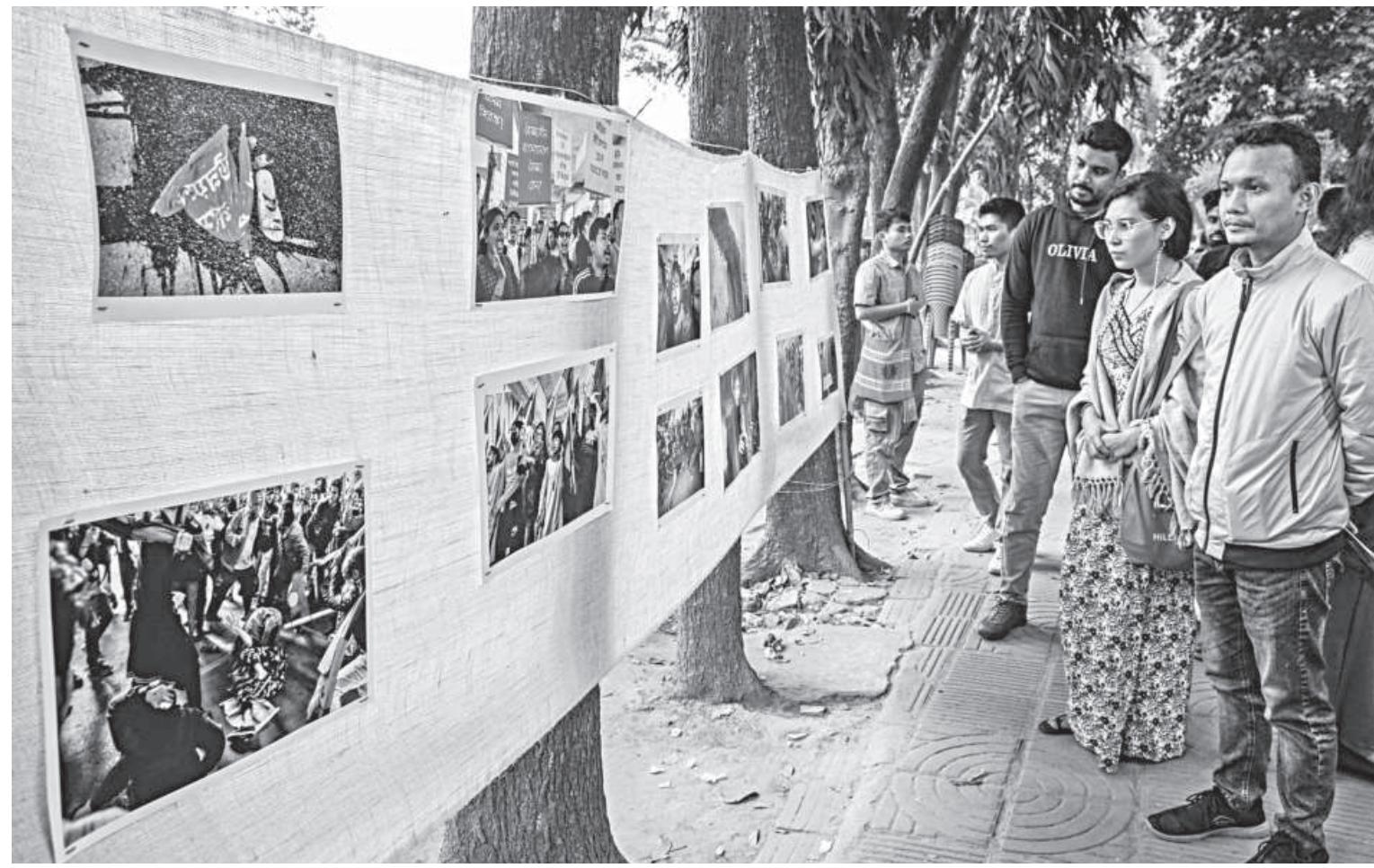
Additionally, the exhibition includes materials used

SEE PAGE 4 COL 8



Syeda Rizwana Hasan, environment adviser; Sharmin S Murshid, adviser to the ministries of social welfare and women and children's affairs, and British High Commissioner Sarah Cooke at an event at Shilpakala Academy yesterday. Bangla daily Prothom Alo launched an eight-day photo exhibition to honour the sacrifices of students and people during the July uprising.

PHOTO: STAR



Bangladesh Indigenous Artist Unity held a cultural gathering at TSC on the Dhaka University campus yesterday, demanding constitutional recognition of the indigenous people, punishment for those attacked the community groups and rights activists, and reinstatement of the word "adivasi" along with the graffiti in textbooks.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Don't create

FROM PAGE 3
potential 1/1 like scenario in a Facebook post.

Abbas dismissed allegations that BNP was envious of a new political party emerging from the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, saying, "If a new party is formed, we'll welcome it."

He urged all quarters to prioritise unity and peace over division, saying, "Our leaders and workers are vigilant guards of the country's independence and sovereignty."

Man beaten

FROM PAGE 5
Mirian was a former joint secretary of the Jubo Dal's ward 2 unit in Aliabad union, claimed his brother Iran Khan.

Contacted, Jahangir Hossain, secretary of Faridpur district Jubo Dal unit, said there are no union-level Jubo Dal committees in Faridpur.

"I have no information about Mirian holding any position in the organisation," he added.

Abir Hossain, an on-duty doctor of the hospital, said, "The body bore multiple injury marks, including in the eyes."

Confirming the matter, Shaileen Chakma, additional superintendent of police in Faridpur, said, "Mirian was accused in five cases, including charges of murder, abduction, and extortion."

Legal Notice

This is to inform all that, my Client Ms. Saima Ahmed Orney, daughter of Moni Ahmed and Seemu Ahmed, of Holding no. 6, Village-Chandpur, Shabirpur, Puthia, District: TSO-1209, Hazaribagh, Dhaka South City Corporation, Dhaka, N.I.D. No. 9563001354, has filed a notice of claim and objection to Mr. Shafuddin, son of Naemunn Uddin and Sakhina Begum, of Village-Mohampur, Post Office: No. 5323, Puthia, Puthia, District: TSO-1209, Hazaribagh, Dhaka, N.I.D. No. 9574976323, to buy 80.00 decimal of land out of total 105.50 decimal of lands. In such situation, if any party has any objection or claim relating to the property mentioned in the schedule below, requested to contact in Mobile No. 01712156016 or 01715943579 within 15 (Fifteen) days of publication of this notice. Otherwise, no claim and objection shall be admissible after the expiry of this period.

Schedule of Property

District: Dhaka, Police Station: Nawabganj, Muzilla: No. 142, Road No. RS-100, Post No. 9574976323, Puthia, Puthia, District: TSO-1209, Hazaribagh, Dhaka, N.I.D. No. 9574976323, Date: No. 250, Road No. 1540. Md Ishtak Ahmed, Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh, 300, Elephant Road, Dhaka, Bangladesh, Mobile: 01712156016 / 01715943579

HABIGANJ TOWN

Illegal constructions rampant on RHD lands



MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

activities were only temporarily halted, locals said.

Nuruddin later resumed filling up the canal to facilitate the construction.

Similarly, US expatriate Sumil Banik and his associates are accused of filling up approximately a 100-foot stretch of the canal in the Kaligachhtala area to build a market.

Residents alleged that RHD sent letters instructing Sunil Banik to remove the soil from the canal. However, Sunil and his associates reportedly continued filling up the canal at night, ignoring the orders.

Additionally, numerous shops are being constructed illegally on RHD land in Anwarpur and other areas. While the RHD occasionally conducts eviction drives against these structures, the buildings are often rebuilt shortly afterward, said Ajay Das, a resident of Kaligachhtala.

One such case involves Nuruddin, a resident of the Sabujbagh area, who is allegedly constructing a clinic named "Queen Mary" by filling up around a 200-foot stretch of a government-owned canal near the stadium.

The RHD lands in Kaligachhtala, Anwarpur Point, and near the stadium along the town's bypass road are reportedly being filled to construct structures, often ignoring RHD's notices to halt such activities.

Residents alleged that RHD sent letters instructing Sunil Banik to remove the soil from the canal. However, Sunil and his associates reportedly continued filling up the canal at night, ignoring the orders.

Additionally, numerous shops are being constructed illegally on RHD land in Anwarpur and other areas. While the RHD occasionally conducts eviction drives against these structures, the buildings are often rebuilt shortly afterward, said Ajay Das, a resident of Kaligachhtala.

The canal along the bypass road, which flows through Kaligachhtala and the stadium areas, is crucial

for draining water from the town during the monsoon, said Tofazzal Sohel, general secretary of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolok's Habiganj unit.

Attempts to contact Sunil Banik, who is currently in the US, were unsuccessful. His relative, Debabrata Chowdhury, claimed they had dumped soil on their own land next to the canal.

Contacted, Nuruddin claimed he had received permission from the RHD and other relevant authorities to fill up the canal for constructing the clinic. However, they failed to provide any evidence to support their claims.

Zakir Hossain, executive engineer of RHD in Habiganj, said all illegal structures on RHD land along the bypass road have been evicted, but some floating structures were later reinstalled.

"Allegations regarding the filling of the canal for illegal constructions will be investigated, and necessary actions will be taken," he added.

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AHSANULLAH UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
141-142 Love Road, Tejgaon Industrial Area, Dhaka-1208.
Phone: 02 8870422 (Ext.-201) Web: www.aust.edu
Tender Ref. No: AUST/CE & TE/OTM/Tender-09/2024-25

TENDER INVITATION

Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology (AUST) is inviting sealed bids from bona fide/ reputed organizations/ distributors/ business partners/agents for:

- Supply & Installation of lab Equipment (Miniature Spinning Line) for Textile Engineering Department, AUST as described in the tender schedule.
- Supply of lab Equipment (Unconfined compression test apparatus) for Civil Engineering Department, AUST as described in the tender schedule.

The bidders must submit earnest money @ 2.5% of the quoted price in the form of Pay Order issued from any scheduled bank drawn in favor of "Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology" along with their offer. Interested bidders may collect schedule of tender from Procurement Officer of AUST on all working days till Feb. 06, 2025. The sealed offer must be submitted on Feb. 09, 2025 by 2.30 p.m. at the Treasurer's office and the tenders will be opened at 03:00 p.m. on the same day (Feb. 09, 2025). Representatives of the participating bidders may remain present at the time of opening the tenders.

The AUST authority reserves the right to accept or reject any or all the tenders without showing any reason what-so-ever and is not bound to award the work order to the lowest bidder.

INNOVATION:: CREATION:: LEADERSHIP

4,813 bodies of migrant

FROM PAGE 3
of which arrived from the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries: Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain.

Of the corpses, 5,666 arrived from Saudi Arabia followed by 1,913 from the UAE and 1,893 from Oman.

The six GCC countries together have hired 76.3 percent of Bangladesh's total 1.6 crore outbound workers between 1976 and 2023, according to the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training.

The 2022 report "The Deaths of Migrants in the Gulf" by the Vital Signs Partnership (VSP) highlights several risks faced by low-paid migrant workers in the Gulf. These include poor working conditions, exposure to heat and humidity, air pollution, and abusive treatment. Workers also face health risks such as psychosocial stress,

PRAYER TIMING
JANUARY 25
Faz Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 5-35 12-45 4-15 5-46 7-15
JAMAT 6-10 1-15 4-30 5-50 7-45
SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

College student dies

FROM PAGE 3

Witnesses said Shimul was sitting and chatting with a girl behind the Third Science Building when a routine patrol vehicle of the university's proctorial team approached. While trying to escape, he lost control of the motorcycle as he tried to navigate a road under construction. Both he and the girl were thrown off the bike.

While the girl was unharmed, Shimul had lost consciousness.

The university proctorial team first took him to the campus medical centre before transferring him to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital due to the severity of his condition, said Professor Mahbubur Rahman, the university proctor.

"I was informed of the incident around 10:00pm. Our assistant proctor was patrolling when he noticed the boy and the girl behind the Third Science Building. They attempted to flee on a motorcycle upon seeing the proctor's vehicle and got into an accident on the under-construction road," he said.

Meanwhile, Mahmudul Hasan, a doctor at RMCH's emergency department,

33m schoolchildren

FROM PAGE 3

"The increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events is having a knock-on effect on children's education," said Rana Flowers, Unicef representative to Bangladesh.

"Extreme temperatures and other climate hazards don't only damage schools, they affect students' concentration, memory, and mental and physical health. Prolonged school closures increase the chance of children dropping out and being married off by families to cope with economic stress," he added.

Girl children are mostly impacted, with many of them married off instead of being supported to continue education. Bangladesh ranks among the top 10 countries in the world with the highest percentage of child marriage.

Children in Bangladesh are among the most exposed and vulnerable to climate and environmental hazards, according to the Unicef Children's Climate Risk Index. These disasters often exacerbate the country's "learning poverty", where one in two children cannot read at their grade level and two-thirds are unable to do basic counting after completing primary education.

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Honouring

FROM PAGE 3

by government forces to suppress the uprising, such as bullet casings, pellet cartridges, grenade pins, and tear gas canisters.

Speaking at the inauguration, Rizwana said such an exhibition was crucial in preserving the evidence of the uprising in a country where history is often distorted. This exhibition ensures the events of the movement are accurately remembered.

Sharmeen S Mursid suggested that similar initiatives should be replicated and called for the creation of a permanent space for the exhibition. "We must consider transforming this temporary exhibition into a permanent institution, such as a museum or archive," she said.

She emphasised the importance of recognising the women who participated in the uprising, urging that they not be forgotten, as female fighters in 1971 often were.

Sarah Cooke described the exhibition as a powerful, emotional, and moving record of last year's events.

The exhibition, curated by artist Anisuzzaman Shohel, will remain open until January 31.

On January 26, a book launch and discussion featuring four books on the mass uprising will be held.

Another discussion with the families of the martyrs will take place the following day. A special video on the August 5 massacre in Savar will premiere on January 29.

Teachers stage

FROM PAGE 5

Farhad Hossain, a teacher from Baruihati Government Primary School in Sunamganj, echoed these sentiments, saying, "We are part of the teaching community; why should we be in the third class? It is not possible to build a country by keeping teachers in the third class."

Several recommendations were made including accelerating financing to improve climate resilience in the education sector, ensuring children are engaged in climate decision-making, ensuring proper national climate plans -- including Nationally Determined Contribution 3.0 and the National Adaptation Plan -- strengthening child-critical social services like education to be more climate smart and disaster-resilient.

"Children in Bangladesh are at the forefront of two interconnected crises -- climate change and deepening learning poverty that threatens their survival and future. As children continue to speak up and call for urgent action on the devastating impacts of the climate crisis, decision-makers must heed their calls and place their needs at the centre of climate policies and financing plans," said Flowers.

A step forward for elephant

FROM PAGE 5

All they get is a uniform, pair of shoes and whistle.

"We are working to save elephants from poachers. We also protect residents and their properties from elephant attacks," Hashem said.

"We face risks, from potential elephant attacks to the dangers of navigating the dense jungle," Hashem adds, "yet we received no financial support from the government."

Without a formal framework or any form of supervision, the teams operated with limited accountability, sometimes leading to unforeseen incidents.

However, this may change soon. The government has recently allocated Tk 45 lakh for 50 ERTs at Anwara and Karnaphuli upazila of Chattogram.

"It will allow us to pay the ERT members, ensuring their commitment and enabling us to hold them accountable for their duties," said Abu Naser Md Yasin Newaz, divisional

forest officer.

Imran Ahmed, conservator of the Wildlife and Nature Conservation Region, said, "While the initial allocation may not be substantial, it symbolises a significant shift in government policy and paves the way for increased support in the future."

HUMAN-ELEPHANT COEXISTENCE UNDER THREAT

The country has 268 critically endangered Asian elephants. Most of them live in Chattogram, Cox's Bazar



Women in the hills busy collecting Boro seedbeds. After collection, they plant these seedlings in the field. The photo was taken in the Bhanga Mura area of Bandarban recently.

PHOTO: MONG SING HAI MARMA

A step forward for elephant conservation

Govt allocates funds for response teams in Ctg

SIEYET ULLAH

The pre-dawn silence in Hajigaon, a village situated on the green hills of Chattogram's Karnaphuli upazila, is often shattered by the distant rumble of a colossal presence.

It's the sound of elephants, the gentle giants venturing out of the dwindling forests, seeking food and space.

For 46-year-old Mohammed Hashem, this is a call to duty.

He starts his day by patrolling through the dense forests, trying to detect the subtle signs of elephant movements.

Hashem is a member of the Elephant Response Team (ERT), a group of locals assigned by the forest department to mitigate the escalating human-elephant conflict in the region.



The response team in Chattogram.

PHOTO: STAR

There are 130 ERTs working under the forest department in the country at present.

Since 2018, Hashem and his fellows have been on the frontlines, working to safeguard both the elephants and the human communities that share their habitat.

