



**Weaving heritage hangs by a thread**

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## PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES Admission woes deepen for students

10 institutions opt out of cluster-based entrance test system

ARAFAT RAHAMAN

Admission seekers are set to face increased hassle with at least 10 public universities no longer participating in the cluster-based admission test system. They are holding entrance exams on their own.

All three universities under the Engineering Cluster have already broken away.

The seven others are among the 24 institutions under the General and Science and Technology (GST) Cluster that expressed their intention to split.

Prof Anwarul Azim Akhand, vice chancellor of Maulana Bhashani Science and Technology University and convener of the GST Cluster admission test committee, revealed the seven universities' decision to The Daily Star.

"We are hopeful that the rest of the universities will stay with us so that we can hold the test under the cluster," he said.

- UGC says separate admission tests too expensive
- Univs that opted out cite poor planning, delayed result
- Students concerned over preparation complexities, expenditure
- They will hold 'Long March to UGC' today demanding authorities reform, retain cluster-based system

He said the University Grants Commission (UGC) held several meetings with all the university VCs, while the education ministry issued letters to hold the admission tests under the clusters.

In late November last year, the Secondary and Higher Education Division urged the VCs to ensure that their universities remain part of the cluster admission test system.

Amid growing concerns over the withdrawal of several universities from the clusters, a group of admission seekers announced a "Long March to UGC" at Agargaon in Dhaka at 10:30am today.

The students demand that the authorities retain the system for 24 universities under the GST Cluster by removing the complexities in the system and bringing reforms to it.

The cluster admission tests were designed to cut cost, time, and hassle for admission seekers, who had to travel to different parts of the country and prepare for different types of exams before the new system was introduced.

But major universities have been leaving the system, saying it created more complications like session jams. They cited issues like delayed result publication and poor planning.

Only the Agriculture Cluster, consisting of nine universities, remains intact, according to university officials.

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Hawkers occupy a lion's share of this street near the Dhaka Trade Centre building in the capital's Gulistan, leaving only a narrow strip for traffic. As a result, passing this 150-meter section can cost commuters up to 20 minutes. The photo was taken yesterday around 1:30pm.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

## Service delivery suffers in cities without councillors

HELEMUL ALAM

City dwellers are still experiencing poor civic services six months after the formation of the interim government.

Local government representatives were dismissed in over 300 municipalities and 12 city corporations after the fall of the Awami League regime on August 5 last year.

The government ordered city corporation executives to do the tasks of councillors, but the volume of work appears to overwhelm them.

Councillors are authorised to issue 23 types of certificates that include the crucial certification of birth, death, succession, character and trade licences.

The interim government replaced mayors with administrators in eight city corporations on August 19. Councillors of 12 city corporations and 323 municipalities were removed on September 27.

The 12 city corporations are Dhaka South, Dhaka North, Chattogram, Khulna, Rajshahi, Sylhet, Barishal, Narayanganj, Cumilla, Rangpur, Gazipur and Mymensingh.

In the capital, the aforesaid certificates are now issued by ward-level offices with

approval from the zone-level office of the city corporations.

People complain that they have to wait for several days to get the certificates.

A councillor could issue the certificate within an hour, partly because the councillors knew many residents of their neighbourhoods, and they did not need approval from another office.

Ashiquil Islam, a banker who lives in ward 27, said he needed to make a correction on the birth certificate of his son for his admission to a school.

He said he filed an application, and after 10 days, the ward secretary told him to wait for 10 more days. "But the school requires the certificate right now."

Secretary of the ward Rifat Rahman said his office had sent the application to the office of the registrar general immediately after it was filed.

Suvendu Kumar Dev, a resident of Dinajpur town, said, "I urgently needed a citizenship certificate and filed an application with the municipality. But I received the certificate the next day."

Property disputes used to be settled by mayors and councillors. In their absence,

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## Weak deterrents fuel crime concerns

Criminals act recklessly as law enforcers' morale still low

MUNTAKIM SAAD and MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Crimes such as murder, extortion and robbery continue to plague various parts of the country despite efforts by law enforcement agencies.

On January 24, Arnob Kumar Sarker, a 28-year-old MBA student at Khulna University, was shot dead by unidentified assailants around 9:15pm at the Tetultala intersection in Khulna.

On the same day, at around 1:00pm, dried fish trader Md Jahangir was shot dead in Noapara village of Raozan, Chattogram. Two men who attempted to save him were assaulted by the attackers.

The previous day, armed muggers shot a jewellery trader and reportedly stole 50 bhoiri of gold and Tk 3.5 lakh from his possession in Dhaka's Kamrangirchar area. The incident occurred around 11:00pm in the Beribad area.

On January 22, Abdul Kader Sikdar, who runs currency exchange, and his cousin Amir Hamza were stabbed in the capital's upmarket Gulshan area, with attackers allegedly making off with Tk 1 crore.

The same day, two men -- Sazu Mollah, a chauffeur, and Rimon Hossain, a vegetable vendor -- were murdered in separate stabbing incidents in Bijoyagar and Muga areas of the capital, reportedly over previous enmity and disputes over property.

Omar Faruk, a professor at the Department of Criminology and Police Science at Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University, said

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3



## Govt suspends list of Bangla Academy awardees

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Just two days after announcing the 2024 Bangla Academy Literary Awards honouring ten individuals for their contributions to Bangla literature, the government has suspended its decision.

Cultural Affairs Adviser Mostofa Sarwar Farooki made the announcement in a post on his verified Facebook account last night.

Farooki said, "Our first task is to review the strange policies that enable such bizarre awards."

"We must also determine everything from how Bangla Academy will be governed to the policies it will adhere to."

"We will now move towards a comprehensive overhaul of the academy. If the country is to be reformed, why not the Bangla Academy?"

The previous announcement, made on Thursday, recognised ten individuals for their significant contributions to various genres of Bangla literature.

The honourees included Salimullah Khan for essay writing, Masud Khan for poetry, Selim Morshed for fiction, Subhasish Sinha for drama, and Faruk

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



Candidates outside the Arts Building of Dhaka University after sitting for the entrance examinations for undergraduate programmes under B unit (Arts, Law, and Social Science). The photo was taken yesterday around 12:30pm.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

## AL won't be allowed to run in nat'l polls

Says Adviser Mahfuj

STAR REPORT

Calling the party fascist and anti-state, Mahfuj Alam, adviser to the interim government, yesterday said the Awami League would not be allowed to take part in the general election.

"The elections will be contested among pro-Bangladesh groups only. All political parties, whether BNP, Jamaat or others, along with student organisations, workers, women, and scholars who are pro-Bangladesh, will establish future governance through a fair electoral process."

He made these remarks while exchanging greetings with students and locals at Hajiganj Bazar in Chandpur, reports a correspondent in Chandpur.

"We're working to establish a stable democratic Bangladesh, free from Awami fascism. If the Awami League returns, fascism will return with it," said Mahfuj.

He claimed that the people of the

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## 12 robbers disguised as DGFI men held in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police arrested 12 individuals impersonating members of the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence while attempting to rob a flat in Chattogram's Khulshi area Friday night.

The suspects were caught red-handed from the 8th floor of the Sanmar Royal Reach Building, where they targeted the residence of Jamuna Oil Company's former managing director Gias Uddin Ansari.

Fake DGFI ID cards, three toy guns, a crowbar, and a microbus were seized during the arrest, said Roish Uddin, deputy commissioner (crime) of Chattogram Metropolitan Police.

Quoting witnesses, Mozibur Rahman Kawsar, officer-in-charge of Khulshi Police Station, said the

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3



BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman drives home his mother and party Chairperson Khaleda Zia [in the backseat] on Friday night after the former prime minister was released from The London Clinic, where she underwent treatment for 17 days. Tarique's wife Zubaida Rahman was in the passenger seat. Story on page 12.

PHOTO: BNP MEDIA WING

## Bangladeshi woman killed in Bengaluru after 'sexual assault'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

A Bangladeshi woman has been allegedly "assaulted sexually" and killed in Bengaluru city of India, said police.

The woman, 28, who worked as a domestic help in Kalkere locality, was killed possibly on Thursday and her body was disposed of at Kalkere lake in Ramamurthy Nagar, Bengaluru police said.

Her body was recovered on Friday [January 24], said Ramesh Banoth, joint commissioner of police in Bengaluru East Division.

"It seems she had been sexually assaulted," he said, adding that a case under sections of murder and rape has been registered.

The Bangladeshi woman had been living in Bengaluru with her husband and three children for the past six years and had been doing housekeeping in an apartment, he said.

On Thursday, the woman left the apartment after finishing her work. However, she did not return home.

A team of forensic experts visited the scene and conducted an inspection.

Banoth said the woman's husband came to India legally. However, the victim entered the country illegally without a passport.

"Based on the complaint filed by her husband, we have registered a case of sexual assault and murder and are investigating," added the police official.

The body has been sent for postmortem.

## AL won't be allowed

FROM PAGE 1

country do not want to see the era of Sheikh Mujib or Sheikh Hasina in Bangladesh anymore.

"The new Bangladesh rejects the fascist system. We want Bangladesh to remain in the hands of true patriots. There will be no place for pro-Delhi elements in Bangladesh," added Mahfuj.

The adviser further said they would soon start talks with political parties and stakeholders and hold elections to facilitate democratic transformation, after carrying out minimum reforms based on the report of reform commissions.

"It is our commitment to ensure justice to the killings during the July uprising and to carry out reform of the institutions that were destroyed by fascist Hasina. We are also committed to holding free and fair elections for the sake of democratic transition."

Mahfuj, however, said

that if the election is held without minimum reforms to the institutions that Hasina used to perpetrate genocide and oppress people, those same institutions will remain in place.

Hajiganj Upazila Nirbahi Officer Tapas Shil, Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Hajiganj Police Station Mohiuddin Farooq, leaders of Students Against Discrimination and Jatiya Nagorik Committee were present.

Later in the day in Ramganj Government College in Lakshmipur, Mahfuj said there is no probability of military rule in Bangladesh, reports our Noakhali correspondent.

"We did not overthrow Hasina with the support of any state this time. We overthrew Hasina with the blood of the students and the people. We no longer need to obey anyone. We have brought independence in exchange for our own blood ... We will not bow to anyone again."

## Govt suspends list

FROM PAGE 1

Newaz for children's literature. GH Habib was recognised as the best transcript writer, while Muhammad Shahjahan Mia was set to receive the award in the research category. Rezaur Rahman was honoured in the science category, Mohammad Hannan for his contributions to Liberation War literature, and Syed Jamil Ahmed for his work in folklore.

A statement issued by the Bangla Academy last night stated that a revised list of award recipients will be announced within three working days.

The statement signed by Bangla Academy Director General Professor Mohammad Azam said a meeting of the Bangla Academy Literary Award Committee 2024 was held at the Bangla Academy to reconsider the previously announced list of recipients.

It also read postponement was prompted by some allegations regarding certain individuals on the award list, in light of the current socio-political situation. A decision has been made to investigate these allegations before the list is republished.

## Admission woes deepen for students

FROM PAGE 1

WHY CLUSTERS

Under the system with separate admission tests, the students' hassle begins after their Higher Secondary Certificate exams. Many of them turn to private coaching centres to prepare for the admission tests.

Then they buy admission forms for different units of multiple universities and spend a lot of time and money on travel and accommodation.

The students often travel with parents or guardians, and sometimes have to check into hotels for overnight stays. There are cases when a candidate has to take separate tests for seats in separate faculties, even separate departments, in one university.

The UGC has long been suggesting modifying the admission process, saying it is too expensive.

In several annual reports, the commission said the public universities would have to take initiatives to introduce a unified admission system to reduce students' hassle and cut their expenses.

Considering the suffering of the students, the cluster admission system was launched for agriculture universities in 2019, and for GST and engineering in 2020.

However, large institutions like Dhaka University, Jahangirnagar University, Rajshahi University, Chittagong University, and Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology opted for independent admission

tests.

WHY LEAVE

Most of the universities which have already left the cluster system cited their academic council decision or pressure from teachers' associations as reasons.

University officials cited issues like delayed result publication, inefficient admission procedures, and disorganised department allocations that resulted in session jams.

The seven universities that have decided to leave the GST Cluster and hold admission tests independently are Jagannath University; Khulna University; Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST), Comilla University; Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Science and Technology University; Gopalganj; Hajee Mohammad Danesh Science and Technology University; and Islamic University, Kushtia.

Jagannath University VC Prof Rezaul Karim described the cluster system as a "well-intentioned initiative that suffered from poor planning".

Khulna University VC Prof Md Rezaul Karim also expressed concern over the system's "inefficiencies and flaws", saying it took more time than independent tests, leading to session jams and academic disruptions. He warned that the admission process risks undermining their achievements in the international academic arena.

The GST committee has already announced its entrance exam schedule: C Unit (Business Education)

on April 25, B Unit (Humanities) on May 2, and A Unit (Science) on May 9.

The Engineering Cluster has completely opted out of the system, with all three universities – Rajshahi, Chittagong and Khulna universities of engineering and technology (RUET, CUET and KUET) – holding their entrance exams independently this year.