The ERT's main task is to identify elephants before they encroach upon human settlements, gently guiding them back to their natural habitat.

Despite their efforts, Hashem, like his fellow ERT members, has never received any financial support from the government.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

Teachers stage demo for 10th grade salary scale

UNB, Dhaka

Teachers of government primary schools across the country staged a protest yesterday at the Central Shaheed Minar in Dhaka, demanding implementation of the 10th grade salary scale for assistant teachers.

The demonstration began at 10:00am, with teachers arriving in large numbers.

They termed their current classification as third class employees as unjust and demeaning to the teaching profession.

The protesters issued an ultimatum to the government, warning that they would escalate their movement if their demands were not addressed by 2:00pm. Later, they marched towards Shahbagh around 3:30pm, where police intercepted them near Shahbagh Police Station. The teachers continued their protest at the police barricade.

"We are paid as third-class employees, which we cannot accept as teachers. We demand immediate implementation of 10th grade pay scale for assistant teachers," said one of the protesters wishing anonymity.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 8



Teachers of government primary schools stage a protest at the Central Shaheed Minar in Dhaka yesterday, demanding implementation of the 10th grade salary scale for assistant teachers.

PARTHA CHAKRABORTTY, Bagerhat

Around 25 percent of the dredging work on the Bishkhali River in Bagerhat remains incomplete, despite the project deadline expiring last month, due to illegal encroachments and property disputes.

The Bangladesh Water Development Board launched the Tk 45 crore project in 2023 to dredge a 24-kilometre stretch between Morrelganj and Kachua upazilas, aiming to resolve water shortages and boost agricultural productivity. The project was initially set to be completed by December 2024. However, with approximately 3km still undredged, the deadline has been extended to December 2025.

BWDB officials attributed the delays to illegal structures built on river land and legal disputes in areas such as Ramchandrapur and Sagorkathi.

In Sagorkathi, Abul Bashar claimed ownership of land occupied by a house, cemetery, and mosque. "We are the rightful owners as per SA and BS records. Without compensation or rehabilitation, we cannot allow dredging on our purchased land. We have already filed a court case," he said.

In Ramchandrapur, Marjina Begum

said her family had purchased two kathas of land to build a house, unaware it would be reclaimed for river excavation. "We never knew the government would claim this property. Now we are left with nothing," she said.

Abu Raian Mohammad Al Biruni, BWDB's executive engineer in Bagerhat, said that dredging is proceeding based on the river's CS records.

"Notices and public announcements were issued to illegal occupiers. Legal action will be taken if they do not remove the structures," he said. The BWDB has yet to receive court notice on Bashar's case, he added.

Once a vital waterway, the Bishkhali has suffered heavy siltation from years of neglect, causing severe irrigation water shortages.

Shankar Kumar Majumdar, deputy director of the Department of Agricultural Extension in Bagerhat, said that Aman paddy is currently cultivated on 26,000 hectares in Morrelganj, Kachua, and Sharankhola upazilas, but only 9,000 hectares are used for Boro cultivation due to water scarcity.

"If dredging is completed, around 20,000 hectares of cropland can be cultivated during the Rabi season," he said.

WINTER DISEASES

Hospitals grapple with influx of child patients



ARUN BIKASH DEY, Chattogram

Hospitals in Chattogram are struggling to handle a sharp increase in child patients suffering from cold-related complications during the winter.

During visits to various hospitals in the port city, pediatric wards were found filled beyond capacity. Many children were admitted with conditions such as pneumonia, bronchitis, and diarrhoea.

At Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH), the situation was especially alarming. Parents crowded the ward and corridors, while nurses moved quickly between patients. Children were seen relying on nebulisers to breathe.

The Child Health ward's two units, with a capacity for 64 patients, were overwhelmed by more than double the number. On Thursday, 110 children were admitted to the ward.

Ikbal Hossain, who

brought his seven-month-old son from Chandanaish upazila, expressed concern. "I am worried. My son cannot breathe normally," he said.

Nur Hashem, who traveled from Cox's Bazar with his five-month-old son, said, "My son started having trouble breathing last Saturday. We went to Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital, but his condition worsened, and they referred us here."

In another bed, an eight-month-old girl was on a saline drip as her mother, Jesmine Sultana, anxiously looked on. Similar scenes were seen throughout the ward.

Dr Mohammad Musa, associate professor at CMCH's Child Health ward, said two-thirds of the admitted children were suffering from cold-related illnesses. He urged parents to act quickly if infants show symptoms such as rapid or difficult breathing.

He also recommended keeping children in smoke-

free environments, ensuring regular breastfeeding for infants, and maintaining good hygiene practices.

At Marine City Medical College Hospital, Dr Basana Muhuri, a professor in the Child Health department, reported a rise in child patients with similar complications.

She emphasised the importance of recognising warning signs, including convulsions, vomiting, rapid or difficult breathing, and loss of appetite.

"Parents must seek medical attention immediately if these symptoms appear," she said.

Dr Jahangir Alam, civil surgeon of Chattogram, said over 100 cases of diarrhoea are being reported daily in the city's hospitals. He attributed the surge to rotavirus, a common cause of diarrhoea in infants during winter. "Our hospitals and health complexes are ready to provide the necessary treatment," he assured.

Man beaten to death on robbery suspicion

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

A man was beaten to death by locals during an attempted robbery in Faridpur Sadar upazila early yesterday.

The villagers also recovered an air-gun and a machete from the scene.

The incident took place at Guchhogram area of Alabad union under the upazila.

The deceased is Miran Khan, 34, a resident of Pochim Sadipur village under the same upazila.

According to locals, a group of seven to eight armed individuals attacked the village, vandalising houses and attempting to break into them in the early hours yesterday.

Miran was detained by the locals while his cohorts fled. He was severely beaten by the mob, before being taken to Faridpur Medical College Hospital, where doctors declared him dead.

Some villagers, wishing anonymity, alleged that Miran was involved in various criminal activities in the area, including drug abuse, extortion and harassment.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

KU student shot dead in Khulna

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna



A student of Khulna University was shot dead by unidentified assailants in Khulna city last night.

The deceased, Arnob Kumar Sarker, 28, was an MBA student at KU, of Abu Ahmed Road in Khulna's Sonadanga.

Quoting witnesses, Md Ahsan Habib, additional deputy commissioner of Khulna Metropolitan Police, told this correspondent that the assailants opened fire targeting Arnab at Teltulipan intersection around 9:15pm.

He sustained a bullet wound to his head. Locals rushed him to Khulna City Medical College Hospital where doctors declared him dead, he said.

Police are trying to find the motive behind the murder and identify and arrest the perpetrators, he added.

Ensure justice for Felani

Jamaat ameer urges govt; meets family

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

The interim government should play an active role to ensure justice for Felani, said Jamaat-e-Islami Amee Dr Shafiqur Rahman yesterday.

He said this after paying a visit to the family of Felani Khatun in Dakshin Ramkhana village, Kurigram.

Felani, 15, was shot dead by BSF troops on January 7, 2011, at the Anantapur border in Kurigram.

Her body was left hanging on the barbed wire fence for four and a half hours, sparking global outrage. The case remains unresolved in India's Supreme Court.

Shafiqur paid respects at Felani's grave and provided financial assistance to the family.

Speaking to Felani's parents, Nur Islam and Jahanara Begum, and her three brothers, Shafiqur said, "Fourteen years have passed since the killing of Felani on the border, but the Awami League government did not do anything to ensure justice."

He added, "The Felani murder shook the conscience of not only Bangladesh but also the people of the world. This was a worldwide discussion. Hence, a trial for Felani's murder should be held in the international court."

More staff detained by Houthi rebels in Yemen: UN

AFP, Sanaa

Yemen's Houthi rebels have detained another group of UN personnel, a UN statement said yesterday, after 13 staff were held last June.

"Yesterday, the de facto authorities in Sanaa detained additional UN personnel working in areas under their control," the office of the resident United Nations coordinator for Yemen said.

It did not say how many were held in the latest swoop by the Iran-backed Houthis, who have detained dozens of staff from UN and other humanitarian organisations, most since the middle of last year.

Yemen is one of the world's worst humanitarian crises where more than 18 million people need assistance and protection, according to the United Nations.

The UN has now suspended "all official movements into and within" areas held by Houthis, the statement said.

WHO chief to cut costs, reset priorities after US exit

REUTERS, Geneva

The World Health Organization (WHO) will cut costs and review which health programmes to prioritise after President Donald Trump announced he was withdrawing the US from the WHO, the agency's chief told staff in an internal memo seen by Reuters.

Trump made the move on the first day of his second term in office, accusing the UN health agency of mishandling the Covid-19 pandemic.

"This announcement has made our financial situation more acute..." WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in the memo dated January 23. It said the WHO planned to significantly reduce travel expenditure and halt recruitment, except for critical areas, as part of cost-saving measures.

Bahar: the patron of Cumilla's goons

FROM PAGE 12

involved in the murder of Sharif, a JaSoD Chhatra League leader from Dishaband village, in late 1973, said leaders of the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JaSoD). Sharif was among three people killed in a firing on a procession at Rajaganj Sonali Bank Mor.

Delwar Hossain, a former organising secretary of Cumilla District BCL, was murdered on November 26, 2018. Police have submitted the charge sheet against ward-26 Councillor Abdus Sattar, a vice-president of Sweekhasebak League's Cumilla City Unit and follower of Bahar.

Another follower of Bahar, ward-27 Councillor and president of the AL's ward unit, Abul Hasan, was made prime accused in a case over the murder of local AL leader Zillur Rahman Chowdhury on Nov 11, 2020.

Both councillors Abdus Sattar and Abul Hasan reportedly run smuggling syndicates along the border with India. The fortunes they made from illegal businesses thrust them into top posts in the AL despite having any past affiliation with the party.

Before Zillur's murder, a local businessman named Akter Hossain was killed in an attack on July 10, 2020 allegedly by ward-23 Councillor Alamgir Hossain, then joint convener of Cumilla City Jubo League who was close to Bahar. Alamgir was able to monopolise the land business at Kotbaria since he was blessed by Bahar, locals said.

On November 22, 2021, Councillor Syed Mohammad Sohel and Awami League activist Haripada Saha were shot dead in broad daylight. Three of the accused -- Shah Alam, Sabbir Hossain and Sajon -- were supporters of Saiful Alam Rony, husband of Bahauddin Bahar's daughter Tahsin Bahar Suchona. The three accused were killed in so-called gunfights with police later.

The latest victim of violence by Bahar's followers is Jamil Hasan Arnab, a staffer at the Satat



Firefighters from the Growlersburg crew hike up the mountain to create a containment fire line to control the Hughes Fire in Castaic, a northwestern neighbourhood of Los Angeles County, California, US on Thursday. The newly emerged Hughes Fire continued to grow overnight, consuming 10,000 acres, but its rate of growth slowed considerably after an explosive first few hours.

PHOTO: AFP

Kyiv receives bodies of 757 killed Ukrainian troops

AFP, Kyiv

Kyiv said yesterday it had received the bodies of hundreds of Ukrainian troops killed in battle with Russian forces, in one of the largest repatriations since Russia invaded.

The exchange of prisoners and return of their remains is one of the few areas of cooperation between Moscow and Kyiv since the Kremlin mobilised its army in Ukraine in February 2022.

The repatriation announced by the Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War, a Ukrainian state agency, is the largest in months and underscores the high cost and intensity of fighting ahead of the war's three-year anniversary.

"The bodies of 757 fallen defenders were returned to Ukraine," the Coordination Headquarters said in a post on social media.

Meanwhile, the Kremlin said yesterday it wanted to resume nuclear disarmament talks with US President Donald Trump's

administration "as soon as possible", after tensions over the Ukraine conflict left negotiations at an impasse.

Moscow pulled out of the last remaining arms control agreement with Washington, called "New START", in 2023 amid a sharp deterioration in relations between the two countries.

Ukrainian drones strike Russian oil site, electronics plant in the Ryazan region

Both have indicated they will unilaterally adhere to the warhead limits outlined in the treaty until 2026, but they are yet to agree on a replacement and talks have stalled for months.

"We are interested in starting this

negotiation process as soon as possible," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

"The ball is in the Americans' court, who have stopped all substantive contacts."

In the war zone, the Ukrainian military confirmed yesterday that Kyiv had launched an overnight drone attack on Russia, claiming to have struck an oil refinery, power station facilities and an electronics plant.

Moscow had earlier said that its air defence systems shot down 121 Ukrainian drones over 12 regions and the occupied Crimean Peninsula.

The Ukrainian General Staff said Ukrainian drones had struck "one of the largest oil refineries in Russia" in the Ryazan region south of Moscow and facilities at a thermal power plant in the same region.

It said in the same statement on social media that the damaged microelectronics plant was located in the western Bryansk region bordering Ukraine.

Chhatra Dal leader held; supporters 'attack' police

FROM PAGE 12

The two traders were attacked with sharp weapons by a group of criminals, including top criminal Sanjidul Haque Emon, following their refusal to meet extortion demands.

A case was filed by Wahedul, who is also the elder brother of Imamul Hasan Helal, alias Pichehi Helal, a notorious criminal from Mohammadpur.

The FIR alleges that after August

Jeweller shot, robbed of 50 bhori gold

FROM PAGE 12

A case has been filed over the incident with Kamrangirchar Police Station, said Officer in Charge (OC) Amirul Islam.

The OC, quoting the case statement, said that the muggers snatched a bag containing 50 bhoris of gold and Tk 3.5 lakh in cash.

Efforts are underway to apprehend those responsible, he added.

Earlier on November 23 last year,

Asylum 'universally recognised' right

Says UN after Trump halts arrivals

AFP, Geneva

The United Nations stressed yesterday that seeking asylum is a "universally recognised" human right, following decisions by President Donald Trump to suspend all refugee admissions and halt the US asylum programme.

"All states are entitled to exercise their jurisdiction along their international borders (but) they need to do so in line with their human rights obligations," UN rights office spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani told reporters in Geneva when asked about the decisions.

"The right to seek asylum is a universally recognised human right."

Her comment came after Trump, on his first day back in office on Monday, declared a national emergency at the US southern border and vowed to deport "millions and millions" of migrants.

The White House has also halted an asylum programme for people fleeing authoritarian regimes in Central and South America, leaving thousands of people stranded on the Mexican side of the border.

In addition, Trump signed an executive order suspending all refugee admissions as of January 27. That move also halted "all previously scheduled travel of refugees to the United States", according to a State Department email to groups working with new arrivals, seen by AFP.

Taliban reject ICC move to arrest top officials

AFP, Kabul

Afghanistan's Taliban government said yesterday an arrest warrant sought by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for its leaders was "politically motivated".

It comes a day after the ICC chief prosecutor said he was seeking warrants against senior Taliban leaders in Afghanistan over the persecution of women -- a crime against humanity.

"Like many other decisions of the (ICC), it is devoid of a fair legal basis, is a matter of double standards and is politically motivated," said a statement from the Foreign Ministry posted on social media platform X.

"It is regrettable that this institution has turned a blind eye to war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by foreign forces and their domestic allies during the twenty-year occupation of Afghanistan."

It said the court should "not attempt to impose a particular interpretation of human rights on the entire world and ignore the religious and national values of people of the rest of the world".

Paribahan counter in Cumilla's Shashongacha bus stand. He was on his way to the counter when a bullet snatched his life during clashes between rival groups over control of the stand on March 15, 2024. Both groups were reportedly backed by Bahar.

INTOLERANT

To establish his sole authority over extortion, land-grabbing, illicit drug trade and tender manipulation,

Bahar took control of the Awami League and its affiliated bodies

by appointing his relatives and followers to the top posts and making it difficult for his rivals in the party to carry out political activities.

His followers in the party

controlled the 27 wards under the city corporation and six unions of Adarsha Sadar upazila.

In 2022, Bahar was elected as

president of Cumilla City Awami League.

Arfanul Haque Rifat, a

Bahar loyalist, was elected general

secretary, and daughter Suchona

organising secretary of the committee. Bahar also filled the other posts with his followers.

Suchona was nominated by the

Awami League as its candidate

for Cumilla City Corporation

mayor's post in 2024. Suchona

won the election, but the other

candidates alleged widespread

voter intimidation. Bahar's armed

cadres were seen patrolling areas

surrounding the polling stations.

Nur Ur Rahman Mahmud Tanim,

an Awami League leader and former

vice-president of Cumilla Victoria

College Students' Union, said, "MP

Bahar did not give any chance to his

rivals in the committees or elections

because he could not tolerate any

dissent."

TENDER EXTORTION

Contractors in Cumilla alleged they

had to pay commissions to Bahar

after winning tender bids.

Local Awami League leader

Masudur Islam, who is loyal to

Afzal Khan's daughter and former

reserved seat MP Ansum Sultana

Sheema, was injured in an attack

after attempting to submit his tender

bid at the Education Engineering

Department on April 1, 2024.