RUET began its admission process on January 4, with a preliminary test scheduled for February 8. CUET is set to hold its exam on February 1, while KUET concluded its process on January 15.

RUET VC Prof SM Abdur Razzak said, "As one of the universities opted to conduct admission test independently, we had very little options to stay in the cluster. Consequently, as the final university in the cluster, we stepped away."

"Although we couldn't hold the test under the cluster this year, we will try to do it in future for the benefit of the students," he added.

CONCERNS

The ongoing shake-up has caused significant concern among students, many of whom had supported the cluster system for its convenience. A group of students has also submitted a letter to Education Adviser Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud, requesting that the cluster system remain intact for the benefit of students.

Rahim Abdullah, a student from Bangabandhu Memorial College in Jhenaidah, said, "I've been preparing for months, and now there's uncertainty

about which exam I should sit for. The cluster system was helpful because it unified the process, reducing the stress of multiple applications and exams."

Another student, Ahsan Kabir, from Mohammadpur Model School and College in the capital, said, "The system provided us with a convenience that independent tests do not. It saved both time and money. With the departure of major universities, it will only make things more complicated for students like me."

UGC Chairman Prof SMA Faiz said, "We hope universities prioritise the interests of students in their decisions. The UGC will provide support if required."

UGC member Prof Tanzimuddin Khan admitted that an integrated solution is missing in the current cluster system, which he said has structural weaknesses and financial complexities.

"We are thinking about how to resolve these issues and how to simplify the system for students and their guardians."

"However, the UGC no longer has the mandate or administrative authority to intervene in such matters. As a result, even though we wanted to, we could not take the necessary initiatives," he said, adding that currently the education ministry is handling the issue.

Repeated attempts to reach Prof M Aminul Islam, the chief adviser's special assistant on education, for comments failed.

## Bangladeshi farmer hurt as BSF shoots him in C'nawabganj

UNB, Chapainawabganj

A 30 year-old Bangladeshi man sustained bullet injuries in firing by Indian Border Security Force (BSF) at the Telkupi border in Chapainawabganj's Shibganj upazila on Friday.

The injured, Habil, 30, of Mollatola village in Shahbazzpur union, is currently undergoing treatment at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital.

BGB 59 Battalion Commander Lt Col Golam Kibria said BSF personnel opened fire around 3:30am when a group of six to seven suspected smugglers tried to cross the border, leaving Habil injured.

Habil's associates managed to rescue him and bring him back to Bangladesh.

He was taken to the 250 Bed District Hospital, Chapainawabganj for primary treatment and later moved to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital for advanced treatment.

Dr Kausar Hasan, doctor of the emergency department at Chapainawabganj hospital, said Habil was admitted to the hospital around 7:00am today where he was treated for a gunshot wound in the chest.

## Govt committed to holding free, fair polls

Says Adviser Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The interim government is committed to holding free, fair and inclusive elections as per the expectations of the people, Planning and Education Adviser Professor Wahiduddin Mahmud said yesterday

Addressing an event marking the 76th Republic Day of India at a hotel in the capital, he also said Bangladesh is committed to strengthening relations with neighbouring countries, including India.

The adviser mentioned that Bangladesh wants to advance relations with India and others on the basis of fairness and equality, taking into account mutual priorities and sensitivities.

Prof Wahiduddin recalled the important contribution of the people and government of India during the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971. The two countries also collaborated in the years after 1971 for shared prosperity and sustainable development, he said.

"We strongly believe our partnership will be stronger in the days to come," the adviser added.

Speaking at the same event, Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka Pranay Verma said New Delhi wants to see a democratic, stable, peaceful, progressive and inclusive Bangladesh.

Since India-Bangladesh ties are "interdependent", Verma said, New Delhi attaches importance to maintaining "stable, constructive, future-oriented and mutually beneficial relations".

## Service delivery

FROM PAGE 1

disputes are left unresolved, locals said.

Entrepreneurs and traders needing trade licences have reported that delays disrupt their operations.

In Chattogram City Corporation (CCC), 13 executives were ordered to handle the jobs of 41 councillors.

Special Magistrate Manisha Mahajan has been entrusted with the responsibility of two wards while regional executive officers Rezaul Karim, Shahrin Ferdousi and Raktim Chowdhury have the charge of five wards each.

The executives are expected to fill in for councillors on top of their regular duties, which severely hampers service delivery.

Many of these officials cannot visit their wards even once a week due to their heavy workload. As a result, the service seekers face delays.

Nazrul Islam, a local of ward-15, said, "I urge the city corporation to delegate one executive for each ward. Otherwise, people will continue to suffer."

CCC Chief Executive Officer Sheikh Mohammad Tauhidul Islam said there were not enough officers posted to the CCC on deputation to do the councillors' tasks.

"We are going through a transition, and I think everything will become normal," he said.

An officer at Mymensingh City Corporation said, "The executives take more time for certain tasks because they, unlike the local representatives, don't know the locals."

Shamsun Nahar,

resident of the city's Kristapur said she needed a succession certificate to settle land ownership issues, but she could not secure it despite two weeks of frantic efforts.

In Gazipur City Corporation, Khairul Islam, former councillor of ward-29, said, "The common people are not getting even the basic services like the issuance of holding tax certificate, trade licence and birth certificate."

For an inheritance certificate or marriage certificate, they have to make multiple visits.

City Corporation Executive Engineer Mohammad Ibrahim Khalil said, "Even when the documents are ready, we cannot hand them over quickly, since it takes time to get the mayor's approval."

After taking charge as the administrator, Dhaka Divisional Commissioner Sabirul Islam said, "The current government wants to form a corruption-free, discrimination-free state. We will work towards that goal."

Gazipur Citizens Forum President Jalal Uddin said, "We elected the mayor with high hopes. But the city residents are still suffering."

Adviser Mahfuj Alam at a press briefing recently acknowledged that people were not getting regular services at city corporations and union parishes because the administrators could not deliver the services.

That's why the chief adviser proposed holding local government elections.

Our correspondents in Chattogram, Gazipur, Dinajpur and Mymensingh contributed to the report.



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## Govt signs LNG deal with US firm

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has signed a heads of agreement (HOA) with the US-based Argent LNG to import up to 5 million tonnes of liquefied natural gas per year for 20 years.

Argent LNG is developing a 25 million tonnes per annum LNG facility in Louisiana, a southeastern US state on the Gulf of Mexico. The facility is slated to go into operation in early 2030.

The HOA is a non-binding agreement, meaning neither party is obligated to agree to the terms listed in the document.

The agreement was signed by Ashik Chowdhury, executive chairman of the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority, and Jonathan Bass, chairman and chief executive officer of Argent LNG, at a ceremony held at the Bangladesh Embassy in Washington, DC, on Friday.

If the Argent LNG  
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Anti-Discrimination Student Movement holds a rally at Raju memorial sculpture on the Dhaka University campus yesterday, protesting the killing of a Bangladeshi woman after alleged sexual assault in Bengaluru, India recently.

PHOTO: STAR

## Promote ACC hotline, public engagement

Recommends reform commission

DIPAN NANDY

The Anti-Corruption Commission Reform Commission has urged the ACC to formulate a detailed strategy to combat corruption, proposing short-term, medium-term, and long-term action plans. "The ACC must create a robust corruption prevention strategy, grounded in an impartial assessment of current initiatives and developed with input from experts. Effective implementation of action plans is vital," Iftekharuzzaman, chairman of the reform commission, told The Daily Star.

The commission submitted its report to Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus on January 15. Among its recommendations, the commission called for the incorporation of ethics, honesty, and anti-

RECOMMENDATIONS	
Comprehensive strategy to combat corruption	
Short-term, medium-term, long-term measures	
Integration of anti-corruption ethics into curriculum	
Youth engagement in anti-corruption campaigns	
Collaboration between ACC, NGOs	

## JULY UPRISING Will identify unknown martyrs

Says Nahid

BSS, Dhaka

Efforts are underway to identify the unknown martyrs of the July uprising buried at Rayerbazar graveyard, Information Adviser Nahid Islam said yesterday.

He said this after paying tribute to the martyrs at the graveyard.

Following the visit, the adviser met with the relatives of the martyrs and inquired about their wellbeing.

"The debt of the martyrs can never be repaid," he said.

He assured that the interim government remains committed to supporting the families of those who lost their lives in the uprising.

Financial assistance for the families of the martyrs will start early next month, he added.



## Underfunding a key factor behind police bribery

Says reform commission, proposes increased allocation for operational expenses

SHARIFUL ISLAM and SHAHEEN MOLLAH

When we talk about corruption in the police force, the focus, rightly so, often falls on bribery and abuse of power.

However, we rarely address the systemic issues -- such as inadequate allocations -- and how they create fertile ground for corruption and malpractice. From out-of-pocket expenses for investigations to dismal detainee meal allowances and insufficient fuel budgets, the shortfalls leave officers with no choice but to seek alternative -- and often unethical -- means to meet operational needs.

Now, a proposal by the Police Reform Commission aims to address these gaps by ensuring proper allocation for operational expenses.

Sub-inspectors and officers-in-charges from several Dhaka police stations say that without adequate and timely financial support, systemic issues will persist, forcing police to rely on questionable



### RECOMMENDATIONS

Increase operational allowances

Set up audit, inspection wing

Allocate funds directly to SPs

Raise investigation funds per case

Provide special allocations for staff

Allocate purchasing funds

Increase budgets for vehicles, fuel costs

practices.

"We rarely have vehicles or funds to hire one when we need to travel outside the capital for critical cases like murder or robbery," said one SI, adding that operational expenses often fall

directly on their shoulders.

"Hiring a vehicle alone can cost Tk 30,000-40,000," he said. "If the complainant is poor, we are left to manage the cost ourselves."

Then, they resort to alternative means, such as arresting innocent individuals and then extorting bribes for their release."

While the government provides some allowances -- Tk 875 for daily expenses and Tk 15 per kilometre for travel outside duty stations -- officers say these sums are far from sufficient to cover real-world demands.

**CASE EXPENSES: INSUFFICIENT AND OUTDATED**

Police are granted Tk 6,000 to investigate murder or robbery cases, Tk 5,000 for abduction cases, Tk 4,000 for unnatural deaths, and Tk 2,000 for theft or petty crimes. However, officers say these capped amounts rarely reflect the actual costs of gathering evidence, engaging informants, or making arrests.

An SI from Bhasantek Police

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## BHORER KAGOJ CLOSURE Journos, staffers stage protests

UNB, Dhaka

A faction of Bangla daily Bhorer Kagoj employees, including journalists and officials, staged protests in front of its office at Malibagh in the capital yesterday, demanding an explanation from its management for its sudden closure and the settlement of their dues.

With placards and slogans, the protesters expressed their dismay over the decision of closing down the newspaper.

At the demonstration, the journalists spoke out against the management's action and alleged financial irregularities.

Bhorer Kagoj chief reporter Khandaker Kawsar Hossain said, "After the editor was arrested, Arun Kumar Sarkar, the resident director of Saber Hossain Chowdhury's business establishment, assumed the role of executive editor."

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## Those discovering 'Ziaism' have bad intentions: Khasru

UNB, Dhaka

Those who have suddenly discovered the term "Ziaism" (Ziabad in Bangla) has ill-intentions, said BNP Standing Committee Member Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury yesterday.

Speaking at a discussion at Jatiya Press Club, marking the 89th birth anniversary of BNP founder and former President Ziaur Rahman, Khasru said, "If there are plans beyond democracy regarding power transfer, the consequences will not be good, and BNP's support may not continue."



**We support the interim government for ensuring a peaceful transfer of power through elections. Any agenda beyond this will lead to the withdrawal of support.**

The event, titled Shaheed Zia's Contributions to the Great Liberation War and the Building of Modern Bangladesh, was organised by Zia Parishad.

"We have never heard of 'Ziaism'. Those who oppose BNP coined the term, and their intentions are questionable," Khasru said.

He said BNP, despite being in power three times,

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## Mostafa Golam Quddus passes away

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Mostafa Golam Quddus, former president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, breathed his last at Evercare Hospital in Dhaka yesterday.

He was born on March 4, 1949, in Cumilla.

Quddus was the chairman of Dragon Group and Rupali Insurance Company Ltd and the founder of Sonali Life Insurance Company Limited.

His first namaz-e-janaza was held at Gulshan Grand Azad Mosque after the Zohr prayers yesterday.

The second janaza was held at his village home in Choudhagram, Cumilla the same day. Later, he was buried in his family graveyard.



## Shahidul Islam Pannu's death anniv today

STAR REPORT

Today is the 16th death anniversary of Md Shahidul Islam Pannu, director of Sara Advertising Ltd, said a press release.

His family members have requested all to pray for the salvation of the departed soul.



## Those

FROM PAGE 3 never glorified Ziaur Rahman through statues or posters, keeping his legacy within party politics. The BNP leader praised Ziaur Rahman's contributions to the Liberation War, nation-building, and state reforms, claiming few leaders in the world could compare.

He said BNP has implemented 90 percent of reforms in Bangladesh since its inception, and in 2017, Khaleda Zia presented Vision 2030, proposing reforms such as limiting the prime minister's tenure to two terms and introducing a bicameral parliament.

"These proposals were designed for the post-Hasina era, yet some are now using our ideas as their own," he added.

Khasru reiterated BNP's conditional support for the interim government to ensure a peaceful transfer of power through elections.

"This is the only purpose we're all supporting and cooperating with this interim government. Any agenda beyond this will lead to the withdrawal of support," he warned.

He emphasised the need for national unity to pull Bangladesh out of its current crisis. "We must unite to rescue the nation from the ditch it has fallen into," he urged.



PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Workers unloading sacks of dried fish from small cargo ships and loading them onto trucks. These dried fish are supplied to wholesalers across the country -- including Rajshahi, Rangpur, and Dhaka -- from Dublar Char in the Sundarbans. Depending on the quality, dried fish sells for Tk 200-4,000 per kg in different markets. This photo was taken at Ghat-5 on the Bhairab river in Khulna yesterday.

### NARSINGDI DC OFFICE

## Recruitment delays create frustration, service disruption

JAHIDUL ISLAM, Narsingdi

Despite five job advertisements over the past two years for a total of 123 vacant positions, the recruitment process at the Narsingdi Deputy Commissioner's Office remains incomplete.

Although written and practical tests were conducted, the final appointments have been delayed due to recent changes in quota systems and age limits, leaving job seekers disheartened and impacting public service delivery.

A recent recruitment circular initially set the age limit at 30, with a 56 percent quota for applicants.

However, following policy revisions, the age limit was extended to 32 and the quota reduced to 7 percent.

Rakibul Islam, 29, who applied for an office assistant position in 2019, said, "The written test was delayed four times before it was eventually held, but the final appointment has yet to be made after more than four years."

Shahadat Islam, 31, who applied for a computer operator position, added, "I passed the written test, and the viva was supposed to take place within four days.

But it was postponed. Now, eight months later, no new date has been set. This waiting is endless and disheartening."

The delays have also affected the office's operations, with services becoming sluggish due to staff shortages at 25 branches and approximately 300 sub-branches.

Rabiul Islam, chief assistant and accountant of the revenue branch, said, "We were supposed to have five office assistants, but only three are currently working. As a result, we have to put in long hours to keep services running."

The impact on public service has been felt by local residents.

Ahmed Islam, a resident of Alokballi union, said, "It took six months to process a simple file. I also tried to get services for an orphanage, but couldn't."

Contacted, Narsingdi DC Mohammad Rashed Hossain Chowdhury attributed the crisis to the quota system and age limit changes.

"We've sent a letter to higher authorities regarding this issue. Once we receive formal instructions, we will take immediate steps to complete the recruitment process," he said.

## Woman beaten to death in Bangshal

UNB, Dhaka

A woman was beaten to death with a hammer allegedly by her husband in Dhaka's Bangshal area on Friday evening. The victim is Maksuda Khanam, 30.

Sub-inspector Md Ferdous Alam of Bangshal Police Station said the victim's husband Ibrahim Khan, 37, informed the police about the incident.

He has been detained for questioning, he added.

According to the victim's uncle, Abdul Latif, Maksuda and Ibrahim got married two years ago and the couple has a one-year-old daughter.

Family members alleged that Ibrahim used to quarrel with Maksuda over minor issues.

Maksuda's younger brother Mostafizur Rahman filed a murder case with Bangshal Police Station.

## Garment worker stabbed to death

UNB, Dhaka

A 23-year-old garment worker was stabbed to death allegedly by some youths at a slum at Diabari in the capital's Mirpur on Friday night.

The deceased is Mizanur Rahman Milton, 23.

Quoting family members, Inspector Faruk, in-charge of Dhaka Medical College Hospital police camp, said Milton used to live at the slum at Chhoto Diabari-1. On Friday night, some youths snatched the mobile phone of one Biplal, 12, at the slum.

When Milton protested, they beat Milton and stabbed him, leaving him injured. Later, he was taken to DMCH where doctors declared him dead around 12:00am.

## Weaving heritage

FROM PAGE 5 poverty. The income from weaving could no longer sustain them.

Fazlul Ali, president of the Lalmonirhat Weavers' Association, said the district once boasted around 1,500 handlooms. Now, just 60-70 remain, confined to Mahishamuri and Kakina villages, with only a fraction still operational.

He said, "Maximum weavers sold their handlooms while few others stored them away and are now earning money by joining various professions."

Aftar Ali, 60, a weaver from Kakina, recounted how the blankets and sheets made in the village were once in high demand. Now,

he struggles to turn a profit due to soaring yarn prices.

"Some of us are still keeping alive our ancestral job," he said.

Mansur Ali, 45, another weaver from Mahishamuri, remains hopeful despite the dire situation. "We make shirt fabrics, pant fabrics, bedsheets, towels, lungis, saris, and other items with our handloom. Our fabrics are still sold satisfactorily to low-income people because they are relatively affordable. If we get the capital and market advantage, we will be able to rise as before," he said. For now, however, the vibrant weaving heritage of Kakina and Mahishamuri hangs by a thread.

## Underfunding a key factor

FROM PAGE 3 Station said these constraints leave police financially vulnerable. "There are instances when I've spent Tk 40,000 from my own pocket just to apprehend a suspect," he said.

At a recent Dhaka Metropolitan Police crime conference, this issue was raised, with officers highlighting the strain it places on their ability to perform their duties effectively.

In response, DMP Commissioner SM Sazzat Ali directed that SIs could access vehicles through the motor transport wing. However, many officers argue this measure offers little relief due to procedural delays, particularly during nighttime when offices are closed.

"By the time we get the vehicle, the suspect may already have fled," said another SI.

### HIDDEN COSTS OF POLICING

OCs also pointed out the absence of funds for basic operational needs at police stations.

"There is no budget for cooks, cleaners, or electricians, all of whom are essential for running a station," said an officer who served as OC in three smaller stations.

He said that monthly out-of-pocket expenses for maintaining a station can range between Tk 80,000 and Tk 100,000, while source funds allocated to OCs amount to just Tk 20,000 in smaller stations and Tk 40,000 in larger

ones.

"I had to hire a cook for Tk 15,000 per month, a cleaner for Tk 10,000, and an electrician or mechanic costs around Tk 1,200 per visit," he said.

### FUEL AND DETAINEE ALLOCATIONS: ANOTHER SHORTFALL

Fuel allowance is another contentious issue. Some officers using official motorcycles receive 30 litres of fuel per month, while those using personal vehicles get just 20 litres.

These amounts, officers argue, are woefully inadequate given the distances they must travel for investigations.

Meanwhile, detainee meal allocations remain dismal, at just Tk 75 per meal. Often, officers cover the costs themselves to avoid bureaucratic delays, particularly when detainees' families are unable to provide food.

"Submitting these expenses involves so much hassle that most officers simply avoid it," said a district superintendent of police.

### CORRUPTION FUELED BY FINANCIAL GAPS

These financial gaps, coupled with an absence of oversight, create fertile ground for systemic corruption.

When officers are left to fund operations out of pocket, they are incentivised to find alternative revenue streams, including bribes.

For instance, complainants are sometimes asked to bear investigation costs, or

innocent individuals are detained and released in exchange for payments.

"Until these gaps are addressed and the police change their behaviour, true reform will remain elusive," said an OC who served in city police stations for over a decade.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REFORM

The Police Reform Commission has recommended several measures to address these challenges.

Among them are increasing operational allowances, establishing an audit and inspection wing to oversee procurement at police stations, and allocating funds directly to superintendents of police (SPs) to streamline expenses and reduce bureaucratic hurdles.

The proposals also include increasing investigation funds per case, providing special allocations for those working in the general diary section and verification-related departments, allocating funds for purchasing and repairing essential furniture in police stations, and increasing budgets for vehicles and fuel costs.

Without these reforms, the disconnect between police funding and operational needs will likely continue to hinder law enforcement, erode public trust, and perpetuate a system where corruption becomes a survival mechanism, said the cops involved.

## Promote ACC hotline

FROM PAGE 3 corruption awareness into the national curriculum at all levels, from primary to higher secondary education. It also proposed governance and anti-corruption courses, as well as training programmes, internships, and fellowships for undergraduate and postgraduate students.

Promoting the ACC's hotline number (106) through textbooks, traditional media, and social media platforms like Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram was another key recommendation. Targeted anti-corruption campaigns and advocacy through these platforms were also suggested.

The commission highlighted the need to raise public awareness about citizen empowerment laws, such as the Right to Information Act, 2009, and the Public Interest Information Disclosure (Protection) Act, 2011, through extensive promotions and training.

It also emphasised fostering ethical practices rooted in human qualities and religious values, urging the engagement of youth in anti-corruption awareness campaigns at both local and national levels.

The commission recommended strengthening collaboration between the ACC's anti-corruption committees and non-governmental organisations, while also aligning the state's legal framework with Article 13 of the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC).

This alignment aims to enhance media and citizen participation in anti-corruption efforts.

The report suggested observing International Anti-Corruption Day at a national level and promoting anti-corruption

messages during significant cultural, religious, and political events.

Additionally, the commission called for effective grassroots implementation of the Right to Information Act, in collaboration with the Information Commission and civil society organisations, ensuring equal access to information for all citizens.

"Corruption is not just a punishable offence but an abhorrent, discriminatory, and destructive practice, unacceptable under social, cultural, and religious norms," the report said.

It urged the ACC to employ innovative and sustainable methods to instill a mindset against corruption and implement long-term preventive measures.

## Govt signs

FROM PAGE 3 project in Port Fourchon is completed, its cargoes could be sold to Petrobangla, Reuters said quoting the agreement.

The ministry of power, energy and mineral resources and Petrobangla, which are supposed to make the final call on LNG procurement, are yet to know of the issue.

Argent LNG is still in the exploration stage in Louisiana, said Muhammad Fouzul Kabir Khan, the adviser to the energy ministry. "Such a deal will be further discussed with the designated government bodies before finalisation -- it's still in a very preliminary stage," Khan told The Daily Star.

Currently, Petrobangla imports around 5 million tonnes of LNG annually from two long-term contracts with Qatar Gas and Oman's OQ Trading, and 15-20 shipments from the international spot market.

## Leprosy cases keep

FROM PAGE 5 among tea workers. Meanwhile, diagnosis and treatment facilities for leprosy remains inadequate in the district.

Although upazila health complexes and district hospitals across the country provide treatment and free medicines for leprosy, the facilities are largely insufficient.

Moreover, the Sylhet Leprosy Hospital, one of the only three government-run leprosy treatment centres in the country, is facing numerous operational challenges to cater to the needs of the patients in the district.

The hospital, established in 1890, is now in a shabby state and in urgent need of renovation. Intended to accommodate a total 80 patients, the hospital currently have only 48 functioning beds for patients. The diagnostic facilities are currently suspended due to shortage of staff, while the equipment remain unused.

On a typical day, some 10-13 patients receive treatment at the hospital's outpatient department. Due to shortage of manpower, patients admitted in the hospital are largely deprived of essential services.

A patient at the hospital, wishing anonymity, said they are not receiving the necessary medical attention due to acute shortage of doctors and nurses at the hospital.

Vidyut Kumar Deb, a senior nurse at the hospital, said the hospital is now running with only 28 staff members against 49 available posts.

"All nine posts of cleaners are vacant at present. The hospital is also in a dilapidated condition. The century-old building is crumbling, with the roof leaking water during monsoon," he also said.

"The hospital once handled a wide range of services, but now no major surgeries are performed here. Higher authorities

have been informed with request for addressing these issues," he added.

Leprosy Bangladesh, an organisation actively involved in helping leprosy patients and raising public awareness about the disease, currently has 29 field-level initiatives, including financial assistances to patients and other support, said its representative Shyamal Kumar Chowdhury.

Janmejoy Dutta, deputy civil surgeon in Sylhet, said while leprosy is not highly contagious, it can spread mildly through respiratory droplets during sneezing and coughing.

Early signs include pale brown or reddish spots on skin without any sensation or hair growth. Immediate medical attention should be sought if any painless swelling appears anywhere on the body, or if there is loss of sensation in limbs or eyes, he added.

## Journos

FROM PAGE 3 He and the owners assured us that we would receive everything we are entitled to, but now they have stopped communicating with us."

Describing the closure as unacceptable, he added, "The organisation has been shut down due to the corruption of the head of the financial department and administration."

The protesters called for the immediate reopening of the newspaper or clearing their dues as per the 8th Wage Board.

A notice regarding the closure of the daily, launched on February 15, 1992, was put up on its Malibagh office main gate on January 20.