The attackers were allegedly led by Bahar's followers Jahirul Islam Rintu and Sadekur Raham Pias, president and general secretary of Cumilla Sweekhasebak League, respectively.

Masudur, who was bedridden for months after the attack, said, "They broke my hands and legs for not giving a 10 percent commission."

GRABBING PROPERTIES, BUSINESSES

Bahar and his people occupied different public and private properties in Cumilla city allegedly by using muscle power or unjust contracts. They were reportedly involved in illegal sand extraction from the Comiti river.

He constructed a four-storey market on Town Hall's land under a 30-year contract. As the lessee, Bahar has been paying only Tk 2 lakh per year.

A trader of the Town Hall Super Market, requesting not to be named, said, "The actual rent of the market should be several crore taka a year. The commercial value of the property has been neglected in this contract."

Recently, the district administration took control of the Town Hall market and asked the traders to deposit rent to the Town Hall's account.

Bahar also tried to demolish the old Town Hall building and construct a high-rise there.

His political rival late Afzal Khan's daughter Sheema alleged that Bahar illegally occupied Cumilla Modern High School and Bangabandhu Law College established by Afzal.

"He [Bahar] did it only over political rivalry. He abused his power," Sheema said.

Former Jatiya party MP Ansar Ahmed and former schoolteacher Monindra Babu were allegedly forced to give up their land for

Bahar's 12-storey market in Monohorpur.

Another landowner, Rashedul Rusel, alleged Bahar forcefully shut down his shop as Rusel refused to give his land. "He [Bahar] harassed

me by making me accused in different cases in the last six years."

The ten-storey building housing Cumilla City Awami League office at Ramghatla was known to be allotted to Cumilla District Mukti Joddha Sangsad.

District Commander Shafiqul Alam Babul alleged they were forced to hand over the land under pressure.

Bahar also targeted the famous Liberty Cinema Hall at Kandirpar. Several cases were filed over land ownership dispute and documentation fraud centring the building.

Monzur Kader Moni, councillor of ward-10, who was close to Suchona's husband Rony, made a fortune with bribes taken for building plans as he was appointed as a member of the Building Plan Committee of the city corporation.

No one dared to counter Moni in the last city polls as Rony threatened others who had planned to submit nominations.

Besides controlling tenders in different departments, Rony also grabbed cable TV and internet businesses in Cumilla. He allegedly built teen gangs to establish his control.

Cumilla AL General Secretary Rifat and Abdullah Al Mahmud, who were loyal to Bahar, were listed as top drug dealers in Cumilla under Chattogram division.

The Prime Minister's Office sent a letter along with the list of top drug dealers of Chattogram division to the home ministry in January 2018, requesting investigation and action against those on the list.

After the fall of the AL government, several cases have been filed against Bahar, Suchona and Bahar's followers on charges related to fatal attacks on protesters during the student-led mass uprising in July-August last year.

Social Marketing Company



চ. সামুদ্রিক আহমেদ
উদ্দেশ্য
অর্থ মন্ত্রণালয়
গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার



Dr. Salehuddin Ahmed
Adviser
Ministry of Finance
Government of the
People's Republic of Bangladesh

MESSAGE

I am happy to know that Social Marketing Company (SMC) is going to celebrate its 50th anniversary. On this auspicious occasion, I would like to extend my warm wishes to the Board, all employees, and stakeholders of this organization.

From the beginning, the main challenge of SMC was to control the rapid population growth in order to eradicate of poverty and reconstruct the economy.

SMC evolved as a result of adoption of the social marketing concept in family planning and contraception along with other philanthropic efforts of the government and few other NGOs. Over years, the social marketing campaign created hype in acceptance of family planning by the people of Bangladesh. Through series of efforts by many stakeholders, including SMC, the country is now near its fertility goal.

Over the past five decades, SMC has played a striking role through innovative approaches to public health. SMC's innovation has not only limited to family planning but also extended to interventions on child health, maternal health, adolescent health, tuberculosis and other health and hygiene issues. I feel proud to note its dedication and sincerity to saving countless lives by reaching communities across the nation with vital health services.

SMC's journey from humble beginnings to becoming a beacon of hope and progress is a testament to the resilience and vision of those who have been part of this remarkable organization. As we celebrate the 50th anniversary milestone, I wish that SMC will continue to build on the successes of the past and advance toward the future with renewed commitment and further innovations.

I congratulate the leadership, staff, and partners of SMC for their outstanding contributions and wish the best for continued success of SMC in all future endeavors.

Dr. Salehuddin Ahmed

Toslim Uddin Khan
Managing Director &
Chief Executive Officer
Social Marketing Company



MESSAGE

The journey of Social Marketing started in 1975 as a Social Marketing Project initiated by a US-based NGO- Population Services International in partnership with the Government of Bangladesh and financial support of United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Due to the relentless efforts of all stakeholders, Bangladesh is now near its fertility goal. About half of the modern family planning method users now rely on SMC-branded contraceptives. In the eighties, diarrhea was one of the leading causes of child mortality but the wide use of packaged ORS of SMC reduced deaths due to diarrhea significantly. At present, SMC is also implementing programs on health of children, mothers, adolescents and other family members.

The continued successful implementation of the project ultimately led to the creation of a not-for-profit organization- Social Marketing Company in April 1990. Since then, relentless innovative efforts have made SMC a major contributor to the Bangladesh national health and family planning program. It markets a wide range of products and offer essential public health services. SMC implements its programs with extensive coverage of five Star Networks such as Blue Star, Green Star, Gold Star, Pink Star, and Rose Star network engaging different level providers in private sector.

In 2014, SMC created a subsidiary Company- SMC Enterprise Ltd- to manage profit-making activities and support SMC to carry forward program operations designed to enhance social good. This sustainable business model helps SMC to advance its major program operation with its own resources while use the support of donors mostly for innovation and program expansion.

As a symbol of trust, SMC always initiates new program activities and markets new products considering the changing needs and interests of the people of the Country. With the cooperation of all, SMC is committed to meeting the existing and upcoming public health requirements of children, women and families in Bangladesh.

Toslim Uddin Khan



Blue Star Network has 13,000 providers to provide affordable primary healthcare at the community level.



Green Star Network has 5,500 providers engaged in administering follow-up doses of injectable contraceptive and providing nutritional counseling to the mothers of children under five.



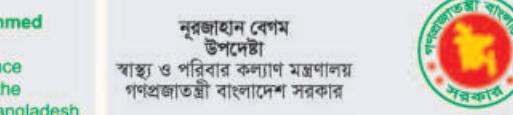
Pink Star Network has 607 providers to offer intrauterine devices (IUDs), implants and injectable contraceptives through their private chambers.



Gold Star Network has 4,000 members who deliver public health messages and sell family planning and health products at the community level.



Rose Star Network has 350 providers who counsel on nutrition and growth monitoring for children under 5 at the community level.



Nurjahan Begum
Adviser
Ministry of Health & Family Welfare
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

বাণী

আগামী ২৫ জানুয়ারি ২০২৫ মোশ্যাল মার্কেটিং কোম্পানীর (এসএমসি)-এর ৫০তম বার্ষিকী উদযাপন হবে জেনে আমি আনন্দিত।

সাহীনতাৰ পৰ যুক্ত-বিকল্পত বাংলাদেশৰ বাস্তু এবং জীৱনমান উন্নয়নেৰ লক্ষ্যে এসএমসি সৱকাৰেৰ সামৰে মৌখিকভাৱে কাজ তৰে কৰে। বিগত ৫০ বছৰে এসএমসি পৰিবাৰৰ পৱিকঢ়না, মা ও শিশু বাস্তু, বয়ঃসন্ধিকালীন বাস্তু ও পৰিজনতাৰ এবং রোগ প্রতিৰোধে প্ৰযোজনীয় জনবাস্তু পণ্যসমূহৰ বাস্তুসেৰা সকলোৰ কাছে পৌছে দেয়াৰ মাধ্যমে আমাদেৱ দেশৰে বাস্তু ব্যবহাৰৰ সামৰে পৰিবৰ্তন সাধন কৰেছে। এসএমসি নিৰ্বাচন প্ৰক্ৰিয়াৰ মাধ্যমে সাৱা দেশৰ বাস্তুবাস্তুৰ উন্নয়ন এবং সমাজে সাধাৰণ জনগণেৰ ক্ষমতায়নে ব্যাপকভাৱে অবদান কৰেছে।

আমি এসএমসি'ৰ উন্নৰোজ সাকল্য কামনা কৰছি। আশা কৰি ভবিষ্যতেও দেশ ও জাতিৰ উন্নয়নে এসএমসি'ৰ গুৰুত্বপূৰ্ণ অবদান অব্যাহত থাকবে।

নুরজাহান বেগুম

Social Marketing Company (SMC) A Journey to Improving Lives of People of Bangladesh

SMC is a Not-for-Profit Company and its mission is to improve the health and wellbeing of women, children and families through social marketing of products and services in family planning, maternal and child health, nutrition, and other socially beneficial areas, in partnership with government, development partners, and private sector. The concept of social marketing calls upon promoting health products and services as social goods using a market approach through private sector.

A US-based NGO Population Services International initiated the Social Marketing Project in 1975 in partnership with the Government of Bangladesh with the financial support of United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The project made substantial strides ultimately leading to the creation of SMC in April 1990. In 2014, SMC created a subsidiary company- SMC Enterprise Ltd to manage profit-making activities and support SMC by making surplus funds available for investment in program operations designed to enhance social good. SMC is a major contributor to the Bangladeshi national health and family planning program. About 54% of modern contraceptive (except permanent method) users use a SMC-brand method. SMC's ORS has been saving millions of lives for over 40 years. SMC operates the biggest ORS manufacturing facility in the country having a market share of around 90%. SMC also manufactures Sanitary Napkin & Baby Diaper at Hygiene factory in Cumilla and Electrolyte Drinks in recently established FMCG factory in Gazipur. SMC manufactures and markets a wide variety of pharmaceutical, OTC and Consumer products, all intended to support healthy behavior and improved healthy practices. The products include contraceptives (pill, condom, injectable, implant, and IUD); oral saline, nutrition products (MMS, Micronutrient Powder, Zinc and Calcium), electrolyte drinks, instant soft drink powder, glucose powder, biscuit; and anthelmintic tablet; sanitary napkin, baby diaper and pregnancy test kit. Additionally, SMC Enterprise Ltd markets a range of 40 different pharmaceutical products. SMC's vigilance ensures transparency in production upholding the quality of products.

SMC has an extensive sales and distribution network and field-level program operations across the country. The storage and distribution network are managed through a state of excellent central warehouse at Bhaluka, Mymensingh and two regional warehouses at Bogura, and Cumilla. The Company has 12 area offices located in Dhaka, Mymensingh, Chattogram, Cumilla, Sylhet, Khulna, Kushtia, Barishal, Bogura, Rajshahi, and Rangpur.

SMC implements its programs with extensive national coverage through its five Star networks of non-formal and formal private providers. About 13,000 private sector non-graduate Blue Star providers provide primary healthcare at the community level. They play an important role in creating health awareness at the community level and providing quality health services at affordable prices. Green Star is a network of around 5,500 non-formal providers (drug sellers) who are engaged to administer follow-up doses of injectable contraceptive and to provide nutritional counseling to the mothers of children under five.

The Pink Star is a network of 600 graduate medical providers, mostly Obstetricians and Gynecologists, who offer intrauterine devices (IUDs), implants, and injectable contraceptives through their private chambers. About 4,000 rural women entrepreneurs form the Gold Star network deliver public health messages and sell family planning and health products at the doorsteps of the community. The Rose Star Program engaged about 350 Pediatricians who counsel on nutrition and growth monitoring for the under 5 children at the community level. SMC established two clinics in Dhaka to provide quality health care and diagnostic services at an affordable price. In addition to the Star providers, SMC reaches out to over eight lac pharma and non-pharma outlets and institutions and ensures availability of health products at an affordable price. Since commencement, SMC has enjoyed a steady and substantial funding and contraceptive commodity support from USAID. SMC implements a large countrywide pregnancy care services using fund from Children Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF).

A nine-member Board of Directors of the Company governs the Company's long-term strategy, performance, culture and values. The Board is responsible and committed to embracing sound principles of corporate governance. The Board of Directors of SMC and its subsidiary SMC EL comprises a diverse group of individuals with varying expertise and backgrounds in the areas such as finance, law, industry management, leadership, and governance. SMC aspires to continue serving the population in future, as it has done in last 50 years, with full vigor and commitment to support the journey of Bangladesh to a prosperous nation.



পঞ্চাশের উত্তোলন
একসাথে আগামীতে



Waliul Islam
Chairman
Board of Directors
SMC & SMC EL

MESSAGE

SMC has traveled 50 years in the health sector of Bangladesh. Despite many challenges in the social-economic, and environmental ecosystem, the history of SMC is marked by enormous successes in its contribution to the health and family welfare of the country. The Company has demonstrated robust performances over the last 50 years, through innovative product marketing, and service offerings. SMC has contributed to increase Contraceptive Prevalence Rate and ORS use rate for diarrheal diseases at the national level. The Company has expanded its program activities, and developed new ways to support capacity of its Star health networks through continuous training and monitoring.

To materialize the social agenda of women empowerment, SMC has transformed 4,000 rural women from 120 upazilas into entrepreneurs known as Gold Star Members. Our commitment to innovation, operational excellence, and customer satisfaction has allowed us to enhance our competitiveness in the market. The impressive achievements of SMC Enterprise Limited (SMC EL), a subsidiary of SMC, has contributed to a remarkable sales growth of our public health products. SMC EL is dedicated to deliver high-quality products to our valued customers while upholding SMC's principles and social objectives. The catalysts behind the success of the Company include good corporate governance, teamwork, a comprehensive strategic plan, attractive business models, quality of products and services, and support from the development partners and the government.

Looking ahead, SMC will continue to build upon this success momentum by ensuring sustained and remarkable growth to foster its mission to improve the lives of women, children and families in the country. We extend our gratitude to our dedicated employees, valued customers, and esteemed stakeholders for their support. Together, we will navigate the evolving challenges and capitalize on the emerging opportunities that lie ahead.

Waliul Islam

Sayef Nasir
Managing Director
SMC Enterprise Limited

MESSAGE

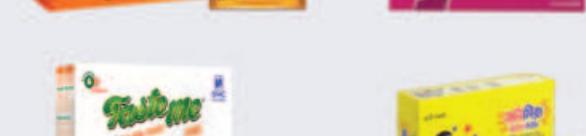
SMC Enterprise Ltd. (SMC EL), a subsidiary of SMC, supports SMC's mission through its commercial operation to invest in social programs. Since its inception, SMC EL has been offering wide range of products that improve the quality of life for people in Bangladesh. The company's portfolio includes over 30 brands in 5 categories: Rehydration, Contraceptive, Health & Hygiene, Food & Beverage, and Pharmaceuticals.

With 5 brands generating over Tk. 100 crore in yearly turnover, SMC EL has grown into a Tk. 2,000 crore enterprise with double-digit growth. With a clear Vision, and Empowered organization, SMC EL is committed to improving the health and wellbeing of Bangladeshi consumers by providing access to high-quality products.

On SMC's 50th anniversary, I thank the people of Bangladesh for their trust in SMC products, which has been the foundation for our continued growth. I also acknowledge the contributions of USAID, PSI, CIFF, the Government of Bangladesh, and our predecessors on this special occasion. Together, we celebrate this milestone and work towards a prosperous future for Bangladesh. We are committed to carry to continue SMC's legacy forward.

Let's Leap Together into future with Exuberance of our 50th anniversary.

Sayef Nasir



Time to take a critical look at labour sector

Closure of 68 factories since August 5 is alarming

The sheer uncertainty and chaos that has followed the closure of 16 Beximco factories in mid-December is but a reflection of a deeper crisis exposed by the fall of the Awami League government. According to a report by *Prothom Alo*, these factories are among the 68 that have shut down in Gazipur, Savar, Ashulia, and Dhamrai over the past five and a half months. Six more are in the process of closing, while the number of job losses recorded so far has surpassed 50,000. These closures and the subsequent protests by workers, often resulting in public disorder, highlight not only the urgency of the crisis, but also the need for long-overdue reforms in the industrial sector.

Further details from the report help illustrate the point. For example, Gazipur has 2,176 registered factories, including 1,154 garment factories, while Savar, Ashulia, and Dhamrai have 1,863 factories, of which 745 are garment factories. It makes sense then that the RMG sector has been disproportionately hit by the post-uprising turmoil, which is alarming given its crucial role in Bangladesh's export earnings. The crisis may spread to other factories where grievances over unpaid dues and annual wage increments threaten to destabilise their environment. The question is, why are factories failing to operate properly?

According to factory owners and labour leaders, several factors are at play here: lack of export orders, inadequate support from banks, and the inability to cope with rising production costs. Many owners, especially those linked to the ousted regime, took on loans far beyond their capacity, often through duplicitous means. Enforcement of stricter measures on these loans now has exacerbated the problem. Some owners have also gone into hiding, leaving their businesses in disarray. The Beximco crisis perfectly captures this situation: the group's total debt, according to the labour adviser, exceeds Tk 40,000 crore, including Tk 29,925 crore borrowed against 32 factories in Beximco Industrial Park. However, 16 of these factories exist only on paper and have been used as collateral for loans. Given the sheer volume of its debt, the government has reportedly opted against reopening the closed factories.

Where does it leave Beximco's laid-off workers? What about the workers of other closed or soon-to-be-closed factories? It is not enough to simply arrange for the payment of their unpaid dues. These people need jobs, which are hard to come by in the current situation, especially for women and those with disabilities. Finding employment for them and helping the struggling factories to stay afloat are equally important. We, therefore, believe the government should urgently introduce a structured financial support mechanism to help these factories while also facilitating targeted loan restructuring programmes in collaboration with banks.

That said, it is equally important to think about the future and undertake proper reforms to prevent the recurrence of such crises. We hope the Labour Reform Commission, which is supposed to submit its recommendations to the government by February 18, will address the systemic issues that have long plagued the industrial sector. Building an environment that supports growth and livelihood free from undue business and political influences is crucial.

Renewables are our future

Refrain from decisions that deter the transition to renewables

It is unfortunate that Bangladesh's power generation from renewable sources pales in comparison to its neighbours, despite our role as a climate change champion on the global stage. According to a recent report, only 0.8 percent of total power in Bangladesh comes from renewables—mainly wind and solar—whereas India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam generate 11.5 percent, 3.7 percent, 10.8 percent, and 13.6 percent, respectively, from those two sustainable sources.

Bangladesh's transition to renewable energy has been slow, complicated, and hindered by contradictory policy decisions. Corruption and inefficiency plagued the country's entire energy sector during the last regime, and renewables were no exception. To partially fulfil her government's commitment to producing 6,000MW-16,000MW from renewable sources by 2030, former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina approved 37 renewable plants, without following due process, under the controversial Quick Enhancement of Electricity and Energy Supply (Special Provision) Act, 2010. The law was repealed after the interim government took power in August, and the Bangladesh Power Development Board (PDB) floated tenders for 22 solar plants in various areas of the country with a total capacity of 853MW.

Unfortunately, the interim government, unlike previous administrations, has decided not to underwrite bills of power-generating companies if the PDB defaults. Ironically, PDB, which sells power at prices lower than its production or purchase cost, has a record of defaulting on payments. While the interim government's decision could be seen as an attempt to incentivise institutions to operate more efficiently and profitably by not bailing them out, it risks discouraging businesses from investing in renewables.

Given that Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus has long advocated for actions to mitigate climate change, we would expect his administration's policy decisions to reflect a commitment to transitioning to renewables. Decisions that contradict this aim should therefore be avoided. Also, a mechanism should be put in place to hold future political governments accountable if they fail to accelerate the transition to renewables. Moreover, reform of relevant public institutions is essential to ensure that Bangladesh does not fall behind in renewable power generation. Reducing our dependence on fossil fuel-generated power is not just necessary to cut costs and reduce reliance on foreign power supply sources, but because renewables may soon be the only viable options left for us to generate power.

EDITORIAL

What should we expect from a national constitutional council?



Barrister Khan Khalid Adnan is advocate of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh, fellow at the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators, and head of the chamber at Khan Saifur Rahman and Associates in Dhaka.

KHAN KHALID ADNAN

The Constitutional Reform Commission submitted its report to Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus on January 15, proposing a number of recommendations to bring significant changes to the constitution of Bangladesh. Among the most notable recommendations is the creation of a constitutional body called the National Constitutional Council (NCC). The goal of forming this body is to establish checks and balances among constitutional organs, preventing the concentration of power in any single individual or institution. The recommendation is rooted in Bangladesh's recent experience with 15 plus years of authoritarian rule, during which the constitution was repeatedly misused to suppress dissent. The proposed NCC is expected to curtail the prime minister's extensive powers, restore institutional balance, and oversee the formation of interim governments.

The concept of NCC appears to draw inspiration from constitutional councils in other jurisdictions, which serve as guardians of constitutional principles. Originating in France, the idea of a constitutional council has parallels with, but differs from, the constitutional court model found in countries like South Africa and Colombia. A few nations have adopted the constitutional council framework. For instance, it is viewed as a quasi-political entity in Cameroon, a fully political body in France, and a body composed of senior public officials in Cambodia. Within South Asia, Sri Lanka and Nepal have implemented similar models. In Nepal, the constitutional council primarily focuses on recommending appointments to constitutional positions, promoting gender and inclusive representation, and formulating guidelines for nominations. However, the council in Nepal has faced criticism for partisan decision-making and difficulties in achieving consensus. The requirement for majority approval in a politically fragmented environment often leads to delays in appointments. While recent amendments have aimed to enhance procedural transparency, they have also sparked allegations of

increasing executive dominance.

Given that Bangladesh's constitution, under Article 102, already vests extensive judicial review powers in the High Court Division, which includes the authority to interpret the constitution and review executive actions, adopting the NCC model instead of a constitutional court seems prudent. The NCC would not have judicial functions, but would complement the judiciary's robust review powers, making it a sensible and promising approach.

The proposed composition of the NCC is noteworthy, bringing together representatives from various constitutional organs. It includes the president, the prime minister, the leader of the opposition, speakers of both houses of parliament, the chief justice, deputy speakers from both houses nominated by the opposition, and one member elected by a majority vote of all legislators, excluding the prime minister, the opposition leader and their party members. In coalition

governments, this additional member would be elected by members of coalition parties, excluding the prime minister's party. If parliament is dissolved, the NCC would continue functioning, consisting of the president, the chief adviser, the chief justice, and two advisory council members chosen by the chief adviser. This representative structure mirrors

commissioner and other election commissioners, the attorney general and additional attorney generals, the chairpersons and members of the Public Service Commission, Anti-Corruption Commission, and National Human Rights Commission, as well as the chiefs of the defence forces and other positions prescribed by law. This advisory role would limit



FILE VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

the scope of Article 48 (3), which currently requires the president to act on the prime minister's advice in these appointments. By reducing the prime minister's unilateral authority, the NCC would introduce greater transparency and promote democratic practices. This mechanism is similar to the appointment roles of constitutional councils in Nepal and Sri Lanka. Furthermore, the NCC would be responsible for selecting advisers for interim governments formed after the dissolution of parliament.

Additionally, the NCC would remain operational during interim governments and periods when the parliament is dissolved. This continuous operation is designed to address extraordinary constitutional crises, such as the one triggered by the abrupt departure of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on August 5, 2024 amid widespread protests. The NCC's ongoing presence would enable it to manage unforeseen constitutional challenges effectively.

The NCC would play a pivotal role in appointing individuals to significant constitutional positions. It would advise the president on appointments to key roles, including the chief election

and the scope of Article 48 (3), which currently requires the president to act on the prime minister's advice in these appointments. By reducing the prime minister's unilateral authority, the NCC would introduce greater transparency and promote democratic practices. This mechanism is similar to the appointment roles of constitutional councils in Nepal and Sri Lanka. Furthermore, the NCC would be responsible for selecting advisers for interim governments formed after the dissolution of parliament.

For Bangladesh, establishing the NCC has the potential to strengthen democratic institutions and address systemic governance challenges. Functioning as a quasi-political entity rather than a judicial body, the NCC could serve as a constitutional guardian, similar to the role of constitutional councils in other nations. Entrusted with upholding and preserving constitutional principles, the NCC has the potential to enhance governance and reinforce democracy in the country.

A vision for a child-friendly book fair



Laila Khondkar is an international development worker.

LAILA KHONDKAR

Children have an innate love for stories. When given the right resources, their imagination soars, sharpening their analytical abilities, deepening their attention spans, and enhancing their communication skills. Reading is not just an activity—it is vital for children's intellectual and emotional development.

As the month-long Amar Ekushey Boi Mela, the largest book fair in Bangladesh, approaches, a question looms large: are we truly creating an environment that fosters love for books among children? Year after year, countless families throng the fairground with children excitedly tagging along, eyes wide with wonder. Yet, for many of these young visitors, the experience falls short of its potential. Are we doing enough to nurture their budding curiosity and imagination?

Take, for example, the designated children's corner at the book fair. While it holds promise, it often lacks the creativity and vibrancy needed to captivate young minds. Imagine a magical gateway at the entrance—a vivid, colourful portal transporting children into a world of imagination and wonder. The decor could mirror the themes of beloved books, with characters and scenes brought to life through art, colours, and innovative use of space. This is not merely about aesthetics; it's about creating an environment where children feel

valued, seen, and inspired.

Infrastructure, too, demands careful thinking. Children's safety and comfort should be non-negotiable. Facilities like child-friendly drinking water stations, washrooms, and breastfeeding corners for mothers with infants must be prioritised. These practical elements ensure that families can fully immerse themselves in the book fair without unnecessary stress.

But the experience should not stop at browsing and buying books. The children's corner could host interactive sessions with authors and illustrators, where children share their thoughts and learn about the creative process. Such exchanges would not only delight young readers but also provide invaluable insights for authors and publishers about what resonates with their audience. Why not include spaces where children can express themselves through storytelling, dressing up as their favourite characters, or even designing their book covers? Such activities spark creativity and make the experience truly immersive.

Then there's the issue of *Shishu Prokhor*, a dedicated time slot for children that often feels diluted by the presence of the general crowd. It's disheartening to see this initiative lose its purpose because it isn't strictly enforced. A simple yet bold solution would be to reserve these hours exclusively for children and adults accompanying them, ensuring an

uninterrupted, focused experience.

Publishers bear a significant responsibility. Parents often lament the lack of high-quality Bangla books for children. Many say their children prefer English books simply because they find them more engaging. This isn't surprising in a world where visual storytelling in films, animations, and video games sets an extraordinarily high bar. Books need to compete,

Year after year, countless families throng the Amar Ekushey Book Fair with children excitedly tagging along, eyes wide with wonder. Yet, for many of these young visitors, the experience falls short of its potential. Are we doing enough to nurture their budding curiosity and imagination?

and they can do so only if publishers continue to improve the quality of books.

Books must evolve to challenge outdated notions. Families, societies, and the world are changing. Books should be written considering these factors. The days of rhymes and stories riddled with racist, misogynistic or otherwise insensitive undertones are long gone. Stories must be inclusive and forward-thinking, providing children with lessons about empathy, diversity, and resilience. Children of different ages have different feelings, thoughts, and reading speeds. Authors should write books that will delight children, inform them about age-

appropriate topics, and inspire them to live meaningful lives.

There is a need to publish books on various subjects including rhymes, poems, stories, novels, geography, science, nature, classic literature, fairy tales, mythology, etc. In many countries, different kinds of experiments are going on regarding storytelling, illustration, and printing. Are we doing that? Are we utilising new technologies and possibilities in publishing children's books, considering paper type, binding, cutting, etc in line with the age of the readers? Isn't it natural that children will not want to read a book if its content and printing quality is not good?

Parents play a crucial role in fostering a culture of reading. The seed of love for books are sown at home. Parents who read to their children from infancy and share the joy of storytelling create a lifelong bond between their children and books. It's essential to include books in the family budget, encourage library visits, and celebrate books as thoughtful gifts for birthdays and festivals. Children learn by observing, and when they see their parents read, they're likely to follow suit.

School libraries play an important role in developing reading habits among children. Teachers can encourage children to read books. Free transport could be organised for students from various schools to visit the Amar Ekushey Book Fair.

The Amar Ekushey Book Fair has the potential to be more than a cultural event; it can be a movement that rekindles love for books in a generation inundated with digital distractions. But for that to happen, all stakeholders must step up. It's time to think boldly, act decisively, and reimagine what a child-friendly book fair can be.

'When a govt refuses to go, people accept it until they don't'

Today marks the 50th anniversary of the Fourth Amendment of the constitution that paved the way for a one-party rule in Bangladesh under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Author and researcher Mohiuddin Ahmad talks about the background and formation of BAKSAL in this interview with Priyam Paul of The Daily Star.

In 1972, there were talks about forming a national government. By 1974, there was a national government called BAKSAL. What are your observations on this?

In 1972, many advocated for a national government comprising all political parties that participated in the Liberation War. However, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman did not agree, and instead aimed to establish a one-party government led by the Awami League. As successive crises hit the country, he struggled to manage them. Handling such crises proved impossible for a one-party government.

In 1975, he could have held a midterm election to seek a new mandate. Instead, he chose to form a one-party government called BAKSAL (Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League). This decision was not made with everyone's consent. Members of parliament at the time were forced to join BAKSAL; they were told that their parliamentary membership would be cancelled if they did not join by April 15. This means it was made mandatory. As a result, two MPs from Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JASAD), Moinuddin Manik and Abdullah Sarkar, lost their membership in parliament. Additionally, two Awami League members, Moinul Hossain and MAG Osmany, had already resigned from the party.

Activities of other parties were suspended and all daily newspapers, except four, were shut down. Of the four, two were government-owned: the *Dainik Bangla* and *Bangladesh*

Observer

Was the Fourth Amendment to the constitution done to form BAKSAL?

One month after the amendment, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman announced that there would be a party called BAKSAL and he would be its chairman, while the central committee of Awami League would be known as the committee of BAKSAL. In June 1975, he announced the full committee of BAKSAL. Its affiliated organisations were Chhatra League, Sramik League, Krishak League, Mahila League, and Jubo League. Some members from the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) and National Awami Party (NAP) were included in these committees, but there was none from other parties.

Was forming BAKSAL still necessary after the Fourth Amendment?

Sheikh Mujib wanted a one-party government and absolute power. He believed that with absolute control, he could manage everything. He couldn't tolerate any criticism or dissent. Due to disagreement on various issues, Tajuddin Ahmad had to leave the cabinet. These are well-known facts.



Mohiuddin Ahmad

PHOTO: COURTESY

Some say BAKSAL was formed on CPB's advice. Is there any basis for this?

Moni Singh opposed it, while Mohammad Farhad supported it. Forming BAKSAL was Sheikh Mujib's sole decision.

After a long career in the democratic movement, why did Sheikh Mujibur Rahman undergo this fundamental change after the Liberation War?

When Sheikh Mujib took sole control of Awami League, he did not allow anyone with differing opinions to remain in the party. He

established absolute authority within the party, and since 1964, anyone who opposed him, such as Ataur Rahman Khan and Abul Mansur Ahmad, could not stay. They became his enemies, and the rest were either loyal to him or his subordinates. Therefore, there was never any democracy within the party, and there was no second leader besides Sheikh Mujib either; he was the only leader.

Could you describe the structure of BAKSAL?

BAKSAL had a 15 member executive committee, with Sheikh Mujib as chairman, as well as a secretary general, and three secretaries, including Sheikh Moni. Additionally, there was a 115 member central committee, which included only four members from CPB and NAP.

Did Sheikh Mujib follow any model for BAKSAL?

Sheikh Mujib never mentioned any specific model. It is believed that he came up with this idea on his own. I have detailed this in my book *Bela-Obela*. He mentioned Senegal and Slovenia, among others. He had the mentality of a *morol* (village chief), wanting to control everything. Out of the 300 seats in parliament, 293 were held by Awami League, so why was one-party system necessary? It was because he could not tolerate any criticism, which some newspapers did. He wanted total control. I would say that he was always a dictator, but by forming BAKSAL, he became a fascist.

What was the outcome of BAKSAL?

A one-party rule was established, but Sheikh Mujib did not realise he had lost his popularity. He saw people chanting his name everywhere, but the ground had shifted beneath his feet, and people had turned against him. Constantly surrounded by sycophants, he assumed everyone would agree with him. He left no opportunity for a constitutional change of government. In a parliamentary democracy, elections were supposed to be held every five years. After the 1973 election, the next one was supposed to be held in 1978. However, he declared himself the chairman and president of BAKSAL for the next five years and would decide how many terms he would serve. This meant there was no scope for any change of power through elections. When there is no option to change a government, people either accept it or stage a coup. That is what happened. In August 1975, we witnessed a coup through which the regime changed. Sheikh Mujib had left no other options.

Awami League still believes that BAKSAL was a good initiative. After the 2008 election, Awami League followed a similar path. Although there was a facade of multi-party democracy, in reality, it was a one-person government under Sheikh Hasina's leadership. There are similarities between the two. I would say that this fascist tendency has been ingrained in Awami League's very essence.

INDIGENOUS DEBATE

A nation's heart beats in every leaf



BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

Dr Shamsad Mortuza
is professor of English at
Dhaka University.