PRAYER  
TIMING

JANUARY 26

Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha

AZAN 5:35 12:45 4:15 5:46 7:15

JAMAAT 6:10 1:15 4:30 5:50 7:45

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Office of the Executive Engineer

PWD Division, Rangpur

Tel: 02589962357

E-mail: ee\_rngpr@pwd.gov.bd

Memo No. 25.36.8500.110.00.000.00.25.5178

Date: ২৩/০১/২০২৫ইং

Invitation for e-GP Tender

SL No.	e-GP Tender ID & Reference No.	Name of work	Tender proposal closing date and time
1	1063001, PWD/RNGPR/24-25/Dev/ACC/Purta-02	Construction of ACC Divisional Office (6-storied building with 6-storied foundation) at Rangpur including Civil, Internal Sanitary & Electrification, External Sanitary & Water supply, Internal RCC Road, Surface Drain, Boundary wall & External Electrification works etc. (FY 2024-2025)	20-Feb-2025 12:02

This is an online tender where only e-Tenders will be accepted in e-GP Portal and no offline and hard copy will be accepted. To submit e-Tender please register on in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>).

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নির্বাহী প্রকৌশলী

গণপুত্র বিভাগ, রংপুর

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GD-265



## Number of birds rises at Baikka Beel

**OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar**

The Bangladesh Bird Club has completed its annual bird census at Baikka Beel Sanctuary in Moulvibazar's Hail Haor, recording a significant increase in bird numbers.

This year's census documented 7,870 water birds from 38 species, compared to 4,615 birds from 33 species in 2024 and 6,141 birds from 40 species in 2023.

Baikka Beel, a fish sanctuary and haven for migratory and resident aquatic birds, saw remarkable sightings, including 750 Grey-headed Lapwings and a record 639 Glossy Ibises and 100 Black-headed Ibises. A peregrine falcon, the world's fastest bird, was spotted for the first time, said Moniruzzaman, site officer for Centre for Natural Resource Studies, who called it a "rocket bird."

He said around 59 percent of the birds are migratory, benefitting from Baikka Beel's peaceful environment and fishing ban.

Minnat Ali, president of the Baragangina Resource Management Committee, suggested introducing visitor fees to improve sanctuary management and fund additional staff to address challenges in overseeing the large area.



The number of birds have risen significantly this year at Baikka Beel, a fish sanctuary and haven for migratory and resident aquatic birds. This year's census documented 7,870 water birds from 38 species, compared to 4,615 birds from 33 species in 2024 and 6,141 birds from 40 species in 2023.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

## Hasina, her cohorts using laundered money to spread propaganda: Sarjis

**OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon**

Sarjis Alam, a key coordinator of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, has alleged that ex-prime minister Sheikh Hasina and her cohorts are using laundered money to fund propaganda cells to spread misinformation to confuse and divide people.

"The people of Bangladesh are conscious enough to see through these lies which serve only as a source of amusement for them," he told reporters at an event at Mokbular Rahman Government College ground in Panchagarh yesterday.

Sarjis, also the chief organiser of the Jatiya Nagorik Committee, said they are working to uphold the dreams and spirit of people focusing on building a better future. "Giving importance to such propaganda is nothing but a waste of time."

"We don't need a separate government for neutral elections. Under the guidance of Dr Muhammad Yunus, we can witness transparent elections in Bangladesh," he added.

He said women were at the forefront of the mass uprising and they would have to play a pivotal role in shaping a new Bangladesh.



## Leprosy cases keep rising in Sylhet

Tea workers worst-affected; lone hospital strained of resources

**MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar**

The number of leprosy patients rose in Sylhet district in recent times amid inadequate treatment facilities.

A total 150 new cases were identified in the district in 2024, up from 79 in the previous year, according to Dr Manisar Chowdhury, district civil surgeon.

At present, there are 190 active leprosy cases in Sylhet district, including 124 males, 66 females, and seven children, he added.

According to data of the Directorate General of Health Services, the number of cases identified in 2014 were 194 in Moulvibazar, 150 in Sylhet, 106 in Habiganj, and one in Sunamganj.

In 2023, the numbers were 257 in Moulvibazar, 79 in Sylhet, 117 in Habiganj, and 103 in Sunamganj.

A large proportion of the patients are tea garden workers and



PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Sylhet Leprosy Hospital, one of the only three government-run leprosy treatment centres in the country, is facing numerous operational challenges to cater to the needs of the patients in the district.

their families.

According to data of Sylhet Leprosy Hospital and Lepa Bangladesh, around 65 percent of leprosy patients identified in Sylhet district are from tea workers' families.

Contacted, Dr Mohammad Noore Alam Shamim, assistant director of DGHs's Sylhet divisional office, said lack of awareness and

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

## Grabbers choke Char Fasson canal

**SUSHANTA GHOSH, Barishal**

The Char Fasson canal, stretching 20 kilometres through Bhola's Char Fasson upazila, was once a bustling waterway that facilitated navigation for large boats, trawlers, and launches, promoting communication and trade.

Over the years, however, rampant encroachment has choked the canal, reducing it to a narrow drain and transforming its vibrant waters into a lifeless channel.

Flowing through the southernmost part of the upazila, the canal connects to the Betua, Tentulia, and Meghna rivers.

In its heyday, it supported trading activities between Bhola and various regions, including Dhaka, with small passenger launches plying routes to Daulatkhan, Munsir Hat, Borhanuddin, Kachchhia, and Monpura.



PHOTO: MONIR UDDIN ANIK

Today, the canal is on the brink of collapse due to illegal encroachment and the indiscriminate dumping of waste. The lack of tidal flow has suspended the transport of goods and passengers, raising concerns about a potential environmental disaster. Locals called for urgent action from authorities to evict encroachers and excavate the canal to restore its vitality.

"The canal was once about 75 feet wide and deep enough for launches. Now it's reduced to a mere 20-25 feet wide drain in most areas," said local resident Md Shahadat, citing pollution and siltation as major hindrances. Muhammad Hasanuzzaman, executive engineer of the Bangladesh Water Development Board in Bhola, said efforts are underway to save the canal.

"We listed and evicted some illegal occupants in 2019, but they returned. A 10-km stretch was also dredged to restore flow. We are working to identify and evict all illegal occupants," he said.

## Man dies in elephant attack

**OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban**

A 50-year-old worker was killed in a wild elephant attack early in Lama upazila of Bandarban yesterday.

The deceased, Md Kalu, was a labourer at a betel leaf farm in Ishaq Member Para. He was from Cox's Bazar's Maheshkhali upazila.

Kalu was fatally injured when a herd of elephants raided a storage hut in Ishaq Member Para around 4:00am, said Md Shahadat Hossain, officer-in-charge of Lama Police Station.

The elephants, driven by a food shortage in the hills, descended from the forest and broke into the hut in search of rice and paddy. Kalu, who was sleeping inside, suffered critical injuries during the attack, the OC said, quoting locals. He was declared dead by the on-duty doctor around 6:00am.



A weaver at work in Lalmonirhat's Kaliganj upazila. Once renowned as Lalmonirhat's "Tant Palli," Kaliganj was home to 450-500 active handlooms just five years ago. Today, only 60-70 handlooms remain, of which just 20-25 operate year-round, with the rest functioning merely three to four months a year.

PHOTO: STAR

## LALMONIRHAT'S KALIGANJ UPAZILA Weaving heritage hangs by a thread

**S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat**

Sirajul Islam, 55, a resident of Mahishamuri village in Lalmonirhat's Kaliganj upazila, sits silently outside his modest home, gazing at the remnants of the handloom he sold three years ago. Like his father, the late Mozahar Ali, weaving had been his life's work since childhood. But now, forced to make ends meet, he earns a living as a day labourer, leaving behind a profession that once defined his identity.

Mahishamuri and Kakina villages, once renowned as Lalmonirhat's "Tant Palli," were home to 450-500 active handlooms just five years ago. Today, only 60-70 handlooms

remain, of which just 20-25 operate year-round, with the rest functioning merely three to four months a year.

Most weavers have abandoned their ancestral trade, seeking



livelihoods as agricultural labourers, day labourers, rickshaw pullers, and ferry workers. Those still clinging to their craft find themselves on the brink of giving up.

Weavers explained that the decline

began a decade ago as demand for handwoven fabrics started to dwindle. Machine-made fabrics, with their brighter appearance, have overtaken the market, becoming the preferred choice for buyers.

Capital shortages and shrinking market opportunities have further exacerbated their struggles, as the value of woven cloth continues to fall and its user base shrinks, they said.

Shafiar Rahman, 48, another weaver from Mahishamuri village, has also left the trade. Once taught by his late father, Noor Islam, he now works as a farm labourer to support his family, including his wife and two daughters, who live in extreme

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

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## Nusraat Faria reunites with Jaaz Multimedia for ‘Jinn 3’

Seven years after her last project with Jaaz Multimedia, Nusraat Faria is set to return to the renowned Bangladeshi production house for *Jinn 3*, the third installment in its popular supernatural franchise. Directed by Kamruzzaman Roman, the film is scheduled to start production in February, featuring captivating storyline and the debut of fresh new faces.

Faria, one of Bangladeshi cinema's most recognisable stars, made her debut with Jaaz in 2015's *Aashiqui: True Love*, a film that launched her to stardom. Her last collaboration with the production house was *Inspector Notty K* in 2018. Faria described her return as “coming home,” expressing heartfelt gratitude to Abdul Aziz, Jaaz’s head, for providing her with pivotal opportunities that shaped her career.

*Jinn 3* follows the success of *Jinn* (2023) and *Monica: Jinn 2* (2024), both celebrated for their dark, eerie narratives. Alongside the movie, she is also set to release several music projects this year with Fuad Almuqtadir and Muza.



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED



PHOTO: COURTESY OF BANGLADESH TREE PROTECTION MOVEMENT

After much anticipation and postponement, Kaavish finally graced the stage of *Dhaka Dreams*, enchanting audiences at Senapangan on the evening of January 24.

Organised by Blue Brick Communications, the concert unfolded like a symphony of emotions — with enchanting performances by Level Five, followed by the soul-stirring melodies of Shunno, the ethereal harmonies of Armeen Musa and the Ghashphoring Choir, and the heartfelt renditions of Arnob and Sunidhi Nayak. But it was the closing act that truly enraptured the crowd — the arrival of the beloved Pakistani band, Kaavish.

As the night unfolded, Kaavish wove a spell with their music, serenading the audience with timeless favorites like *Moray Sayyaan*, *Tere Naam*, *Baat Unkahi*, and *Tere Pyaar Mein* — each note carrying the weight of nostalgia and longing.




PHOTO: THABIT AL BASHAR

## Artists and activists demand restoration of Panthakunja Park

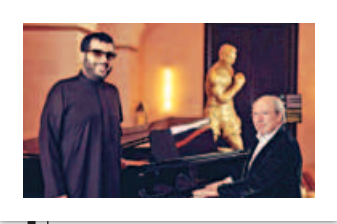
The Bangladesh Tree Protection Movement (BTPM) yesterday launched a protest, demanding the restoration of Panthakunja Park, a 5.39-acre urban green space, and the adjacent Hatirjheel water-catchment area. They are both threatened by the construction of ramps for the Dhaka Elevated Expressway (DEE).

The citizen-led demonstration, which began at 10am at Panthakunja Park, spoke out against practices that isolate communities and harm local ecosystems, diverging from the principles of sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Several artists took part in the installation art segment, including Afsana Sharmin Jhumpa, Farah Naz Moon, Sumana Akter, Ritu Sattar, Walid Saddam Topu, Efat Razowana Reya, Tahmina Hafiz Liza, Mehedi Masud, and Syed Muhammad Zakir.

The open-to-all demonstration underscored the growing demand for environmentally conscious urban planning.

## Hans Zimmer contacted by Saudi government to ‘rework’ national anthem



Saudi Arabia has enlisted Oscar-winning composer Hans Zimmer to create a new arrangement of its national anthem.

Zimmer, known for composing scores for *The Lion King* (1994), *Dune*, and *The Dark Knight* trilogy, has agreed to the general framework of the project, stated Turki Alalshikh, chairman of the General Entertainment Authority.

“We discussed numerous future projects that I hope will come to life soon, including a rearrangement of the Saudi national anthem employing different instruments,” Alalshikh shared on X (formerly Twitter).

Additionally, Zimmer explored plans for a Saudi-inspired musical titled *Arabia*, and the soundtrack for *The Battle of Yarmuk*, an upcoming film, Alalshikh concluded.

### WHAT'S THE HAPS?

**‘ART’**

Open Space Theatre presents *ART*, a critically acclaimed play written by Yasmina Reza, directed by M Arifur Rahman. This Bengali adaptation explores the dynamics of friendship and the subjective nature of art, humorously delving into how personal tastes influence relationships and provoke self-reflection. Centering on three friends and their conflict over an expensive white painting, the performance examines the fragility and strength of human connections.

**DATE:** SUNDAY | JANUARY 28  
**TIME:** 4:30PM-6:00PM AND 7:00PM-8:30PM  
**VENUE:** EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE HALL, BANGLADESH SHILPAKALA ACADEMY

# COUNTRYWIDE

## BORO SEEDLING CULTIVATION Advanced tray method sees success

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narsingdi

For the first time, a group of farmers in Palash upazila started using advanced tray method to grow hybrid Boro seedlings this season.