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

By now, the story of the "Bangladesh: Don't pluck leaves" graffiti—containing the image of leafy branch representing different groups (Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, and Indigenous/Adibashi)—being removed from a textbook has become stale. On January 12, a group named Students for Sovereignty protested its inclusion in the Class 9-10 Bangla Grammar and Composition textbook, arguing that using the term "Indigenous" was unconstitutional. The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) responded by replacing the plurality tree in the online version of the book with a new slogan that celebrates heroism. The group whose "leaf" was plucked rallied to demand the reinstatement of the graffiti. Members of Students for Sovereignty, clad in national flag bandanas, swooped on them while police remained vigilant in dispersing them. We all read the news of protesters from "ethnic minority" groups being sized up. Journalists have moved on to cover other issues. The minority groups have bled at the hands of the majority to

framework to bring the perpetrators of July violence to justice cannot be selective in its orientation. The argument that the constitution denies ethnic minority groups their Indigenous rights serves as a prime example.

The people—ethnic minority or not—are still people, with rights guaranteed by Article 27 of the constitution, which states that all citizens are equal before

sums up the issue. Without repeating what has already been said, let me focus on the recent news to remind our policy framers of the momentous opportunity to attain a solution to this problem. The path of linear nation-building and majoritarian state formation will keep the issue dormant for future explosion. The recommendation to shift from a Bangalee-centred nation-state to a Bangladeshi identity has opened up



FILE PHOTO: MONG SING HAI MARMA
Demonstrators stage a protest in Rangamati on January 16, 2025 after a group of Indigenous students and their supporters came under attack while staging a protest against the removal of a graffiti from a textbook in Dhaka.

The people—ethnic minority or not—are still people, with rights guaranteed by Article 27 of the constitution, which states that all citizens are equal before the law and entitled to equal protection of the law. The following clauses further entitle to equal protection of the law, and provide scope for affirmative action (positive discrimination) in favour of disadvantaged citizens (Articles 28, 29).

prove they are indeed the minority.

The factual words of reports often fail to capture the inward, private world of the "minority." This is where poets (and, by extension, intellectuals) come in—the ones who react to news, mediate it in invented words, and imagine it in scenarios that can be reimagined and reinterpreted by readers. Poetry, as Ezra Pound would have it, is news that stays news. Poets, then, are the conscientious voices of their time. A note of disclaimer, though: not all poets code and decode news; some simply express their inner thoughts in lyrics.

When we sing of the glory of boxer Sura Krishna Chakma lifting international trophies for his country, of booters Anai and Anuching Mogini, Monika Chakma, Ritu Porna Chakma, and Rupna Chakma wrapping themselves in national flags, we become lyrical poets or factual reporters. Our songs celebrate the tree with all its leaves in green and flowers in red. But such news does not stay news, and such songs do not remain lyrical when we allow one of our groups to bleed. The blood of our minority brothers and sisters bore no race. It displayed the same hue that permeates the veins of all humans. It demonstrated a passion that compelled some of these activists, who are also students, to take part in the July uprising. What distinguishes one group from another is a sociopolitical and cultural construct—a historical strategy. Does history always tell the story of the victor?

Soon after the previous regime fell on August 5, 2024, a short video circulated of a student leader slapping a young bus conductor for demanding the full fare. The conductor held his cheek in pain and utter disbelief. He kept mumbling, "Brother, I was with you in your fight, too. I was there." The division bell rings. No amount of plucking leaves will bring the equality, social justice, and democracy that the present government seeks to attain. A government committed to operating within the global human rights

the law and entitled to equal protection of the law. The following clauses further outlaw discrimination on the grounds of race, religion, and place of birth, and provide scope for affirmative action (positive discrimination) in favour of disadvantaged citizens (Articles 28, 29).

With the surgery currently being done on a comatose constitution, this is actually the right time to address one of the sources of toxicity in our sociopolitical and cultural body. We can finally resolve the disputed status of the "Indigenous" or "small ethnic minority groups". There are about 54 Indigenous peoples in the country, who speak at least 35 different languages. A significant number of them live in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), while the rest are scattered across different regions. Together, they constitute less than two percent of our population. Bangladesh has yet to sign the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, denying them the "Indigenous" status that they have long been demanding. The 1997 CHT Peace Accord between Indigenous peoples and the government made some progress in giving some sort of autonomy to these people. However, little progress has been made in the 27 years since the accord was signed.

For those interested in understanding the nuances and complexities of these terms, the article by mountaineer and social activist Wasfa Nazreen brilliantly

new possibilities.

Let's also try to understand who benefits from alienating the margins from the centre. With insurgent groups operating within and outside our territory, shouldn't we be more prudent in dealing with a group that has had years of resentment towards the groups invading their land and culture? We can all argue who was here first by invoking the earliest migration theory. The Caucasians in the US claimed that the Native Americans crossed the Bering Straits to enter the continent. That makes the Indigenous groups nothing but the earliest migrants. People usually use the same logic to identify those who have been living in a land for long, preserving their distinct cultural markers. There is also a restrictive law about purchasing land that is often cited as a discriminatory privilege that these groups have.

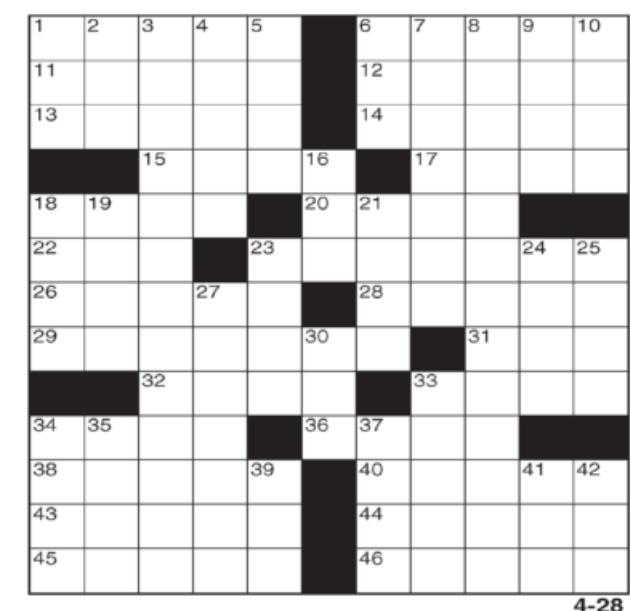
The time has come to move past this exclusionary politics. The beating of the minority groups is a regressive policy. Caving to the protests of some students could cause significant damage to our national fabric. The desire for instant gratification may have long-term consequences that can unsettle not only our nation but also our borders. With equality, social justice, and democracy as the guiding principles of the new government, it is time to reflect on the inner world—and create news that stays news.

CROSSWORD

BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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4-28

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS



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LAW REVIEW

The Cyber Protection law and our problematic 'cyberbullying' provision

In sum, the progress that the Ordinance made lies in naming and defining the offence of cyberbullying and broadening its scope. Yet this 'progress' is overshadowed by its use of rather vague and ambiguous language. Given the intricacies and sophistication of the offence, an ill-defined provision will only exacerbate the crises.

MUHAMMAD KHALID KHAN

With the ever-increasing use of various online means of communication, the prevalence of crimes committed in cyberspace has also been on the rise. Apparently to address the issue of cybercrimes, the infamous Digital Security Act, 2018 (DSA), and later the Cyber Security Act, 2023 (CSA) were passed. Both the laws drew criticisms for their particularly vague language, largely used by the previous regime to suppress dissenting voices. Following the July uprising, the Cyber Protection Ordinance, 2024 was expected to be substantively different. However, on multiple counts, the ordinance fell short to meet our expectations.

Among the several changes brought about through this Ordinance, the explicit recognition of 'cyberbullying' as a distinct offence under Section 25 has been a significant one. Cyberbullying is a growing concern all over the world, with legislation being passed in several jurisdictions to specifically deal with the issue. It is commendable that the interim government decided to legislate in that regard. In fact, the provision on 'cyberbullying'

may appear fine. However, the said provision suffers from certain fatal defects too.

First, the definition of 'cyberbullying' is not specific as to what exactly constitutes the offence. The Explanation to the Section defines 'cyberbullying' as harming one's reputation or mental health by threatening, intimidating or harassing that person, or publishing false or harmful information, spreading insulting or abusive messages about someone, or spreading rumours or defamatory content. Interestingly, we do not find the mention of 'cyberbullying' in the main content of section 25, although 'blackmailing' has been explicitly mentioned there and subsequently defined in the Explanation as well. It is not clear what purpose defining 'cyberbullying' serves when the same has not been used in the main text of the provision.

Notably, both the DSA and CSA criminalised the act of a person intentionally or knowingly sending such data or information to others, known to be offensive, intimidating or false. Thus, the two Acts did in fact cover some aspects of cyberbullying. Therefore, it is not clear what specific objective this new law intends to pursue.

Second, the section does not delineate what degree or seriousness of harm caused to the victim's mental well-being constitutes the offence. Hence, trivial or non-substantial harm to one's mental health may be counted as an offence of cyberbullying, leading to a floodgate of cases coming to the court.

Third, the definition suffers from lack of nuances. The Section does not provide any exceptions. The Online Safety Act 2023 of the UK, for example, provides an exception in favour of recognised news publishers from the offence of 'false communications.' We have a history of section 25 being used against journalists and media outlets, and a lack of exemption can potentially aggravate the situation, instead of ameliorating the same.

In sum, the progress that the Ordinance made lies in naming and defining the offence and broadening its scope. Yet this 'progress' is overshadowed by its use of rather vague and ambiguous language. Given the intricacies and sophistication of the offence, an ill-defined provision will only exacerbate the crises.

The writer works at the Law Desk.

LAW LETTER

Barriers to access justice

In addition to the language barrier, the unaffordable cost of legal services presents another hurdle for the majority. This makes the legal system a privilege only for the wealthy and influential people, leaving marginalised communities suffer in silence.

JEBA MOBASHWIRA

Law is a tool created by the people, for the people, in order to promote fairness and order in society. However, the legal system, frequently marginalises the very people it is meant to serve and protect—the weak, poor and vulnerable. Law and justice have been placed on a pedestal, accessible only to a few who possess the resources, education, and privilege to navigate the system. However, for the general people, law has become a distant and abstract entity, which is difficult to understand, harder to access, beyond their reach.

The pervasive use of legal jargons is a key barrier to access justice. Laws and legal documents are often written in complex technical language which is incomprehensible to the common people. While such language aims to achieve precision, it often prejudices those who do not have any specialised legal knowledge and training. The reluctance to simplify the law perpetuates 'elitism', making legal services increasingly opaque and alienating for the general populace.

In addition to the language barrier, the unaffordable cost of legal services presents



another hurdle for the majority. This makes the legal system a privilege only for the wealthy and influential people, leaving the marginalised communities suffer in silence. The bureaucratic and procedural complexities of the system exacerbate the situation, causing delays that compound the financial and emotional burdens on those seeking justice. The system is designed in such a way that those without power or privilege are forced to navigate endless procedural hurdles, often leaving them disillusioned and without resolution. Thus, justice appears 'so close, yet so far'—within reach but inaccessible when people try to grasp it.

In Bangladesh, the presence

in other sectors, the legal field has lagged behind in adopting digital tools and remains predominantly manual and shrouded in inefficiency. While innovative devices, applications, and AI are being developed to simplify everyday life and reduce human burdens, relatively little attention has been given to making legal systems more accessible, and understandable to the general people.

As Bangladesh stands on the cusp of reforms, the legal sector is one of the most critical areas in need of transformation. To build a more inclusive system, the legal framework must prioritise accessibility, affordability, and availability for all citizens, with particular focus on decentralisation and digitalisation. Outdated laws that perpetuate injustices and no longer reflect contemporary values should be restructured so that the legal system can meet the needs of the modern society. Ultimately, the purpose of the law should be to serve the collective good by ensuring that justice is equally accessible to all, rather than being an exclusive privilege reserved for an elite class.

The writer is LLM candidate at Bangladesh University of Professionals.

LAW ADVOCACY

Bangladesh needs a Mediation Act

AKASH GUPTA AND MOHAIMENUL I. ARNAB

Historically, mediation has been a well-established system for dispute resolution in our subcontinent. Over time, different laws, including the Code of Civil Procedure 1908 (CPC)—the guiding law for civil court proceedings formally adopted the mediation process for dispute resolution. While India enacted the Mediation Act 2023 which provides a framework to mainstream and institutionalise the mediation process for dispute resolution, Bangladesh lacks comprehensive legislation to provide a comprehensive framework for dispute resolution via mediation.

Bangladesh's judiciary is overburdened with a huge backlog of cases due largely to the lack of infrastructure and shortage of judges. The litigation process is often costly; therefore, litigants endure serious hardships. Mediation is an amicable settlement process through which people can, within a short period, resolve their



disputes in a less costly and adversarial way outside the courtroom.

India has recently witnessed a significant growth in people's preference for ADR, especially mediation. Keeping in mind the need for a legal framework for mediation, the Mediation Act, 2023 was enacted, and now it serves as a standalone legislation for mediation. The Act aims to promote and facilitate mediation, especially institutional mediation, enforce mediated settlement agreements, create a body for mediator registration, support community mediation, and make online mediation an accessible and affordable option. It aims to regulate, certify, and promote professional mediation, encourage pre-litigation mediation, make mediation agreements enforceable similar to court orders, and provide a time frame for the mediation process for a timely dispute resolution. Additionally, in its schedules, the law amends many existing laws to make the mediation process streamlined and unified.

Enactment of a legislation similar to the Mediation Act of India has the potential to tackle Bangladesh's existing challenges with backlog. A mediation Act will institutionalise the mediation

The courts must require a mandatory pre-litigation mediation so that disputants attempt mediation before filing suits. Mediation settlement agreements should be treated similarly to a court decree to ensure enforceability and fairness. A mediation council should be in place to oversee the accreditation, training, and other mediation-related issues.

process, allowing people to opt for mediation without filing a suit, and that would significantly reduce the number of cases and burden on the courts.

The Act should be a standalone legislation that works as the guiding legislation regarding mediation, and every other legislation that allows mediation should be amended to remove inconsistencies and ambiguities. The courts must require a mandatory pre-litigation mediation so that disputants attempt mediation before filing suits. Mediation settlement agreements should be treated similarly to a court decree to ensure enforceability and fairness. A mediation council should be in place to oversee the accreditation, training, and other mediation-related issues. The Act should also encourage the accreditation of mediators and mediation centers. It should also provide a fixed timeframe for the process to avoid delays in mediation and ensure timely access to justice. Finally, it should also acknowledge online dispute resolution (ODR).

In conclusion, the Indian Mediation Act, 2023 is a comprehensive law that offers a well-organised, efficient, accessible, and reliable system that adheres to international standards. Enacting a similar mediation law in Bangladesh can promote a people-friendly dispute resolution system—which can ultimately strengthen the overall dispute resolution regime in Bangladesh.

The writers are Assistant Professor of law, Jindal Global Law School, India and student of law, BRAC University respectively.



'I'll keep striving to win more Slams'

Novak Djokovic's injury retirement from his Australian Open semifinal against Alexander Zverev after a gruelling first set on Friday, and his subsequent comments, have left question marks about how the last chapter of his great career might unfold. "It's not like I'm worrying approaching every Grand Slam now whether I'm going to get injured or not, but statistics are against me in a way in the last couple of years. So it is true that, you know, getting injured quite a bit last few years. But I'll keep going. I'll keep striving to win more Slams. And as long as I feel that I want to put up with all of this, I'll be around," Djokovic said after the semifinal.



Sinner, Zverev book title clash IN MELBOURNE

Top-ranked Jannik Sinner overcame cramp in the third set of the semifinal to blow past Ben Shelton 7-6 (7/2), 6-2, 6-2 in Melbourne on Friday to set up a meeting with second seed Alexander Zverev in Sunday's final. Meanwhile, Zverev made it through to the final after Novak Djokovic retired injured from the other semifinal against the German following a 7-6 (7/5) loss in the very first set.

- ⌚ Jannik Sinner is on the cusp of a first successful Grand Slam title defence after winning his maiden major crown in Melbourne last year.
- ⌚ Sinner's victory made the 23-year-old the youngest man to make multiple finals at the Australian Open since Jim Courier in 1992-93 and kept alive his dream of becoming the first Italian to lift three Grand Slam singles trophies.
- ⌚ Meanwhile, Sunday's final is set to be Alexander Zverev's first Australian Open final.
- ⌚ Zverev has been a Grand Slam runner-up twice before, at last year's French Open and the 2020 US Open, but has never lifted one of the big four majors.

Mohammedan suffer first BPL defeat

SPORTS REPORTER

A high-flying Mohammedan SC were stopped in their tracks as they tasted their first defeat in the Bangladesh Premier League, going down 1-0 against newly-promoted Fakirpool Young Men's Club at the Shaheed Dhirendranath Datta Stadium in Cumilla yesterday.

Sardor Jokhono struck the decisive goal in the 66th minute to end Mohammedan's eight-match winning streak. The defeat, however, did not disturb Mohammedan's position at the top of the table as they still hold a five-point lead over second-placed Abahani, who have played a match less.

Mohammedan SC were expected to dominate their way to an inevitable victory against Fakirpool but they were stunned by the minnows, who climbed to seventh with three wins in nine matches.

Mohammedan, expectedly, dominated proceedings from the outset but they could not expose the backline of Fakirpool and were stunned when they conceded from a counterattack. After a few exchanges on the left flank, Uzbek midfielder Jakhonov played a smart one-two with Akobir Turaev before letting loose a powerful shot past Mohammedan goalkeeper Sujan Hossain.

Mohammedan applied constant pressure in search of an equaliser and created several chances but Fakirpool's substitute goalkeeper Saju Ahmed stood tall to thwart at least four chances to pull off the season's biggest upset.

At the Shaheed Barkat Stadium in Gazipur, five-time champions Bashundhara Kings returned to winning ways with a 5-0 win against promoted side Dhaka Wanderers Club. Jonathan Fernandes Reis, Mohammad Sohel Rana, Tapu Barman, Rakibul Hasan and Miguel Ferreira netted one goal apiece in the one-way contest.

Bangladesh Police FC came from behind to clinch a 2-1 win over Rahmatganj MFS at the Rofique Uddin Bhuian Stadium in Mymensingh, thanks to an Al Amin brace.

A fifth win in nine matches took Kings to third on the standings, with 17 points, while Police leapfrogged to sixth with 10 points. Rahmatganj slipped to fourth with 15 points from nine matches.

Sabalenka, Keys promise thunderous slugfest

AFP, Melbourne

The irresistible force of Aryna Sabalenka meets the unbreakable spirit of Madison Keys in an Australian Open women's singles final on Saturday that promises to be a thunderous slugfest.

Defending champion Sabalenka was hailed by beaten semifinalist Paula Badosa as being so good it was "like she's playing a PlayStation" after dishing out a merciless straight sets budgeon to her good friend.

The never-say-die American Keys, who will turn 30 next month, saved eight break points and a match point in a nerve-shredding final set against Iga Swiatek that went all the way to a 10-point tiebreak.

"Definitely some big-hitting. I think that is going to happen," the powerful 19th seed Keys predicted of the final. "Not a lot of long points."

Keys and Sabalenka have met five times previously, with the Belarusian winning four of them, most recently on the Beijing hard courts last year.

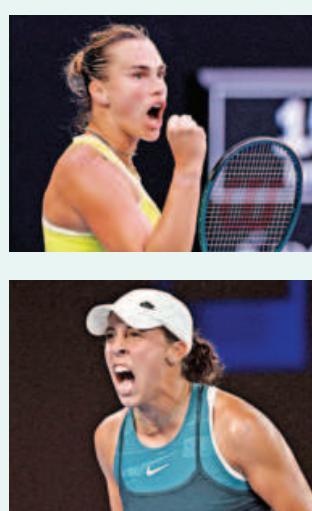
Keys' sole win came on grass in Berlin in 2021.

"She's playing incredible tennis," said Sabalenka.

"She's a very aggressive player, serving well, moving well. She's in a great shape."

"It's going to be a great battle. We had a lot of great battles in the past."

Sabalenka will remain world number one after Swiatek's defeat while Keys is guaranteed to be back



in the top 10 for the first time since 2019 in the new rankings.

Both players are in rampant form and on 11-match win streaks after winning their respective warm-up events.

Sabalenka, the modern day queen of Melbourne Park, has won 20 straight matches on the famous blue hard courts.

If she makes it 21 it will see her complete a treble not witnessed this century.

The last person to achieve the three-peat in Melbourne was Martina Hingis in 1999 and only four other women have done it --

⌚ Defending champion Aryna Sabalenka is aiming to become the first woman since Martina Hingis from 1997-99 to win the Australian Open title three times in a row.

⌚ Victory on Saturday would also see Sabalenka become the sixth woman to win three straight Australian Open titles, joining Margaret Court, Evonne Goolagong Cawley, Steffi Graf, Monica Seles, and Hingis.

⌚ Sabalenka won four of the five clashes against Madison Keys.

⌚ This is set to be Sabalenka's fifth Slam final while Keys will be playing in her second.

Margaret Court, Evonne Goolagong, Steffi Graf and Monica Seles.

Three in a row is a rare achievement at any Slam and has only been done this century on three occasions.

At Roland Garros Justine Henin completed the treble in 2007 and Iga Swiatek emulated it last year.

Serena Williams won 23 Grand Slam singles titles but only managed a hattrick once, at the US Open from 2012-14.

Sabalenka will be in her fifth Slam final, Keys in only her second, having lost the 2017 US Open final 6-3, 6-0 to Sloane Stephens.

Kings owner admits Emon's non-payment

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

Players' non payment issue in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) is refusing to die down on Friday Chittagong Kings admitted that they are yet to pay anything to Bangladesh cricketer Parvez Hossain Emon due to "personal reasons".

Earlier, Chittagong's Sri Lankan pacer Binura Fernando had alleged that he had not been paid the promised amount by the franchise, a claim the team officials denied. But when asked about Emon's issue, franchise owner Sameer Quader Chowdhury admitted not paying Emon a dime without any hesitation.

"I didn't pay Emon because of personal reasons. My money doesn't grow on trees, I need some self-satisfaction. That's it... There are a few personal and franchise issues. I will make my decision after discussing it with the player and the board," Sameer told The Daily Star yesterday.

Sameer, however, did not divulge the exact reason for the non-payment.

"Of course, I will complete the payment, but before that I need to be satisfied," he added.

The Daily Star tried to contact Emon but the player could not be reached.

It was learnt that Emon did not travel with the team from Chattogram to Dhaka yesterday for their remaining matches.

A source who spoke with Emon told The Daily Star that the opener has verbally informed the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) about his non payment and is expected to lodge an official complaint. BPL governing council's member secretary Nazmul Abedeen Fahim was contacted for a comment on the development but also could not be reached.

Till he gets any kind of assurance, Emon plans to practice individually in preparation for the upcoming ICC Champions Trophy, scheduled to be held in Pakistan and the UAE from February 19.

Emon has underwhelmed in this BPL so far, making only 103 runs in seven matches. He also lost his place in the XI in the previous two games.

Meanwhile, Sameer claimed that his team has already cleared 25 to 50 percent payment of other local players and at least 50 percent of the overseas players which included Binura.

"By the time Binura had played one match, he had received 50 percent payment... Now, he has received 70 percent payment and he is not even in Bangladesh," he concluded.



Pakistan captain Shan Masood slogsweeps one during the team's practice session at the Multan Cricket Stadium ahead of the second Test against the West Indies, which gets underway today. Having beaten the visitors by 127 runs in the first Test, the hosts will be banking on their spin-heavy attack to make it a clean sweep.

PHOTO: PCB

Top-four battle intensifies as City host Chelsea

AGENCIES

A top-four finish is on the forefront of the agenda as reigning Premier League champions Manchester City host Chelsea on Saturday.

The two teams lock horns for the first time since the opening day of the season in August last year when the Citizens secured a 2-0 win at Stamford Bridge and since then have had a topsy-turvy ride, with both their title aspirations being quashed.

Wednesday's dramatic 4-2 defeat to PSG left City on the brink of an early UEFA Champions League exit, with their worst campaign under Pep Guardiola threatening to reach a new nadir.

In the Premier League, however, City have turned something of a corner lately, taking 10 points from their last four games to boost their hopes of a top-four



finish and have a chance to move into the top-four spots with a win as they are two points off Chelsea (40).

After a run of just one win in nine league games from the start of November (D2 L6), City have now won three of their last four (D1). They have scored 14 goals in this run, more than they had in their previous 11 league games (D3).

Guardiola has moved to strengthen his backline -- a part of his side that is

largely responsible for their plight this season -- with the January acquisitions of Abdulkadir Khusanov and Vitor Reis, both of whom could be involved in the matchday squad on Saturday with fellow defender Ruben Dias a doubt. Also eligible is Omar Marmoush, who arrived from Eintracht Frankfurt for an estimated £63million on Thursday.

Prior to leaving Eintracht, Marmoush recorded 15 goals and nine assists in 17 Bundesliga games in 2024-25, and 20 goals and 13 assists in 26 games in all competitions.

Alongside fellow Egyptian Mohamed Salah, Marmoush is one of just two players from Europe's top five leagues in double figures for goals and assists in all competitions this term.

Enzo Maresca's hopes of overseeing a title charge are surely over after Chelsea went five league games without a victory either side of New Year, though they put a halt to their slump by beating Wolves 3-1 on Monday.

Chelsea have failed to win any of their last 10 meetings with the Citizens across all competitions (D2 L8) since beating Guardiola's side 1-0 in the 2021 Champions League final, three weeks after they claimed their last Premier League win over Man City (2-1) at the Etihad in the same season.

Guardiola has moved to strengthen his backline -- a part of his side that is



Khulna Tigers skipper Mehedi Hasan Miraz, Abu Hider Rony, and Afif Hossain, and Pakistani all-rounder Mohammad Nawaz take a selfie after returning to Dhaka on Friday following the end of the Chattogram phase of the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League (BPL). The final phase of BPL will begin in Mirpur tomorrow, but Khulna will resume their campaign a day later when they take on defending champions Fortune Barishal at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium.



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STABBING OF COMPUTER TRADERS

Chhatra Dal leader held; supporters 'attack' police

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least five police personnel were injured when supporters of a Chhatra Dal leader allegedly assaulted them at New Market Police Station early yesterday. The assault occurred to free the leader from custody after his arrest over an attack on two computer traders.

Mohammad Hossain, alias Mithun, 35, joint general secretary of Chhatra Dal's central committee, was arrested by police from Purbachal.

At least 30 of Mithun's supporters attempted to block the police vehicle as it entered the New Market Police Station premises around 4:00am.

They then clashed with police officers in an effort to free Mithun, according to DMP Additional Commissioner (Crime and Operations) SN Nazrul Islam.

Tariq Latif, assistant commissioner of police (New Market Zone), was among the injured cops.

A case has been filed for the assault on police officers.

Six individuals were arrested from the scene, including Bashir Islam, Mohammad Hasan, Mohammad Imon, Masum Mahmud, Mohammad Alamin, and Akbar Ali, said Talebur Rahman, deputy commissioner (media) of DMP.

Mithun's arrest is linked to an attack on two computer shop owners, Wahedul Hasan Dipu and Ehteshamul Haque, on Elephant Road on January 10.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 5

OF CRONIES AND CRIMES

Bahar: the patron of Cumilla's goons

KHALID BIN NAZRUL

Some people of Cumilla, along with a section of the Awami League, started supporting former Chhatra League leader AKM Bahauddin Bahar in the '80s to usher in a new era of young leadership and counter the influence of late party heavyweight Afzal Khan's family in regional politics. Little did they know what was ahead of them.

Since defeating Afzal in the 1984 municipality chairman polls, Bahar established a group loyal to him – an era marred by murder accusations against Bahar's followers until his ouster along with the Awami League regime last August.

Bahar allegedly used muscle power to take control of the government institutions in Cumilla to build his fortune through irregularities, tender manipulation and extortion in the real estate, transport and other sectors, along with illegal drug dealings.

Former Cumilla-6 MP Bahar's luxurious triplex house in Munsebari, a 10-storied building housing Cumilla City Awami League office in Ramghatla, and Cumilla Club in the Town Hall premises that Bahar and his people used as their own office were torched during the fall of the AL regime last August. Bahauddin Bahar and his daughter Tahsin Bahar Suchona reportedly fled to India after the political



changeover.

Nizam Uddin Kaiser, former convener of Svechchhasebok Dal's Cumilla City unit, told The Daily Star that Bahar created a sense of panic among the people. "They don't believe that Bahar can't make a comeback because his accomplices in crime are still unharmed and staying in different areas of the city," Nizam said.

MURDERS

After being elected municipality chairman, Bahar focused on strengthening Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) in late '80s, with his supporters' activities centring on Cumilla Victoria College, Cumilla town and Sadar Upazila.

Nearly a decade later, in 1998, BCL leader Jahid Babu was killed allegedly in an infighting between Bahar's followers.

Obaidul Haque Dulal, former general secretary of BCL's Victoria College unit, then left Bahar's group, accusing the Awami League leader of assisting the killers of Jahid.

After three years, Dulal was himself murdered.

His uncle Kabirul Islam Shikder, an Awami League leader and former president of Cumilla District BCL, said, "Bahar's political career is based on the support of my brother Shafiqul Islam Shikder and other family members. But Bahar's men were involved in killing Dulal."

Even before his rise, Bahar was allegedly

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

Jeweller shot, robbed of 50 bhori gold

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Armed muggers shot a jewellery trader and reportedly robbed 50 bhori of gold and Tk 3.5 lakh from his possession in the capital.

The incident occurred in the Beribadh area of Kamrangirchar around 11:00pm on Thursday.

The injured businessman, Sajal Rajbongshi, 37, is currently admitted to Popular Hospital in Dhammendi, said police.

Sajal's brother, Joy Rajbongshi, said their family resides in the Jelepara area of Hazaribagh and runs a jewellery store in Kamrangirchar.

On his way home after closing the shop, Sajal, on a motorcycle, was ambushed near the Beribadh area by seven to eight muggers on multiple motorcycles. They shot him on his left knee and snatched a bag containing gold and cash from his shoulder.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 5



Preparations for Amar Ekushey Book Fair, especially the construction of bookstalls, are underway at Suhrawardy Udyana. Each year in February, the Bangla Academy organises the month-long fair. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Violence in West Bank imperils Gaza truce
Warns UN rights office

AGENCIES

Israeli operations in the West Bank have killed at least 12 Palestinians since Tuesday and could threaten the newly agreed ceasefire in Gaza, United Nations Human Rights office spokesperson Thameen Al-Kheetan said yesterday.

Hundreds of Jenin residents fled their homes as the military demolished a number of houses on the third day of a major operation in the West Bank city on Thursday.

The operation was launched within days of the start of a ceasefire in Gaza that saw the first exchange of Israeli hostages for Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails since a brief truce in November 2023.

A senior Hamas official told AFP that his group provided the names of four Israeli women hostages to be freed today as part of a second release under the ceasefire with Israel.

Israeli officials said the Jenin operation in the West Bank was aimed at what the military said were Iranian-backed groups in the refugee camp adjacent to the city, a major hub for armed Palestinian groups for years.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 5



Novak Djokovic acknowledges the applause as he exits the court after retiring from the semifinal of the Australian Open against Germany's Alexander Zverev in Melbourne on Friday. The 24-time Grand Slam winner, who beat Carlos Alcaraz in a four-set quarterfinal battle, lost the first set against Zverev in tiebreaker before retiring hurt with a muscle tear.

PHOTO: AFP

GRAFT ALLEGATIONS

Sri Lanka 'revokes' power purchase deal with Adani

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka has revoked a power purchase agreement with Indian conglomerate Adani Group following allegations of corruption, energy ministry sources in Colombo said yesterday.

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's administration opened probes into the company's local projects after billionaire founder Gautam Adani was charged with bribery in the United States late last year.

The administration of his predecessor had agreed in May 2024 to buy electricity at US\$0.0826 per kilowatt from an Adani wind power complex yet to be built in the island nation's northwest.

Bunt a top energy ministry official said Dissanayake's cabinet decided this month not to proceed with the deal.

The government has revoked the power purchase agreement, but the project is not cancelled. A committee has been appointed to review the entire project, the source told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Several activists had challenged the agreement, arguing that smaller renewable projects were selling electricity at two-thirds the price of Adani.

US arrests, deports hundreds of migrants

Says White House; Trump admin to appeal judge's decision on ending birthright citizenship

AGENCIES

Hundreds of migrants in the United States were arrested Thursday and others flown out of the country on military aircraft as President Donald Trump's promised mass deportation operation got underway, the White House said.

The crackdown came as Trump yesterday prepared to head to California and North Carolina, where natural disasters have turned into political footballs, in his first trip since his return to office.

And on another whirlwind day in his first week as president, Trump told Fox News he would "rather not" impose tariffs on China, after repeated vows to hit America's biggest economic rival with hefty import levies.

The Republican also said he would reach out to Kim Jong Un again, calling the North Korean leader he previously met three times a "smart guy."

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said Trump's administration on Thursday "arrested 538 illegal immigrant criminals," adding "hundreds" were deported by military aircraft.

"The largest massive deportation

operation in history is well underway," she said in a post on social media platform X.

Meanwhile, a federal judge on Thursday blocked Trump's administration from implementing the Republican president's executive order curtailing the right to automatic birthright citizenship in the United States, calling it "blatantly unconstitutional."

Seattle-based US District Judge John Coughenour issued a temporary restraining order at the urging of four Democratic-led states – Washington, Arizona, Illinois and Oregon – preventing the administration from enforcing the order. Trump had signed the order on Monday, his first day back in office.

The judge, an appointee of Republican former president Ronald Reagan, dealt the first legal setback to the hardline policies on immigration that are a centerpiece of Trump's second term as president, reports Reuters.

"Obviously we'll appeal," Trump said of Coughenour's ruling.