The group of 120 farmers of Noakanda village under Gazaria union, under the supervision of local agriculture department, have successfully grown Boro seedlings on 45 decimals of land using the advanced technic, which will be gradually transplanted on 150 bighas of land.

Agriculture officials said this unique method will not only reduce the production and labourer costs, but ensure a better yield.

Moreover, alongside protecting the seedbeds from adverse weather, it will also encourage farmers to adopt modern machine-based farming practices.

This year, a total of 2,320 plastic trays are being used, with 10 kilogrammes of hybrid seeds sown in each tray, to grow Boro seedlings on 45 decimals of land.

The advanced method ensures nearly 100 percent germination, resulting in robust seedlings.

Farmers cover all the trays with plastic sheets at night in order to protect the

saplings from extreme cold and fog.

Besides, the seedlings will be ready for transplantation within 20 to 25 days.

Farmer Faruk Mia of the village said, “We only have to bear the irrigation and land preparation costs. All other steps, from preparing the seedbeds to transplanting, will be done under the supervision of the agriculture office.”

The advanced method has not only reduced their expenses, but also made the process much easier, Faruk added.

Another paddy grower Rahim Uddin said seedlings grown in the trays remain healthy even in adverse weather as the plastic sheets protect the seedbeds from cold and fog.

The pilot initiative has also facilitated better coordination among farmers of the village, he further said.

Palash Upazila Agriculture Officer (UAO) Ayesha Akter said cultivation of Boro saplings using the tray method is an innovative and eco-friendly approach, which saves both time and money.

“We are providing training and necessary technical support to farmers to promote synchronized farming practices and hope it will open new possibilities for the agriculture sector in the coming years,” Ayesha said.



PHOTO: STAR  
Farmers cultivated hybrid Boro seedlings on vast areas using advanced plastic tray method. The photo was taken from Noakanda village in Narsingdi’s Palash upazila.

## AUSTRALIAN OPEN Keys cuts Sabalenka’s streak

AFP, Melbourne

Underdog Madison Keys upset Aryna Sabalenka 6-3, 2-6, 7-5 in the Australian Open final yesterday to win her first Grand Slam crown at the age of 29.

The American ended world number one Sabalenka’s dream of becoming the first woman for 26 years to win a third successive Melbourne Park singles title.

Keys yelled in delight and wiped away tears on securing the title after withstanding a fierce fightback from the Belarusian two-time defending champion, who buried her head in a towel after her 20-match win streak at Melbourne Park was ended.

## 12 robbers

FROM PAGE 2  
gang comprising 15 people reached the building around 10:00pm in two minibuses. They tied up and blindfolded three security guards, confiscated their mobile phones, and removed the CCTV hard drives. They also disconnected the building’s intercom service.

The robbers then broke into Gias Uddin’s flat and attempted to loot valuables. While trying to break a vault, neighbours alerted police by calling the emergency hotline, 999, the OC added.

A team from Khulshi police surrounded the building and arrested 12 suspects during the raid.

However, three members of the gang managed to flee.

“During primary interrogation, it was revealed that the gang members were engaged in various professions. We are questioning them further to identify and apprehend their accomplices,” the OC said.

## Arrest warrant issued

FROM PAGE 12

According to the investigation, on July 1, ACC Assistant Director Riaz Uddin submitted a report to the Senior Special Judge Court, seeking arrest, search, and seizure warrants against the accused.

Court records reveal that on November 19, 2014, Kaisarul Islam Chowdhury, a resident of Matarbari, filed a case against Ruhul Amin and 27 others,

accusing them of embezzling Tk 20 crore allocated for land acquisition for the Matarbari power plant. The court had ordered an ACC investigation into the matter.

Shortly after, Sadikul, the then district and sessions judge, allegedly dropped Ruhul Amin’s name from the case documents and forwarded them to the ACC headquarters. Upon discovering the forgery,

Kaisarul Islam filed a separate case against Ruhul Amin, Sadikul and five others.

Following an investigation, the ACC submitted a report on July 1, naming five accused individuals and recommending the exclusion of government prosecutor Abdur Rahim and former additional deputy commissioner SM Shah Habibur Rahman from the case.

## Yunus returns from Davos

FROM PAGE 12

Bangladesh’s Davos mission concluded on a high note, said the press secretary, adding that the chief adviser and his small Davos team is back home “with their heads held high”.

Prof Yunus held 47 meetings with heads of states, CEOs, and dignitaries. Top European leaders are firmly backing the interim government and its reform agenda to restore democracy, Shafiqul said.

Top journalists from some of the world’s best news outlets have queued to take Prof Yunus’s interviews.

“Nobody seems to be bothered by the propaganda campaign by the Indian outlets. They are very much aware of the dirty jobs that Indian media does for their political masters,” said the press secretary.

“The Tulip Siddiq saga in the UK added some extra

layers to Hasina’s ‘highway robbery’ story. The Western press now knows the kind of plunder and looting that took place during the Sheikh Hasina dictatorship,” he said.

Prof Yunus also spoke about the data manipulation, blaming the world for being blind during the “dictatorship”.

Prof Yunus, who reached Davos on January 21, had four meetings with heads of government/state, four meetings with minister-level dignitaries and ten meetings with heads/top executives of UN or similar organisations, Chief Adviser’s Deputy Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad Majumder told UNB.

Yunus had 10 meetings with CEOs/high-level business persons, attended nine WEF-hosted programmes and four formal dinner and lunch events.

Yunus also had eight media engagements on the

sidelines of the WEF annual meeting in addition to joining two other events.

The World Economic Forum’s (WEF) annual meeting in Davos brought together world leaders to address key global and regional challenges.

These included responding to geopolitical shocks, stimulating growth to improve living standards, and stewarding just and inclusive energy transition.

This year’s meeting convened under the theme ‘Collaboration for the Intelligent Age’ and the programme will be oriented around five distinct but highly interconnected thematic priorities:

Some 3,000 leaders from over 130 countries, and 350 governmental leaders, including 60 heads of states and governments, from all key regions attended the event.

## Family looking for answers

FROM PAGE 12

Afterwards, Arnob’s family became inconsolable at their residence at city’s Banorgati Islam Commissioner Mor.

His father, Nitish Kumar, who struggled to give his son a bright future, broke down in tears, saying, “I raised him with so much struggle. Why has God punished me like this? How will I return home without Arnob? What will I tell his mother?”

The incident has also

deeply affected Arnob’s younger brother, Anik Sarker, who was supposed to sit for the Dhaka University admission test at Khulna University yesterday.

Instead, he found himself at Gallamari cremation ground, overseeing his brother’s funeral.

“They shot him multiple times. He had no enemies, no disputes, no bad company. Why would anyone kill him?” Arnob’s uncle, Tushar Kumar said, breaking down

in tears.

Sk Moniruzzaman Mithue, deputy commissioner (South) of Khulna Metropolitan Police said that while the motive remains unclear, three individuals have been detained for questioning.

“We are interrogating several individuals but have no concrete leads yet.”

No case had been filed at the time of filing this report at 4:00pm yesterday.

## Tarique warns students against using state support

FROM PAGE 1

certainly welcomes the initiative. But if anyone seeks help from the state and administrative support to form a political party, it will disappoint the people,” the BNP leader said.

He also said that if the behaviour, comments, or statements of those intending to form a new party are antagonistic and vindictive towards other political parties, that would also be undesirable to the people.

“Of course, today’s youth are the future of Bangladesh. The youth will create a new path by coming out of the past, but not in a questionable way.”

He also considered unnecessary arguments between the interim government and the pro-democracy forces of Bangladesh as a waste of time.

“But at the same time, I want to draw the attention of the government and say that if the people can patiently accept its failures in various areas, it is important for those in the government to have much more patience and tolerance.”

As BNP pursues politics for the welfare of the people, he said their party aims to ensure the people’s political and economic power.

“Election is one of the main effective tools to ensure the political power of the people. Creating controversy over the election arrangement means unwittingly strengthening the position of fugitive and defeated fascist forces,” Tarique warned.



# Gaza development put back 60 years by war: UN

AFP, Davos

The Israel-Hamas war has put back development in Gaza by 60 years and mobilising the tens of billions of dollars needed for reconstruction will be an uphill task, the United Nations said.

Around two-thirds of all buildings in the Gaza Strip have been destroyed or damaged, and removing the estimated 42 million tonnes of rubble will be dangerous and complex, the head of the UN Development Programme told AFP.

"Probably between 65 percent to 70 percent of buildings in Gaza have either been entirely destroyed or damaged," Achim Steiner said in an interview at the World Economic Forum annual meeting in the Swiss ski resort town of Davos.

"But we're also talking about an economy that has been destroyed, where we estimate that roughly 60 years of development have been lost in this conflict over 15 months.

"Two million people who are in the Gaza Strip have lost not only their shelter: they've lost public infrastructure, sewage treatment systems, freshwater supply systems, public waste management. All of these fundamental infrastructure and



service elements simply do not exist."

And for all these towering numbers, Steiner stressed: "Human desperation is not just something that you capture in statistics."

The fragile ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza war took effect on Sunday.

Steiner said it was difficult to put a timeframe on reconstruction due to the "volatile" nature of the ceasefire, and because the UN's immediate focus is on life-saving aid.

"When we talk about reconstruction, we are not talking about one or two years here," he said.

"We are talking about years and years, until you even come close to rebuilding, first of all, the physical infrastructure, but it's also an entire economy.

"People had savings. People had loans. People had invested in businesses. And all of this is lost. So we are talking about the physical and economic, and in some ways even the psychosocial phase for reconstruction."

He said the physical reconstruction alone would cost "tens of billions of dollars", and "we do face an enormous uphill struggle on how to mobilise that scale of finance".



Hamas fighters escort four Israeli hostages, (centre: L-R) Naama Levy, Liri Albag, Daniella Gilboa and Karina Arie, on a stage before handing them over to a team from the Red Cross in Gaza City yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## SECOND HOSTAGE-PRISONER SWAP

# Four Israeli soldiers, 200 Palestinians freed

AGENCIES

Palestinian militants and Israel carried out a hostage-prisoner swap yesterday under a Gaza ceasefire deal, but a last-minute dispute blocked the expected return of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to devastated northern Gaza.

As part of the exchange, the second since the truce took effect last Sunday, four freed Israeli women hostages, all soldiers, arrived home in Israel after more than 15 months of captivity in Gaza.

In exchange, Israel's prison service confirmed that 200 prisoners, whom it called "terrorists", were freed.

The Israeli captives, Karina Arie, Daniella Gilboa and Naama Levy, all aged 20, and Liri Albag, 19, waved, smiled, and gave thumbs up as they were paraded on a stage in Gaza City.

Masked and armed militants flanked them during a slick ceremony watched by hundreds of residents.

In Tel Aviv, where a crowd gathered to watch their release on a large TV screen at a plaza known as Hostage Square, there were tears of joy, applause and a loud cheer as Israeli flags waved.

After their handover to the Red Cross, Israel's military said the women were transferred back into Israel and "reunited with their parents".

They were later taken by military helicopter to the Rabin Medical Centre, where they would receive "comprehensive medical care, including psychological support", according to Israel's health ministry.

Buses carrying the released Palestinians left Ofer prison in the occupied West Bank and Ktziot prison in the Negev desert.

As dozens of the former prisoners reached the West Bank city of Ramallah, crowds of Palestinians erupted in joy, raising many of



them onto their shoulders, an AFP journalist said.

The Palestinian Prisoners Club advocacy group said among those to be released was Mohammed al-Tous, 69, who has spent the longest continuous period in Israeli detention.

Bassem Naim, of the Hamas political bureau, had told AFP on Friday that Palestinians displaced by the war to southern Gaza should have been able to begin returning to the north following Saturday's releases.

But Israel yesterday said it would block such returns until civilian woman hostage Arbel Yehud is released.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said she "was supposed to be released today" but a Hamas source told AFP Yehud will be "released as part of the third swap set for next Saturday".

On social media platform X, the military's Arabic-language spokesman, Avichay Adraee, reiterated that Gazans were not allowed to

## Drone attack on hospital kills 30 in Darfur

AFP, Port Sudan

A drone attack on one of the last functioning hospitals in El-Fasher in Sudan's Darfur region killed 30 people and injured dozens, a medical source said yesterday.

The bombing of the Saudi Hospital on Friday evening "led to the destruction" of the hospital's emergency building, the source told AFP, requesting anonymity for fear of retaliation.

It was not immediately clear which of Sudan's warring sides had launched the attack.

Since April 2023, the Sudanese army has been at war with the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), who have seized nearly the entire vast western region of Darfur.

They have besieged El-Fasher, the state capital of North Darfur, since May, but have not managed to claim the city.

Last week, they issued an ultimatum demanding army forces and allies leave the city by Wednesday afternoon in advance of an expected offensive.

Local activists have reported intermittent fighting since, including repeated artillery fire from the RSF on the famine-hit Abu Shouk displacement camp.

## 'Peace talks minus Ukraine will yield no real results'

AFP, Kyiv

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky yesterday said allies should work towards determining a format for any upcoming peace talks with Russia and that Kyiv must be involved for successful negotiations.