Trump on Thursday also ordered the declassification of the last secret files on the assassination of president John F Kennedy, a case that still fuels conspiracy theories more than 60 years after his death, reports AFP.

Astronomers discover the windiest planet in the universe

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Astronomers have discovered a huge planet with the fastest wind speeds ever observed in the universe.

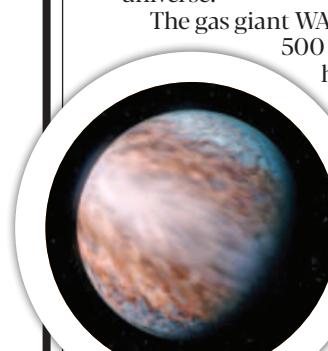
The gas giant WASP-127b, which is located over 500 light years away from Earth, has winds that travel around its equator six times faster than the planet's rotation speed.

Observations from the European Southern Observatory's Very Large Telescope recorded wind speeds that reach up to 33,000 kilometres per hour (20,000mph).

"This is something we haven't seen before," said Lisa Nortmann, a scientist at the University of Göttingen, Germany.

"Part of the atmosphere of this planet is moving towards us at a high velocity while another part is moving away from us at the same speed. This signal shows us that there is a very fast, supersonic, jet wind around the planet's equator."

The supersonic winds are more than 60 times faster than the fastest winds ever observed on Earth, which were recorded during an exceptionally powerful F5 tornado in Oklahoma, US, in 1999.



A new era in elderly care

JBFRH brings Japanese-standard retirement homes to Bangladesh

"One of the most fascinating aspects of Japanese culture, which moved and touched me, is the way they take care of the elderly population. All of us know that Japan is the forerunner in the field of geriatric, ie, elderly healthcare, and living in Japan for five and half years I could see the beauty of it."

RAFFAT BINTE RASHID

Dr Asha Islam Nayem, a professor in the Department of History at the Dhaka University, has a heart-wrenching story.

Her father, Professor Sirajul Islam, an eminent historian and the chief editor of the national encyclopaedia of Bangladesh, Banglapedia, is suffering from dementia. A neurological anomaly that not only robs you of your memory but makes simple everyday tasks like brushing your teeth or using the bathroom a difficulty; simply because you cannot remember the reflexes.

In one of her articles, Dr Asha Islam Nayem writes:

"My father has lost all sense of time and space. He lives in a lonely and scary world of hallucinations. He keeps looking for his parents, not believing us when we tell him that an 85-year-old person can't have living parents. We must keep the front door of our apartment always locked from the inside because dementia patients tend to slip out of the house to go looking for his/her parents, ending up getting lost."

Dementia is a very tricky disease to detect, especially if the person has always been forgetful. That is probably why my father's dementia was detected very late. He always had been the absent-minded professor, always losing his glasses, wallet, pens, umbrellas, etc. That is why when he used to keep asking the same question



PHOTO: COURTESY



repeatedly, forgetting appointments, what medicines he took, forgetting names, we thought it was because he was aging."

Hers is not the only story that relates to such a sad reality. Taking care of your elderly parents is something we are all struggling with currently. You will often come across advertisements, notices, or Facebook posts of people desperately looking for their mother or father, who has lost their way home and doesn't know who he or she is.

In this race to earn enough for our families, we are compromised when it comes to taking care of our aging parents, let alone giving them the dignified life they deserve at the golden end of their lives.

It is the truth; taking your parents for their cataract operation, getting them hearing aids, assuring them they still look good after having to take out their front tooth, aiding them with walkers, caring for your ailing parent is a full-time job. There are multiple responsibilities if they need hospice care. On top of this crucial responsibility, you simultaneously have your full-time office to ensure financial stability, the job of being a parent, and the chore of running a household. This kind of life is just plain taxing and responsibility fatigue seeps in.

There is no harm in allowing specialised geriatric care homes to help you tackle this situation better. We need to learn to accept that in modern metropolitan life, retirement homes are a requirement."

COMPREHENSIVE HEALTHCARE HOME FOR SENIOR CITIZENS

After graduating from Dhaka Medical College, Dr Sarder A Nayem went to Tokyo University to obtain a higher degree in the surgical department. There he developed some precious friendships and lifelong relationships with his professors and mentors and learned to value the need for basic care.

"One of the most fascinating aspects of Japanese culture, which moved and touched me, is the way they take care of the elderly population. All of us know that Japan is the forerunner in the field of geriatric, ie, elderly healthcare, and living in Japan for five and half years I could see the beauty of it," says Professor Nayem, chairman of Japan Bangladesh Friendship Hospital (JBFRH) and Japan Bangladesh Friendship Retirement Homes (JBFRH).

Thus, he sowed the seed of establishing a Japanese-standard comprehensive geriatric healthcare facility in Bangladesh, the result of which is JBFRH in Rupganj upazila.

It is a smooth ride till the absolute end of the 300-foot road in Purbachal you take a turn under the Kanchan bridge, a straight drive from there would take to JBFRH in 15 minutes or so. This easily accessible facility is the first-ever comprehensive healthcare home, where you can avail yourself of all kinds of geriatric healthcare and treatment facilities for senior citizens in Bangladesh with a modern living concept. Hospice care or end-of-life care is a unique and essential part of

this project.

"Chasing my dream for the elderly care home project, I started with just buying the first small piece of land 12 years back and unconditionally my friends and partners came forward to make this project a huge success despite the social and cultural taboo against the old-age home in our society," Sarder says.

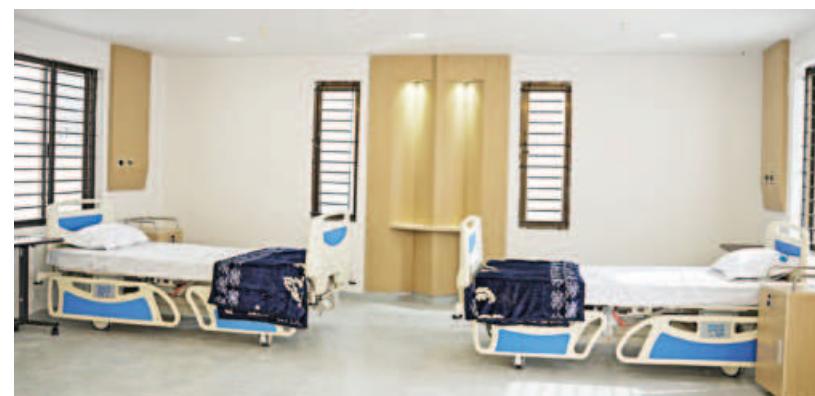
JBFRH has 232 state-of-the-art studio apartments that are designed to create a gated community that prioritises safety, convenience, and social engagement for the country's aging population.

SPECIALISED AND TAILORED CARE
There are times when family members are not aware of the specialised kind of care the elders need especially those suffering from dementia or are terminally ill. JBFRH offers need-based on-site healthcare services through a complete geriatric hospital set-up. Besides routine medical check-ups, they have skilled nursing staff and professional caregivers to offer specialised care, including dementia care or palliative care, ensuring that

"For residents requiring end-of-life care, we offer a compassionate approach that focuses on comfort, dignity, and peace. And our palliative care services are also designed to support both the individual and their loved ones during this sensitive time."

every patient receives the appropriate and right level of medical attention they require.

"For residents requiring end-of-life care, we offer a compassionate approach that focuses on comfort, dignity, and peace. And our palliative care services are also designed to support both the individual and their loved ones during this sensitive time," says Dr Sarder



adding that they have special moveable medical beds that can be taken out to the roof garden for them to enjoy nature.

The facility offers essential services concerning mobility aids, assistive technologies, on-site medical services, personalised meal plans, fitness and mental wellness resources, and opportunities for social activities and offers personalised meal plans prepared by nutritionists and professional chefs.

"Spiritual and cultural well-being is integral to the facility's mission, providing spaces for personal reflection, meditation, and religious practices," says Dr SAM Ashik Ur Rahman, director (coordination), Japan Bangladesh Friendship Retirement Homes & Foundation.

Designed to provide cosy and accessible living spaces whether in studio apartments or in palliative care, terminal care, and hospice facilities, all their accommodations are equipped with essential amenities.

"Meals are tailored to individual preferences or medical requirements, such as low sodium, diabetic friendly, or gluten-free diets in our room service, restaurants, and coffee shops," says Dr Rahman.

This centre is not any regimented place instead special focus is given to recreational and social activities designed to stimulate both the mind and body. They encourage socialisation to combat isolation and also allow residents the opportunity to remain active and engaged in their daily lives. This five-star resort-like elderly home has fitness classes, a library, movie theatres, indoor games, interactive sessions, river cruises, arts and crafts workshops, gardening, music sessions, group outings, and celebrations of special events.

Quoting Dr Asha Islam Nayem:

"It is a blessing that the JBFRH is about to begin its journey. Professor Sirajul Islam is going to be one of the first residents of this institute. My father doesn't have to be locked in his apartment anymore. Because it is a gated community, my father can safely leave his room and roam around the grounds. He can overcome his depression as he will find people of his generation to talk to."

He can enjoy everything that I am unable to provide him now like exercise facilities, outdoor excursions, round-the-clock assistance, and, most of all, comradeship. My father's senses are most calm when he is surrounded by caring people. Locked up in my apartment, my father is living a lonely and depressing life, whereas, at JBFRH, he will have the freedom of movement, something that every human being craves and deserves to have.

The more such facilities develop, the faster we can overcome the cultural inhibitions that we have towards retirement homes or old homes as they are commonly called."

On that note, try and acknowledge the fact that sending your loved ones to one such healthcare facility is not signing their death sentences. Rather, it is giving them a chance to live with dignity in supervised facility despite their old age complications; a chance you cannot give, even if you can afford the best medical attention.



DESIGN: AMREETA LETHE

FICTION

Accursed

"This is a strange incident that happens here. But as this place is near the fringes of the Sundarbans and as there is no human habitation here, it is only familiar to the boatmen. There is history behind it, but that is not well known to the boatmen. Let me tell you instead."

BIBHUTIBHUSHAN BANDYOPADHYAY

A very strange thing happened in my life then. It was about three years ago. I had to visit a place near Barishal on business.

I got on a boat from a bazaar in that area around noon. There was a man from Barishal on the same boat. Time passed by in gossip.

It was just after puja. The sky remained cloudy throughout the day. It began to rain occasionally. But the sky became a bit clearer moments before the evening. The light of the chaturdashi moon was revealed gradually through the broken clouds.

As soon as evening fell, we left the big river and came to a canal—we heard that the canal began from here and united with the river Meghna passing through the north of Noakhali. It was my first time going to East Bengal; everything appeared new to my eyes. The chaturdashi moon glittered behind the clouds in the rain-bathed screw pine jungle on the two sides of the narrow canal. There were big fields on the bank of the river at intervals. In certain places the zedoary, cane, and fern bushes bent towards the water of the canal...Though it was cold outside, I sat out of the chei watching everything...That part of Barishal was close to the Sundarbans. Small lakes and canals were everywhere, and the sea was not very far—Sandip and Hati were only 10 or 15 miles southeast. The night grew late. The solitary jungle on both sides of the canal appeared strange in the dim moonlight. In this part, there was no habitation, only dense forests and big hogla trees by the water.

My companion said, "Don't stay outside at this time of night. Come inside the chei. In this jungle—Do you understand?"

He began to tell many stories of the Sundarbans—of how his uncle was supposed to have worked in the forest department, and how he had visited many parts of the Sundarbans on his launch.

It was almost 12 o'clock at night.

We only had one steersman on our boat. He said out loud, "Babu, there will be a big river ahead. I cannot cross the river alone at this time of night. Let's keep the boat here."

The boat was tied down at that very place. Meanwhile, the moon had set behind the big trees; I saw big woods engulfed in darkness on the two sides of the narrow canal. There was no sound; even the insects had fallen silent...I said to my companion, "Mister, the lake is so narrow—Won't tigers jump on the boat from

the banks?"

My companion said, "I'll be surprised if they don't."

Hearing this, I sat against the chei in great astonishment. We sat for a while, and then my companion said, "Come, let's lie down a bit. We won't be able to sleep, and we shouldn't sleep, but let's close our eyes for some time."

I remained silent for a while, and when I went to call my partner I saw he had fallen asleep. I did not think that the steersman was awake either. I thought then, "Why should I stay awake for no reason?" I made preparations to follow in the footsteps of great men.

What happened next was an uncanny experience. When I was about to lie down, I heard someone playing the gramophone somewhere deep inside the jungle, on the other side of the dark woods...I sat up in a hurry—gramophone? Who would play the gramophone at this time of night, and that too in the middle of these dense woods? I listened carefully. It was not a gramophone. From where the dark hijol hinal forest grew dense, someone was saying something in a loud, afflicted voice...After listening to it for a while, I felt it was the combined voices of more than one person. This was almost like the music which comes from the roof of the neighbour's three storied building—a bit intelligible, a bit unintelligible, but still a nice unbroken melody reaches the ear. Incomprehensible Bangla words reached my ears, but I could not discern what they were. The sound lasted only a few minutes, and then the dark forest became as silent as before...I quickly came out of the chei. The surrounding darkness was as black as luffa seeds. The forest was silent except for the murmur of the ebbing water beneath the boat and a kind of incomprehensible noise in the screw pine bush by the water due to the late-night breeze. The trunks of the black hijol trees away from the bank assumed a strange look in the darkness.

I thought of waking my companions. Then I thought, the poor fellows were sleeping—what was the point in waking them up? It would be better if I stayed awake. I lit a cigarette while standing. When I was about to go back inside the chei, a clear, loud and afflicted sharp noise, resembling the drone of crickets, pierced the breast of the concrete darkness like an arrow and reached the sky from somewhere in the vast forest: "Hey! Passengers of the boat, who are you? Are you there? We are suffocating to death...please save us."

I began to listen to the history of Kirtipashar Gour in the smoky light of the kerosene lamp amid the bosom of the dark forest.

The steersman of the boat woke up in a hurry. I called my companion, "Mister, oh Mister, wake up! Wake up!"

The steersman pressed against me; his voice was trembling with fear. He said, "Allah! Allah! Did you hear, babu?"

My companion woke up and asked, "What, what, Mister? Why did you call me? Is there a beast or something?"

I told him the matter. He also climbed out of the chei quickly. The three of us listened together, carefully. Everything fell silent again...The ebbing water made a greater sound than before, pooling beneath the boat.

My companion asked the steersman, "What is it then?"

The steersman replied, "Babu, Kirtipashar Gour is on the left."

"Then why did you tie the boat here at this time of night? You fool!"

"I tied it here as there are three of us. It was not possible to pull back the boat against the ebbing tide," said the steersman.

Listening to the nature of their conversation, I asked my companion, "What, Mister, what is the matter? Do you know anything?"

It was not in fear as much as it was in astonishment that we all had become alarmed. My companion said, "Oh, you! Light your kerosene lamp. Let's sit with the lights on. There's still a long night ahead."

I asked the steersman, "Did you hear the sound?"

"Yes babu," he said, "the sound woke me up. I've heard this call twice before while steering my boat."

My partner said, "This is a strange incident that happens here. But as this place is near the fringes of the Sundarbans and as there is no human habitation here, it is only familiar to the boatmen. There is history behind it, but that is not well known to the boatmen. Let me tell you instead."

I began to listen to the history of Kirtipashar Gour in the smoky light of the kerosene lamp amid the bosom of the dark forest.

This is an excerpt from Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's short story "Abhishapta", translated by Dipty Rahman.

Dipty Rahman is a lecturer in the department of English, American International University-Bangladesh (AIUB).

POETRY

Will you remember me?

A.M. FAHAD

When the night goes quiet
and the Krishnachura and lilies sink into their graves
and softly whisper into my ear—"come"
Will you think of me when my foot is already one step outside the door?
If the meaning to our lives primarily revolves around love
I would be a middle aged gambler on the brink of announcing bankruptcy
Gambling away pieces of my heart like that in a slot machine
from pouring on a bottomless empty cup
Have I disappointed you with my fragility?
Are my eyes no longer beautiful in the sunlight that pierces through 359 AQI?
Am I still lovable like that day when I was grumpy to myself until fed a BFC burger
when I smiled and all my bare teeth shone back to you
But only maybe the possibility remains
I was never beautiful and you were never the sun
If I disregard the mutual exclusivity of our fundamental disinclination towards pulling our eyes from their lonely sockets and handing them to each other to see the world through



ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

Will you acquit me of all my failures?
And have me detach my arms from around the bend of my throat
I cannot live like this much longer
The illusion in the moonlight lies in its coexistence under the same sky with the sun, just a few hundred thousand miles away from the ground the sun can touch, you will find a patch of grass devoid of sunlight
When moon fades into dawn and when I pass away with it
Will you think of all that I was?
All my love, my incessant monologues on brain rot or Nintendo or scummy corporations—
when the night goes quiet
and the Krishnachura petals and lilies sink into my grave
In your ever-unchanging plane of self destructive solitude
Will you remember me?