His comments are the latest to pile speculation over the possibility of talks to end the brutal conflict that has cost tens of thousands of lives after almost three years of fighting.

"I understand that contacts can be in different formats," Zelensky said, referring to possible negotiations that would lead to "a just peace".

President Vladimir Putin earlier this week said he was ready for talks with US counterpart Donald Trump on Ukraine, praising him as a "smart" leader who might have prevented the conflict from starting in February 2022.

Putin did not say when talks could take place.

Trump, who was inaugurated on Monday, has called the conflict "ridiculous" and threatened Russia with tougher economic sanctions if it does not agree to stop its offensive.

Zelensky said in Kyiv that talks to end the war should be held between the United States, Ukraine and Russia, as well as the European Union.

"It is impossible to exclude Ukraine from any negotiation platform, or this negotiation platform will not have real results, but will have political results," he said.

"And such results will have nothing to do with security and the end of the war," he said.

Zelensky has put forward several proposals to end the conflict, including his so-called victory plan at a Ukraine summit last year that brought together dozens of countries and organisations.



This image released by the Department of Defense shows undocumented migrants awaiting takeoff for a removal flight at the Tucson International Airport, Arizona. The flight came as the White House said it had arrested more than a thousand people in two days with hundreds deported by military aircraft, saying that "the largest massive deportation operation in history is well underway." The photo was taken on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Former Fox News co-host to lead Pentagon

AFP, Washington

The US Senate narrowly confirmed former Fox News co-host Pete Hegseth as Pentagon chief on Friday, despite allegations of alcohol abuse, sexual misconduct and other fears about his ability to lead the world's most powerful military.

Three Republican senators voted against Donald Trump's pick as secretary of defense, resulting in a 50-50 tie that required J.D. Vance to cast the deciding ballot -- only the second time in history a vice president has had to intervene to save a cabinet nominee.

The razor-edged result underscored concerns about Hegseth, who will take over the Pentagon with war raging in Ukraine, the Middle East volatile despite ceasefires in Lebanon and Gaza, and as Trump expands the military's role in security on the US-Mexico border.

The 44-year-old is a former Army National Guard officer who until recently worked as a co-host for Fox News -- one of Trump's favored television channels.

Hegseth has a combative media personality, fierce loyalty and telegenic looks -- common hallmarks in Trump's entourage.

Supporters say Hegseth's deployments

in Afghanistan and Iraq give him the insight to run the Defense Department better than more experienced officials who would normally be considered for the job.

He has pledged to focus the military on "lethality" and to bring back "warrior culture" to the Pentagon.

In confirming him, Republicans brushed aside his lack of experience leading an organisation anywhere near the size of the Defense Department -- the country's largest employer with some three million personnel.

They also approved Hegseth despite allegations of financial mismanagement at veterans' nonprofits where he previously worked, reports of excessive drinking, and allegations that he sexually assaulted a woman in California.

Asked during his confirmation hearing last week about criticism he has faced, Hegseth said there was a "coordinated smear campaign" against him, and that he is "not a perfect person, but redemption is real."

Trump has stood by him, telling reporters Friday: "Pete's a very, very good man."

But three Republicans -- senators Susan Collins, Mitch McConnell and Lisa Murkowski -- were unconvinced and voted against him.





# Rule of law must preside

BNP must send a strong message to its activists to refrain from crimes

We are shocked to note that supporters of a Chhatra Dal leader not only obstructed the police from performing their duty but attacked them on Friday morning, injuring five officers. The incident took place in front of the capital’s New Market Police Station, where at least 30 people gathered to forcibly take away Mohammad Hossain, alias Mithun, joint general secretary of Chhatra Dal’s central committee, from police custody.

According to a report in this daily, law enforcers arrested Mithun in connection with the stabbing of two computer traders in Elephant Road on January 10. According to a *Prothom Alo* report, Mithun allegedly works for top criminal Sanjidul Haque Emon, the main accused in the stabbing case, and had ordered another arrestee of the January 10 case to be at the scene of the stabbing incident. Referring to some video footage, the report also mentions that Mithun’s supporters, at one point in their squabble with police on Friday night, questioned the police’s authority, asked if they knew about “Mithun’s contribution to the uprising,” and boasted about their own participation in the movement.

Since August 5, the alleged involvement of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) activists in crimes including extortion and rape have come up a number of times. Although party leaders, including the acting chairman, warned party activists to refrain from unlawful activities, and Chhatra Dal suspended Mithun and another leader Riyazul Hasan Rasel after Friday’s incident, such actions do not seem to have had much impact. Some of the party’s activists appear to be following the same path as the Awami League’s fallen goons, who exploited political power to get their way and even commit heinous crimes. Instead of building an image that aligns with the expectations of the July uprising for a corruption-free Bangladesh, where the rule of law is respected, activists of BNP and its student wing seem to be doing the opposite. But they must remember that a person’s affiliation with any party or apparent participation in the movement does not entitle them to special favours or immunity from legal consequences.

As one of the major political parties, the BNP must go the extra mile if it seeks to gain the public’s trust. Merely issuing statements or suspending one or two bad apples is not enough. The party must strongly distance itself from individuals with criminal records and take punitive action against anyone committing crimes under its banner. Meanwhile, law enforcers must intensify their efforts to arrest top criminals, many of whom were released on bail after August 5 and have resumed their criminal activities. They must regain their confidence to carry out their duties without political interference. Ensuring citizens’ safety should remain their highest priority.

# Who will answer for our migrant workers’ deaths?

Authorities must do more to ensure their well-being

We are deeply concerned by the unnaturally high number of deaths of our migrant workers abroad, with the host country authorities failing to provide accurate explanations for them. According to the Wage Earners’ Welfare Board (WEWB), 4,813 dead bodies of Bangladeshi migrants arrived in the country from the destination countries in 2024, mostly from the Gulf region. The number of deaths has steadily increased since 2021—with 3,818 in 2021, 3,904 in 2022, and 4,552 in 2023. Reportedly, WEWB received 56,769 dead bodies of migrants from 1993 to 2024, which is shocking. The question is, what is causing the deaths of so many of our workers? Have Bangladeshi authorities sought answers from the destination countries where these individuals met such dire fates?

Every year, many of our workers leave for foreign lands, hoping to improve their financial conditions. Unfortunately, many face severe hardships and return home in coffins, particularly from the Gulf region, the primary destination for Bangladeshi migrant workers. Often, the exact causes of their deaths remain unexplained, with “heart attack” commonly mentioned on their death certificates by the receiving countries. These countries rarely investigate the true reasons for these deaths, and Bangladeshi authorities also fail to find answers. Additionally, our female migrant workers often face physical, psychological, and sexual abuse at the hands of their employers—and many have reportedly died by suicide.

Over the years, our returnee migrant workers have shared the miserable conditions they faced in the Gulf states. Long hours, poor occupational health and safety practices, and exposure to cumulative health risks such as heat, air pollution, abusive conditions, psychosocial stress, hypertension, and chronic kidney disease have been common. The question is, have the Bangladeshi authorities made any effort to improve the living and working conditions of our workers? Additionally, our workers are under constant pressure to send money home to recoup the migration cost, leaving them with no opportunity for adequate rest. Have the authorities taken any steps to lower migration costs?

Why are we overlooking the struggles of our migrant workers, whose labour and remittances form the very backbone of our economy? We urge the authorities to prioritise the lives and welfare of our migrant workers above all else. While Bangladeshi missions abroad must advocate for the rights and welfare of migrant workers, the expatriates’ welfare ministry and the foreign ministry should jointly establish a robust monitoring mechanism to ensure workplace safety, improved accommodation, and regular health check-ups for migrant workers. Additionally, they should collaborate with host countries to enforce proper labour laws and hold employers accountable for mistreatment, unsafe conditions, and deaths. The authorities must also demand transparency regarding the exact causes of our workers’ deaths.

# How Singapore’s transport policies can inspire Dhaka’s growth



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MIR A FARUQUE

Singapore, one of Southeast Asia’s busiest cities, is known for its efficiency. During a recent visit, I was amazed by how seamlessly this small city with a high population density operates without much human involvement in managing traffic, thanks to its revolutionary transport system. The success of Singapore provides a powerful blueprint for cities like Dhaka.

After its independence in 1965, the Singaporean government identified and developed an integrated transport strategy to accommodate a growing population projected to reach 3.4 million by 1992. A traffic study conducted by the Singapore State and City Planning Department in 1967 identified that an improved traffic system with a focus on public transport was essential for the country’s growth. This study led the government to invest in the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) system, with construction starting in 1983 and operations beginning in 1987. This network has since provided millions of residents with a fast and reliable means of transportation.

Later, in 1995, Singapore established the Land Transport Authority (LTA), which introduced various strategies to manage the private vehicle population, including the Vehicle Quota System (VQS), a life-changing system that caps the number of new vehicles registered in the city, thereby mitigating traffic congestion.

Today, Singapore’s transport system is recognised globally for its efficiency and effectiveness. It has a well-connected network of roads, buses, MRT system, and Light Rail Transit (LRT) lines linking various neighbourhoods. While travelling, I spoke to a migrant named Shri, who has been living in Singapore for the last six years. He mentioned that he can travel to any part of the city using public transport and has relied on it exclusively during his time there. He also noted that even though he can afford a car in Singapore, he has never felt the need to buy one.

In the late 2020s, Bangladesh started its journey towards implementing a citywide MRT system. So far, one route from Uttara to Motijheel has been established through the MRT project. Considering the cost and time of travel, I would rate the MRT as the best option for getting around Dhaka.

Apart from saving travel time, the MRT system offers other benefits, such

as environmental, social, and economic advantages that are worth discussing.

MRT reduces greenhouse gas emissions by efficiently transporting large numbers of passengers, significantly reducing reliance on individual car travel. MRT systems promote sustainable land-use patterns, helping preserve green spaces and



MRT reduces greenhouse gas emissions by efficiently transporting large numbers of passengers, significantly reducing reliance on individual car travel.

FILE PHOTO: MARUF AREFIN MIM

natural habitats.

Some of the social benefits of MRT include providing social equity, accessibility for all, and security, especially for women and the elderly.

There are many researched economic benefits of MRT. For instance, workers are more productive as they avoid travel-related fatigue, it creates jobs for the community, and MRT stations often become commercial hubs due to increased traffic within and around these areas.

Dhaka can also benefit from implementing a VQS similar to Singapore’s model. The revenue generated from VQS can be reinvested into public transport infrastructure such as MRTs or LRTs. While it may

the city continues to grow and evolve, adopting best practices from around the world and seeking better solutions is crucial.

**Paid parking in commercial areas**

In the 1990s, Dhaka introduced a paid parking system near the New Market area. However, this system was very informal, with no accountability for the funds collected. Most people believed the fee was paid for car security, even though the driver was usually with the vehicle. Formalising paid parking or banning street parking in core commercial areas such as Motijheel, Gulshan, Uttara, Dhanmondi, and Karwan Bazaar can effectively manage traffic congestion.

In major cities around the world, high hourly parking rates discourage

drivers who mentioned that they only get passengers after 8 pm when the MRT shuts down or is not operational. This is concerning for local buses, and the authorities need to ensure their viability so they can support the public transport system when the MRT is not operational.

The potential benefits of MRT systems extend beyond mere transportation—they can transform cities into thriving, accessible, and environmentally friendly spaces. As Bangladesh moves forward with its MRT project, it has the opportunity to not only improve urban mobility but also foster a healthier, more sustainable, and equitable urban environment for its citizens.

# Why our policies must be backed by evidence

losing the objectivity necessary for improved policy formulation. This has also led to the selective creation and use of superficial data to support the political narrative, creating a culture of misinformation and ignorance.

To this end, an Evidence Unit established at the Chief Adviser’s Office could serve as a transformative institution. An Evidence Unit, as the name suggests, is a dedicated entity within the government that would focus on the analysis and dissemination of high-quality evidence to inform policy decisions. The unit can serve as an integral part of the policymaking process by ensuring decisions are based on available data in an objective manner.

An institutional framework for evidence from the highest level of government will also pave the way for improved understanding and respect for evidence within different agencies and ministries. It will allow for better coordination on issues requiring cross-agency collaboration. For instance, as Dhaka battles its worst-ever air quality, the remedy requires a synchronised approach among responsible government agencies working on the environment, power and energy, roads and transport, etc. For far too long, this coordination has been left at the mercy of a proactive initiator or awaited strong public resentment and media coverage to force concerned agencies into action.

However, an Evidence Unit can work as the coordinator and tracker for these policy concerns, providing data-driven recommendations to address these challenges. This harmonisation of policy across government ministries and departments will support the

development of a unified reform agenda, reducing redundancy and wasteful expenditure.

The expectations of a “new political settlement” also focus on increased participation of the people, particularly the youth, in state governance. To this end, a noticeable phenomenon recently has been the alteration of policies based on social media outcry, often creating mistrust and public dissatisfaction with government initiatives. Evidence-based policymaking is of paramount importance to make decisions that are more decisive, inclusive, discernible, debatable, and fact-based. The political actors in this process should also recognise that giving precedence to evidence in everyday decision-making demands steadfast political commitment.