A.M. Fahad wants to become a more prolific poet and writer. He is based in Dhaka, and he loves creating stories out of the mundane. Send him tips at amfahad1747@gmail.com so that he can stop falling into slumps every other week.



POETRY

Tupperware cake

RUBINA NUSRAT PUSPA

I baked a cake for your birthday recently—or better yet, I tried

The ingredients for this cake were like no other:

1 and 3/4 cups of sugar, 2 cups of i-love you (my mother

warns me that is too much / what is the use of loving

someone so much other than your direct family?),

3/4 cups of dark cocoa powder, 2 cups of flour (this,

my mother is okay with), 1 tablespoon of anxiety (are

you sure that's enough?), some sprinkle of baking

soda, baking powder, and salt, 2 teaspoons of vanilla

extract, 2 tablespoons of anger and resentment (you

will need more sugar to balance out the bitterness),

3 large eggs, 1 cup of buttermilk, 3 cups of i-hope this

year-treats you better-than-the-last (a frown marks

my mother's forehead for always giving too much of

myself away / she sees herself in me and she does not

like it), 3/4 cup of vegetable oil, 1/2 strongly brewed

coffee, and lastly, 1 cup of i-am-proud-of-you (who is

proud you, my mother looks me in the eye and asks / my mouth is sewn shut)

I take the frosting out of the fridge—because really what is a cake without the frosting; (because really what I am without celebrating the day you were born)

I flip a Tupperware to build a make-believe cake box

(my mother looks at me with pointed skepticism laced

into her stare / it's a hack I saw on Instagram, I tell

her / she finds it absurd, the miles I am willing to go

for you)

I press the Tupperware shut and wonder if you, too, will

feel the same

Rubina Nusrat Puspa is a part-time writer and full-time student with question marks floating around her head. You can reach her at rubinanusratpuspa@gmail.com.

ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

Novera eager to shed 'Rickshaw Girl' moniker

RAKSHANDA RAHMAN MISHA

You may know Novera Rahman as the *Rickshaw Girl*, the titular character of the Amitabh Reza Chowdhury directorial, but she is more than that. She is a painter, actress and a producer who yearns to play rebellious characters on-screen. Although the award-winning film was finished years ago and was initially set to release in 2020, the global pandemic delayed its premiere in country. It finally released in Bangladeshi halls yesterday.

Rickshaw Girl was originally made to cater to international audiences—so the characters had to speak in English, which came pretty easily for Novera.

drama. Novera faced the same thing when a project, also titled *Rickshaw Girl*, was featured on television, starring Tanjin Tisha.

"A few years ago, I woke up to a message from someone who sent me a newspaper interview. It featured Tanjin Tisha as the 'Rickshaw Girl.' At first, I thought it was a mistake—maybe they had printed an unrecognisable photo of me. However, it turned out to be Tanjin Tisha in 'brownface', intentionally exhibiting a 'darker' face through makeup, portraying a character who turned out to be a TV ripoff of my film. They even copied the exact color and style of my costume for it!" exclaimed Novera.

I can speak all kinds of Bangla—from posh to street. The difficulty arose when I had to speak English in a way that felt natural to native English speakers while also making it sound like English spoken by a Bangladeshi.

"I was raised in Dhaka, so I can speak all kinds of Bangla—from posh to street," said the actress, who had dropped by for an interview with The Daily Star. "The challenge, however, was toning down my American accent. Having spent some time in America, the difficulty arose when I had to speak English throughout the film in a way that felt natural to native English speakers while also making it sound like English spoken by a Bangladeshi." To achieve this, Novera listened to 1970s footage to capture the unique Bangladeshi accent of that time, which isn't fully British or American. "I further added a hint of street lingo to it, as well."

It's rare to catch glimpse of female rickshaw pullers on the streets of Dhaka, and so when we asked Novera whether she could refer to one while shooting. She shared the inspiring story of *Shimu apa*, a female rickshaw puller who lives on her own.

"Believe it or not, there are female rickshaw pullers in Dhaka, particularly in the outskirts of the city. I spent a day with *Shimu apa*, observing her life and walking around her neighborhood as though she owned it. Watching her confidently navigate her world really inspired me and gave me the strength to play Naima," revealed the artiste.

Novera deeply immersed herself in her character by studying the history of rickshaws and Bangladeshi folk art. She explored the ties between folk art, cinema posters, and rickshaws, uncovering how rickshaws once served as mobile billboards for film advertisements. For *Rickshaw Girl*, she worked with Solaibam Hossain, one of the most well-known rickshaw artists in Bangladesh.

When you put in so much effort and time into a project, it's only natural to feel disheartened you're your work is being replicated for a television

"It felt like someone had not only done 'brownface' to represent me, but also stolen my artwork before it could reach its audience. It broke my heart. Unfortunately, I don't think Bangladesh has strong copyright laws to protect artists and creators. It seems anyone can take someone's idea, replicate it, and move forward without facing any consequences," added the artiste.

Many female-oriented films are being made recently, but while they receive critical acclaim, they often lack commercial success.

"I think this happens because the characters aren't complex enough—audiences enjoy watching layered, multidimensional characters, regardless of gender. These films often focus heavily on struggles, but don't include enough entertainment value to draw viewers. I believe this will improve as more female screenwriters and directors emerge to share stories from our own perspective," she asserted.

The release of *Rickshaw Girl* in Bangladesh marks the end of an era for young Novera Rahman, after being called that for the better part of a decade. "It's a relief, a huge one, for me. I am now ready to move on to better things. Here's to hoping!"



PHOTO: SHAHREAR KABIR HEEML

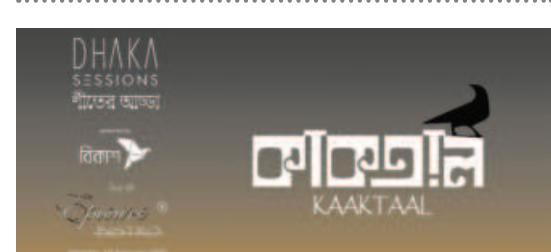
OUT AND ABOUT IN DHAKA



'It's in Our Nature'
January 26 | 6 pm-9 pm
DrikPath Bhabon, Panthapath



Exhibition 'Nalini'
January 21-27 | 3 pm-9 pm
Alliance Française de Dhaka,
Dhanmondi



Kaaktaal Live on Dhaka Sessions
February 1 | 10:30 am- 1 pm
Epicure Bistro, Gulshan 2

WHAT'S PLAYING

'Die with a Smile' by Lady Gaga and Bruno Mars

Die with a Smile, an indisputably hit collaboration between Lady Gaga and Bruno Mars, is a powerful anthem of love, loss, and bittersweet acceptance. With Gaga's signature powerhouse vocals and Bruno's velvety tones, the duo crafts a soundscape with a playful melody.

Lyrically, the song explores the transient nature of happiness, offering both a melancholic and optimistic perspective. *Die with a Smile* reminds listeners to embrace life's fleeting joys and make the most of every moment, even when faced with inevitable setbacks. The message is wrapped in a funky, danceable rhythm that makes it hard not to sway along.

The accompanying music video portrays the highs and lows of a relationship. Set in a neon-lit metropolis, the story follows a couple navigating through moments of bliss and heartbreak.

Gaga's choreography and Bruno's effortless charm infuse the visuals to mark the song with energy, while the final scene—the pair parting ways with a smile—shows them cherishing life's ephemeral beauty.



1-MINUTE REVIEW

'Didi': A semi-autobiographical look at identity and belonging

The state of being emotionally unsure, fraught, and haphazard, all while inadvertently undertaking the reigns of growing just a bit older as a 13-year-old, is what the understated yet riveting film *Didi* (Chinese word for younger brother) touches upon.

Directed by Sean Wang, this semi-autobiographical coming-of-age story of Taiwanese-American Chris Wang (played by Izaac Wang) is a beautifully fresh take on the genre since Richard Linklater's *Boyhood*.

Set in Fremont, California, in



2008, Chris, or Didi (as called by his mother) is fleshed out to be a prime example of a boy making space for himself online during the advent of Facebook surpassing Myspace. The actually cool teenager, thrust with the perpetual desire to be seen by

individuals he thinks highly of, doubts his self-worth.

Didi feels weighed down by his Taiwanese heritage, referring to himself as "half-Asian" and hiding behind oversized hoodies. Amid navigating his distinctly Asian family challenges, he emerges from the loneliest point in his life and finds the footing he needs to move forward.

Wang's understated and restrained performance is the icing on the cake of this smooth, somber, and rewarding piece of work.

STYLE STATEMENT

Sang Heon Lee

The second season of *XO, Kitty* has arrived, and fans are swooning over the irresistible chemistry between Kitty and Min Ho, portrayed by the charismatic Sang Heon Lee. To celebrate the season, the cast and crew participated in an exclusive photo session with Timid fashion magazine, showcasing their impeccable style in glamorous ensembles.

However, it's Sang Heon Lee who steals the spotlight, exuding timeless elegance in an old Hollywood inspired look. Styled by Anamika Khanna, his tailored grey suit is perfectly complemented by a crisp white shirt and sleek black tie from YSL, with a Ferragamo belt adding a touch of refinement. Lee's long, flowing hair enhances the suave and handsome allure of his ensemble, leaving fans captivated by his striking appearance.



TRENDY STREAMS

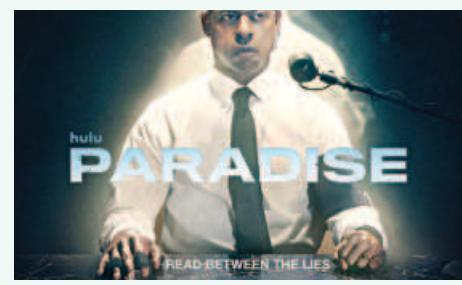
Netflix
The Night Agent



iScreen
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Hulu
Paradise



Disney+ Hotstar
The Secrets of the Shiledars



Apple TV+
Prime Target





PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh faces tough time in global apparel game

Currently, Bangladesh is the second-largest global garment exporter after China, grabbing 7.4 percent of the market share and exporting \$38 billion worth of items, according to data from the World Trade Organization.

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Bangladesh is likely to face more hurdles in the race to grab a bigger share of the global apparel market as the Indian government plans to step up its financial assistance to garment exporters.

The Indian government's confidence that it could capture a bigger slice of the \$800 billion global market was renewed when it noticed that some work orders had been shifted away from Bangladesh and arrived at its doors last year.

A few international clothing retailers and brands opted to shift work orders away from Bangladesh as local exporters were facing challenges in timely production, shipment, raw material imports and transportation owing to political turmoil as a result of the student-led mass uprising in July.

The impasse, which began in July and ended with the ouster of the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League government on August 5 last year, left exporters with their hands tied.

A brief period of instability in the immediate aftermath, which featured spates of labour unrest and closure of a significant number of factories for two to three months, only added to those woes.



A crippling energy crisis, which has prevailed over the last two years, also left many big units operating below capacity.

Moreover, the timing of the "July Revolution" could not have been worse for the garments sector.

July, August, September and October, also represent the peak time for both production and shipment of goods meant for Christmas sales in the Western market, the most important sales season.

This meant local exporters faced tremendous pressure to transport and ship goods. Those who could decide to opt for the expensive route of air shipments, if only to meet deadlines.

Data shows that Bangladesh's exports to major markets are declining as retailers and brands seek alternative destinations while apparel shipments



from India, especially to European countries and the US, have been on an upward trend.

Bangladesh's garment exports to the US fell 0.46 percent to \$6.7 billion between January and November last year while India's rose 4.25 percent to \$4.4 billion, data from the US Office of Textiles and Apparel showed.

On a brighter note, local exporters say that work orders that had shifted away from Bangladesh to other countries, especially to India, are now coming back as normally has started to restore in industrial hubs and the law and order is gradually improving.

However, the Indian government, which has been providing plenty of financial incentives to its apparel sector for a long time, is keen to capitalise on the opportunity.

Currently, there are some major government schemes to improve the Indian textile sector, which employs an estimated 45 million people. These include various funds, including those for technology upgradation, skills development, capacity building, and infrastructure and power development. Alongside that, there are production incentives and facilities that provide remission of duties.

Yet, Mithileshwar Thakur, secretary general of India's Apparel Export Promotion Council, told Reuters last week that exporters were finding it difficult to meet the rush of orders in the last few months.

As such, the country has lined up some new initiatives to facilitate garment manufacturers and exporters in the upcoming budget for FY26, which will be placed in parliament soon.

For example, the government is considering increasing the textile ministry's budget allocation by 10-15

percent from the current 44.17 billion rupees (\$511 million), a government source privy to discussions told Reuters.

The Indian government may also raise the allocation for production-linked incentives for the textile sector to around 600 million rupees from 450 million rupees for the current fiscal year, the source told Reuters.

Under this scheme, the government offers tax incentives and other concessions to companies choosing to manufacture locally.

Tariff cuts on raw materials such as polyester and viscose staple fibre, along with textile machinery, are also under consideration, a second government source told Reuters.

Import tariffs are currently in the range of 11-27 percent on fibre, compared to almost zero in Bangladesh, impacting Indian garment exporters, Reuters said.

Requesting anonymity, a high-end European garment retailer that has been sourcing products from Bangladesh for many years said a few work orders had shifted from Bangladesh to India due to the recent political instability.

"They said they could feel the uncertainty and instability," the retailer said, hopefully adding that those buyers would return with work orders if they felt that the political situation had stabilised.

On the other hand, Bangladesh has cut export subsidies for almost all sectors to reduce pressure on state coffers and encourage exporters to prepare to compete on the global stage without state support after the country graduates from least developed country (LDC) status in 2026.

In FY24, the Bangladesh government provided cash assistance ranging from 1 percent to 15 percent on export earnings

to sharpen the competitive edge of local exports on the international market, which represented a 5 percent slash from the previous highest rate of 20 percent.

The benefit only shrunk further in FY25, with the maximum rate being set at 10 percent and the minimum at 0.3



percent, the Bangladesh Bank said in a notice. Moreover, benefits under the Export Development Fund (EDF) have also been slashed despite rising costs of production.

Currently, Bangladesh is the second-largest global garment exporter after China, grabbing 7.4 percent of the market share and exporting \$38 billion worth of items, according to data from the World Trade Organization (WTO). As per the data, India is fifth-largest, shipping \$15 billion of items to claim a 3 percent market share.

Faruque Hassan, a former president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), said the shifting of work orders from Bangladesh to India happened mainly due to the political crisis.

However, he also believed that the anticipated imposition of high tariffs on Chinese goods by the Trump Administration in the USA may have also played a role for the rise in work orders in India.

A lot of work orders are shifting from China to other countries as there is a possibility that the US will levy higher duties on Chinese imports, he explained, adding that Bangladesh was also a beneficiary of the development.

Even two years ago a lot of work orders were shifted to Bangladesh from India, Pakistan, Myanmar and Ethiopia because of better prices and quality and catering capacity in a better business environment.

Hassan also reminded that international retailers and brands do not want to put all their eggs in one

basket.

He also backed the local sector, saying local exporters faced tremendous pressure last year but are still performing well because they have a higher installed capacity for both garment and primary textiles.

Moreover, the international retailers and brands have confidence in Bangladesh because the country has demonstrated its capacity to cater to large volumes of work orders, Hassan added.

Moreover, Bangladesh has diversified and a significant amount of exported items are now high-end value-added items, which attracts retailers and brands.

Due to such factors, Bangladesh's export trend is now on an upward trajectory, with garment exports growing since June, when it recorded a sharp year-on-year drop of 10.48 percent to \$2.97 billion.

Garment exports began to recover by July, growing 2.89 percent to \$3.17 billion, according to data from the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB). This steady rise continued as exports grew 7.20 percent to \$3.32 billion in August and 14.6 percent to \$3.01 billion in September.

The largest recent increase was seen in October, when exports jumped 22.80 percent to \$3.29 billion, but steady growth is continuing. Garment exports grew 16.25 percent to \$3.30 billion in November and 17.45 percent to \$3.77 billion in December.

So, the export trend suggests that Bangladesh has been performing well despite the odds.

Former BGMEA President Hassan also added that India has not only been providing financial assistance but has also launched an aggressive marketing drive to grab more of the global market.

For example, the country is arranging a mega-expo called "Bharat Tex 2025" in Delhi in February this year. It will be India's largest textile expo and will be designed to attract more buyers and business.

Selim Raihan, a professor of economics at the University of Dhaka and executive director of the South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (Sanem), said it is true that some work orders have shifted from Bangladesh to India because of the political crisis.

However, he added that the Indian government has been trying to increase apparel exports for many years but has not performed well since its labour laws are more stringent and wages are higher compared to Bangladesh.

In India, labour unions are also strong, he explained.

He also added that the incentives that the Indian government is planning to offer to exporters must comply with WTO guidelines. Otherwise, the competitor countries will protest, he said.