The proposition for establishing an Evidence Unit stems from the need for a unified knowledge hub within the government mechanism that bridges the gap between academia, development organisations, and researchers. This would allow authoritative information and expert views to be utilised in the country’s policymaking process.

Several countries have long benefited from taking this approach to policymaking. The What Works Network in the United Kingdom has been instrumental in supporting the government by improving how government and other public sector organisations “create, share, and use” high-quality evidence in decision-making. Likewise, the Government Policy Analysis Unit in Finland and the Productivity Commission in Australia are all effective institutions that have institutionalised evidence-driven governance.

The What Works Network, established in the United Kingdom in 2013, has been an integral part of the British legislative system. The network not only focuses on the pertinent question of “what are the available options” but also addresses the important question of “how?” It identifies several well-tested and effective interventions, ensuring optimum planning and resource allocation, providing cost-benefit analyses, and identifying whether policies are likely to deliver their intended benefits. For example, the Education Endowment Foundation, one of the institutions under the Network, provides educational institutions with resources to improve the quality of teaching and learning by summarising evidence on the most effective educational practices. This is particularly important for a country like Bangladesh, where several streams of the education system have somewhat reinforced societal divides, institutionalised skill disparity, and facilitated prestige gaps in some cases.

The social fabric of Bangladesh is at risk of being blighted by the mistrust created by years of ineffective and disengaged policy decisions. The Evidence Unit can serve as a facilitator to maximise the returns of impactful research and data and instil objectivity and confidence in the government machinery. It will also serve as a repository for the plethora of research and information being generated globally on policy matters. Therefore, as we move forward with the reform agenda, it is indispensable for policymakers to acknowledge the role of evidence in policy formulation and embrace this behavioural shift.



# Awami League’s melodramatic redemption arc



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H. M. NAZMUL ALAM

The ongoing political narrative surrounding the Awami League (AL) seems to be an attempt at rewriting its history—a curious exercise in portraying itself as a victim after years of wielding unbridled power. While some might view this as a natural turn of events in the cycle of politics, others find it to be an astonishing display of hypocrisy and irony.

If politics were a theatre, Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal and his ilk would be worthy of Oscars for their tragicomic renditions of “Victims of Circumstance” and “The Forgotten Heroes.” Only this time, the audience isn’t clapping; they’re rolling their eyes.

In a recent interview with the *Indian Express*, the former home minister delivered a soliloquy so riddled with irony that even the most skilled satirists would struggle to script it. Kamal admitted to an intelligence failure during the July uprising of 2024, lamenting how 460 police stations were torched,

burn because dissent was already smothered in the flames of crossfires and enforced disappearances? During his party’s reign, anyone daring to speak out against the regime was silenced, often permanently. Yet here he stands, bemoaning the inefficacy of the same police force he once weaponised. It’s akin to a firefighter who moonlights as an arsonist lamenting the spread of flames. Kamal’s lament is like a chef blaming his burnt soufflé on the oven—completely ignoring his own recipe for disaster.

Mohammad A Arafat, another AL luminary, recently took to Facebook to demand elections under a caretaker government. Yes, you heard that right—the very system they demonised, abolished, and declared unconstitutional is now their chosen sanctuary. It’s as if someone who insisted on drinking seawater for years suddenly complains about dehydration.

For those who’ve forgotten, AL spent three consecutive

forward to 2025, and here they are, weeping for its resurrection. The hypocrisy could power an entire season of *House of Cards*.

Let’s talk about the crimes that AL leaders conveniently overlook in their newfound role as victims. Under their watch, the nation witnessed extrajudicial killings euphemistically dubbed “crossfires.” Innocent

“morale” of AL workers being high is as believable as claiming that Walter White cooked meth for charity. He wistfully spoke of Sheikh Hasina’s transformative leadership, citing her economic achievements. But where were these accolades when the economy spiralled into inflation, and essential goods became luxuries? The price of onions soared so

man defeated by my own system). Meanwhile, Arafat’s Facebook status could be the perfect script for a villain’s monologue, demanding justice while ignoring the skeletons in his own closet. Their melodramatic shift from authoritarian overlords to misunderstood victims deserves its own soundtrack.

Kamal’s claim that “everything

electoral victories as proof of public support. But in a country where elections were marred by allegations of ballot-box stuffing, intimidation, and outright fraud, these claims hold as much water as a sieve. The phrase “public mandate” was weaponised to justify their grip on power, ignoring the disillusionment simmering among ordinary citizens.

Ironically, the same party that dismissed peaceful protests as “foreign conspiracies” now attempts to portray itself as the defender of democracy. Their narrative is as believable as a thief crying foul when caught red-handed. They demand an impartial system, conveniently forgetting their systematic efforts to erode democratic norms for over a decade.

Under AL’s rule, silence became a survival strategy. Academics, activists, and ordinary citizens were forced to self-censor, lest they invite the wrath of the regime. The state apparatus functioned as an omnipresent spectre, watching and punishing dissent. The culture of fear they cultivated is a scar on the nation’s psyche—one that will take years to heal.

Now, in an ironic twist, AL leaders lament the lack of “freedom of expression” under the interim government. Their cries would be laughable if they weren’t so infuriating. It’s like an authoritarian mourning the loss of their own dictatorship.

The people of Bangladesh have spoken, and their message is clear: enough is enough. No amount of crocodile tears or revisionist narratives can erase the AL’s legacy of oppression. Their cries for justice and democracy ring hollow, echoing the hypocrisy of a regime that trampled those very ideals. The public is now the discerning critic, refusing to buy tickets to a show they’ve seen too many times before.

So, as Kamal dreams of a “short time” for recovery and Arafat rallies for a caretaker government, one can’t help but chuckle at the absurdity. The AL’s redemption arc is less a phoenix rising from the ashes and more a circus act fumbling its way through a dark comedy. The curtain has fallen on their melodrama, and the only applause they’re receiving is the sound of people turning their backs.



ILLUSTRATION: BIPLOB CHAKROBORTY

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thousands of weapons looted, and chaos reigned supreme. To top it off, he boldly blamed a “joint coup of Islamic extremism and the army” for the government’s fall.

But let’s rewind the reel to his own tenure. Remember the years when police stations didn’t need to

elections—2014, 2018 and 2024—under their own political regime, systematically dismantling the caretaker system to cement their autocracy. Their justification? Caretaker governments, they claimed, were a breeding ground for instability and conspiracies. Fast

citizens, political opponents, and journalists were subjected to a reign of terror. The streets of Dhaka were painted red, not with the colours of revolution, but with the blood of innocents. The frightening reports of people disappearing overnight were treated as just another day in the AL’s kingdom.

One could argue that the AL’s rule was a masterclass in dystopian governance. If Orwell’s *1984* were ever to be adapted into a Bangladeshi context, their regime would serve as the perfect blueprint. Surveillance? Check. Thought control? Double check. Fear as a tool of governance? Triple check. Their tenure redefined the term “big brother” and not in the reality-TV sense.

Kamal’s lament about the

high that they became a symbol of wealth, and the middle class found themselves nostalgic for days when a simple fish curry didn’t break the bank.

And let’s not forget the AL’s media stranglehold. During their tenure, newspapers were muzzled, journalists were imprisoned, and social media became a hunting ground for dissenters. Yet today, they whine about media bias under the interim government. It’s like a monopolist complaining about competition.

If the AL’s current predicament were a Bollywood film, it would be titled *Ghar Ghar Mein Hypocrisy*. Picture Kamal as a tragic hero, spouting lines like, “*Main woh insaan hoon jo apne hi banaye huye system se haar gaya*” (I am the

has turned 360 degrees” is unintentionally accurate. A full circle indeed, as the AL now finds itself in the very position it worked so hard to eliminate—pleading for fairness, justice, and democracy. The irony is almost poetic, like a snake biting its own tail. Except this snake spent years assuring everyone it was a dove.

From *Game of Thrones* to *Breaking Bad*, pop culture is rife with cautionary tales about power and its corrupting influence. The AL’s saga is no different. Their fall from grace serves as a stark reminder that unchecked power inevitably leads to ruin. It’s like Walter White lamenting the moral decay of the meth industry or Cersei Lannister criticising unethical leadership practices.

The AL often boasted about their

# A reminder of the nearly unwinnable hand Yunus was dealt



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MIR AFTABUDDIN AHMED

History shows that the aftermath of popular revolts—particularly those that overthrow authoritarian regimes—is marked by chaos and uncertainty. What Bangladesh is currently facing—economic instability on pocketbook issues, such as exorbitant prices of essentials, a feeble investment climate, and a war of words among political stakeholders with competing vested interests—is a predictable symptom of a messy but necessary political transition.

In reality, that transition is underway—not through an overhaul of how politics functions in Bangladesh but within the pre-existing paradigm of a flawed system, through gradual, incremental steps towards democracy. Finding the sweet spot that constitutes a liberal, multi-party ecosystem will take decades, not months. It depends on both a good-faith commitment and the implementation of that commitment by political actors through self-reflection, public policies, and rhetoric that differ extensively from what Bangladesh has experienced in the past.

Yunus leads a team that, for all its flaws, has shown a willingness to listen to criticism rather than suppress dissent. However, testing the public’s patience is the government’s failure to adequately respond to those criticisms by matching words with actions. The public’s patience is considerable, but it is not infinite and will inevitably reach its limits. Yunus’ announcement that elections will take place sometime

between the end of 2025 and mid-2026 has helped calm nerves slightly, offering a skeletal electoral roadmap.

Many segments of society, silenced for 15 years, are voicing their frustrations on a range of issues without the fear of reprisal. This sudden release of anger, while cathartic for some, has added to the government’s woes. A vested quarter, still convinced that Hasina’s political chapter is far from over, are intent on breeding chaos and disrupting the brittle equilibrium defining the social contract between an anxious population and an inexperienced government.

A government, neither elected nor politically sharp yet burdened with the task of navigating a minefield of expectations, frustrations, and entrenched divisions, is far from ideal. However, the current situation simply reflects the raw, anarchic truth of a nation still trying to figure out its next steps.

A sentiment has taken root in Bangladesh: Yunus is an honest man with good intentions, a philosopher who has wooed international leaders every time he has travelled abroad since taking the reins of government. At the recent World Economic Forum conference, he was in fine form. In Bangladesh, though, he seems out of his comfort zone, struggling to steer the ship of state—a ship he did not want to captain.

There are many steps that, as chief adviser, Yunus could and should have taken but has not. Critics have

examined these shortcomings in depth. But it is the nation’s duty to continuously remind itself of the context in which Yunus finds himself in the position he occupies today and why he deserves a fairer assessment.

To begin with, consider how Yunus assumed office. He was preparing either to remain abroad or return to Bangladesh to face

than Yunus. At that moment, and even today, no one else other than him had—or has—the moral legitimacy to unify a fractured Bangladesh. Yunus brought an aura of hope, a balm for a country reeling from weeks of state-sponsored carnage. Mob violence still occurred, but viewed contextually, things could have been much worse. Nonetheless, being a symbol of



The people of Bangladesh have little choice but to place their faith in a man who, throughout his storied career, has rarely disappointed his nation.

PHOTO: CA PRESS WING

imprisonment under a regime that sought retribution. That regime, led by a prime minister with a personal vendetta against Yunus, resented the universal respect he commanded. His stature was an insult to the fragile ego of an autocrat.

In the aftermath of August 5, a group of young student conveners, most in their 20s, approached Yunus with an emotional appeal. They summoned him back to Dhaka from Paris, delivering an unambiguous message: you have to return to take the role of head of government in Bangladesh. And they were right.

Frankly, there was no other option

national unity is one thing. Governing is another matter entirely.

His advisory council has attracted valid criticism due to the underperformance of certain individuals. According to Yunus’s own admissions in a candid conversation with *New Age* editor Nurul Kabir, he was presented with a shortlist of names—likely suggested by the student conveners—and chose individuals he knew personally. Unlike previous chief advisers of caretaker governments, who had the luxury of time to prepare and the clarity of purpose, Yunus inherited a state apparatus with neither.

The caretaker governments of 1991, 1996, and 2001 operated under three-month mandates to organise elections. They benefitted from defined goals, established timelines, and institutional preparation. In contrast, Yunus was tasked with a much broader and less defined mission: to reform a system riddled with corruption, dismantle entrenched authoritarian structures, unite political parties, hold elections, and manage the day-to-day affairs of the state. There was no roadmap, no consensus on priorities, and no clarity on the duration of his administration.

Most members of his advisory council have no experience in government, including Yunus himself, as he often reminds the public. He could not appoint figures closely tied to the Awami League or BNP, nor could he include anyone seen as ideologically extreme to the left or the right. This resulted in a team that lacks administrative skills and ideological cohesion. While these shortcomings are real, they reflect the impossible deck of cards Yunus was dealt.

The politics Yunus must navigate are no less fraught. The BNP demands elections as soon as possible with minimal reforms, pushing the idea that an elected government is urgently needed. Meanwhile, frontline student leaders have begun to display signs of inexperience, veering into unnecessary ideological debates, such as calls to amend Bangladesh’s state ideology, rather than focusing on designing a coherent policy vision for the future. Activism, for all its courage and energy, has not translated into the kind of maturity needed post the uprising.

Then there are the religion-based factions, including Jamaat-e-Islami, which seek to steer Bangladesh in a direction likely at odds with a sizeable segment of the country. Considering all this and more, Yunus has become an umbrella shielding a nation from local and international conspiracies,

striving to cocoon citizens from conflict with one another to the best of his ability, battered by competing political, ideological, and generational storms.

Compounding these challenges is the bureaucracy. The civil service, entrenched in inefficiency and outdated practices, has become a barrier to both reform and daily administration. Yunus has faced a public service designed to resist change, still bearing the influence of the previous regime. From law enforcement’s failure to carry out its responsibilities to the continued dominance of syndicates, the bureaucracy has proven to be an almost insurmountable obstacle.

The greatest challenge lies ahead. The recommendations from various reform commissions must now be either agreed upon, ditched, or left for the elected government to pursue, requiring negotiation among political stakeholders. Yunus has taken on the responsibility of building consensus—an extremely difficult task. He has positioned his government as a facilitator without its own agenda, suggesting that those expected to lead Bangladesh after the elections should take the wheel in determining what is best for the country.

On paper, this approach seems inclusive—some might even call it democratic. The real question, however, is whether an 84-year-old man, who has lived a remarkable life, achieved nearly everything one can aspire to, and brought international recognition to Bangladesh, can rise to meet the moment and what is arguably the biggest test of his life. The people of Bangladesh have little choice but to place their faith in a man who, throughout his storied career, has rarely disappointed his nation. Criticise his government we will, but place our trust in him we must. Good luck, Dr Muhammad Yunus.



## Women face higher cancer risk before age 65: What you need to know

New research from the American Cancer Society shows that women under 65 face a higher risk of being diagnosed with cancer compared to men. The disparity is most noticeable in women aged 49 and younger, with 1 in 17 expected to develop invasive cancer by age 50. For men in the same age group, the risk is 1 in 29.

Younger women are seeing a rise in cancers like lung cancer, pancreatic cancer. Other cancers, such as those affecting the uterus and liver, are also becoming more common and fatal in women.

### Tips to lower your cancer risk

While not all cancers can be prevented, these steps can help reduce your risk:

1. *Get regular screenings:* Early detection can significantly improve outcomes. Women should prioritise screenings like Pap smears, mammograms, and colonoscopies as recommended by their doctors.

2. *Maintain a healthy diet:* Eat a variety of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Reduce processed and red meat consumption, and include foods rich in antioxidants like berries, nuts, and leafy greens.

3. *Stay physically active:* Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week to maintain a healthy weight and reduce cancer risk.

4. *Avoid tobacco and limit alcohol:* Smoking is a major risk factor for many cancers, including lung cancer. Limiting alcohol intake can also lower your risk of liver and breast cancer.

5. *Protect your skin:* Wear sunscreen and protective clothing to lower your risk of skin cancer. Avoid tanning beds and prolonged sun exposure.

6. *Stay up to date on vaccinations:* Vaccines like HPV and hepatitis B can protect against certain cancers. Talk to your doctor about the vaccines you may need.

7. *Manage stress and sleep well:* Chronic stress and poor sleep can weaken your immune system. Practice stress management techniques like yoga or meditation and aim for 7-9 hours of sleep per night.

By adopting these healthy habits and staying informed, you can take proactive steps to reduce your cancer risk and protect your overall health.



### RTN DR MONZUR A KHODA

Ageing is a natural and unavoidable phenomenon that brings with it various health challenges, including arthritis, memory loss, joint degeneration, lung fibrosis, and other complications.

While medicines can alleviate symptoms or modify disease progression, they cannot regenerate or rejuvenate tissues or organs. This is where the magic of regenerative or interventional rheumatology comes in, offering hope for pain relief and rejuvenation.

To understand the essence of regenerative or interventional rheumatology, it is important to first define rheumatology and the diseases it encompasses. Rheumatology differs from conditions like rheumatic fever, which affects children and adolescents following a sore throat and causes migratory joint pain. Rheumatology, however, primarily deals with autoimmune conditions, where the immune system mistakenly attacks the body's own tissues. These autoimmune disorders can cause joint pain, skin rashes, organ damage, and more. Some of the major autoimmune arthritic diseases include:

1. **Rheumatoid arthritis:** Affects the small joints of the hands and feet, causing morning pain.

2. **Ankylosing spondylitis:** Causes back pain, particularly in young to middle-aged males.

3. **Other seronegative arthritides:** Associated with conditions like psoriasis or chronic diarrhoea.

4. **Lupus:** Affects females and causes joint pain, skin rashes, and other symptoms.

5. **Systemic sclerosis:** Involves tightening of the skin and hardening of the lungs.

6. **Dermatomyositis:** Causes skin rashes and muscle pain.

7. **Sjogren's syndrome:** Leads to dryness of natural fluids like tears and saliva.

Rheumatology also addresses degenerative arthritis, such as

## Live pain-free and YOUNG AGAIN



### Platelet Rich Plasma (PRP) treatment

osteoarthritis, which is commonly seen in the knees, hips, and back due to ageing or injury, and other conditions like gout, caused by the deposition of waste products in joints. Mechanical pain from ligaments and tendons, often due to sports injuries, obesity, or sedentary lifestyles, is another area treated by rheumatologists. Nutritional deficiencies, such as vitamin D deficiency, are also common causes of muscle and joint pain.

Interventional rheumatologists focus on providing relief for debilitating arthritis, especially knee and hip osteoarthritis, back pain, and other joint issues like shoulder, ankle, and wrist pain. Some cutting-edge regenerative treatments, which have been successfully introduced in Bangladesh, include:

1. **Prolotherapy:** A treatment that stimulates healing of inflamed joints, ligaments, or tendons using a dextrose solution or ozone.

2. **Platelet-based treatments:** PRP (Platelet Rich Plasma): Plasma from the patient's own blood is rich in platelets that contain growth factors to repair damaged tissues.

Platelet lysate: Platelets are broken down to release growth factors and mRNA, which promote tissue regeneration.

3. **Stem cell therapy:** Involves using

mesenchymal stem cells (MSCs), derived from the patient's own bone marrow or fat or from umbilical cord blood, to replace damaged tissues and rejuvenate joints.

4. **Bone marrow and fat-based treatments:** These involve using stem cells from the patient's own bone marrow and adipose tissue to provide sustainable relief from joint pain and neurological disorders like spinal cord paralysis and Alzheimer's.

5. **GOLDIC therapy:** Involves using gold nanoparticles to release rejuvenating molecules and growth factors from the patient's blood, promoting healing.

6. **Peptide therapy:** Uses amino acid sequences mimicking the body's natural healing molecules to stimulate joint repair and collagen production.

7. **Exosome therapy:** Involves the use of extracellular vesicles produced by stem cells, which deliver therapeutic molecules directly to the target tissue for faster healing.

These regenerative treatments, all of which use biologically active products, aim to rejuvenate painful joints and other diseased structures, offering a promising alternative to traditional medicine.

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### FOOD & MENTAL HEALTH

## Boost your mood through diet

The connection between food and mental health is stronger than ever, with growing evidence highlighting how diet influences emotional well-being. The gut-brain axis, a vital communication link between your digestive system and brain, plays a significant role in regulating mood and mental health. A diet rich in nutrients does more than fuel your body—it nourishes your mind too.

Here are practical tips to boost mental health through better food choices:

**Include gut-friendly foods:** Prebiotics (like garlic, onions, and bananas) and probiotics (found in yoghurt, kefir, and fermented foods) promote a healthy gut microbiome, which supports emotional balance.

**Choose brain-boosting nutrients:** Add omega-3-rich foods like salmon and walnuts, B vitamin-packed leafy greens, and magnesium sources like almonds and spinach to your meals for optimal brain function.

**Adopt a Mediterranean-inspired diet:** The Mediterranean diet—abundant in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, and olive oil—has been linked to reduced risk of depression and better overall mental health.

**Cut back on processed foods:** Ultra-processed snacks, sugary drinks, and refined carbs can negatively impact your mood. Opt for whole, minimally processed foods instead.

**Stay hydrated and eat regularly:** Drinking enough water and maintaining regular meal times help stabilise energy levels and prevent mood swings. Making small, manageable changes—such as swapping processed snacks for fresh fruit can have a lasting impact on mental well-being. Combining these dietary steps with mindful eating practices and social mealtimes can further enhance your emotional health.



## Innovating for a healthier, sustainable future

### STAR HEALTH REPORT

The inaugural Asia-Pacific Global Health Innovation Hackathon 2025 took place from 17-18 January 2025 and brought together 16 teams from 13 Asia-Pacific markets to address the urgent intersection of health challenges and climate change. Jointly hosted by the SingHealth Duke-NUS Academic Medicine Innovation Institute, SingHealth Duke-NUS Global Health Institute, and the SingHealth International Collaboration Office, this unique regional event aimed to develop transformative, scalable solutions for some of the region's most pressing health issues.

Climate change significantly impacts human health through environmental changes such as deteriorating air quality, altered disease vector distribution, extreme weather events, and disruptions to food systems. These changes exacerbate respiratory, cardiovascular, and waterborne diseases, increase the risk of undernutrition, and affect mental health. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive climate mitigation and adaptation strategies.

The hackathon brought together teams of three to four participants, including innovators, technical experts, researchers, and healthcare professionals from Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, the Philippines, and Vietnam. Participants developed data-driven solutions to combat climate-

related health challenges, receiving expert guidance from mentors from Duke-NUS Medical School, the National Environment Agency, WHO, and other organisations.

stated, is a platform for innovation at the intersection of climate resilience and medicine, with the goal of creating sustainable healthcare solutions adaptable to the region's needs.

Ms Lee Chen Ee, Group Director of SingHealth Division of Innovation & Transformation and Co-Chair of the SingHealth Duke-NUS Academic Medicine Innovation Institute, added that the hackathon aims to bring together healthcare professionals from diverse backgrounds to create scalable solutions that address the impact of climate change on health.

Ms Vijaya Rao, Director of the International Collaboration Office at SingHealth, emphasised the importance of collaboration across borders to develop culturally relevant solutions, ultimately aiming to forge a healthier and more equitable future for all.

### SingHealth's commitment to innovation and sustainability



### sustainability

Innovation is one of SingHealth's key pillars of advancement, as they recognise its importance in driving continual progress in healthcare. Their partnership with Duke-NUS Medical School to form the Academic Medicine Innovation Institute (AMII) highlights this commitment, fostering a culture where every team member is empowered to challenge the status quo, collaborate across disciplines, and contribute new ideas to improve healthcare delivery. AMII acts as a catalyst for pioneering solutions that will address both current and future health challenges.

SingHealth has long recognised the power of cross-border collaboration to transform healthcare. Through various initiatives, they have built partnerships with healthcare organisations from across Asia and beyond, sharing knowledge and expertise to tackle regional and global public health challenges. This collaborative spirit was evident at the hackathon, as participants worked together to create scalable solutions for climate-related health issues.

This first-of-its-kind hackathon in the Asia-Pacific region is made possible by the generous support of The Moh Family Foundation. Beyond the event, the hackathon aims to establish a regional network of innovators focused on climate health, fostering collaboration and innovation in addressing the adverse health impacts of climate change.

## Breathe easy: The best allergy treatments

If you suffer from seasonal allergies, you are not alone. Many people turn to oral antihistamines or montelukast



for relief, but research shows that nasal sprays are far more effective. A systematic review of 35 clinical trials compared nasal sprays and oral medications in managing seasonal allergic rhinitis in teens and adults. The results were clear: nasal preparations outperformed pills across all measures, including symptom control and quality of life.

Nasal steroids provided the most significant benefit, especially when compared to montelukast. Nasal antihistamines also performed better than oral antihistamines, making sprays the top choice for treating allergies.

For mild-to-moderate symptoms that come and go, nasal antihistamines work quickly—often within 15 minutes—and can be used as needed. For persistent or severe symptoms, nasal steroids are more effective but require consistent daily use. If symptoms remain uncontrolled with one spray, combining nasal steroids with nasal antihistamines provides better relief than adding oral medications.

While many patients prefer pills, nasal sprays clearly deliver better results. If you are struggling with allergies, talk to your healthcare provider about switching to a nasal preparation.

Source: Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology



### REVOLUTIONISING INFANT CARE

## New approaches to treating possible serious bacterial infection in young infants

### STAR HEALTH REPORT

A dissemination meeting showcasing the key findings of two pioneering clinical trials aimed at enhancing the management of Possible Serious Bacterial Infection (PSBI) in infants under 2 months of age was held at the Radisson Blu Water Garden Hotel in Dhaka recently. The event was hosted by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in collaboration with Projahnmo Research Foundation (PRF), Bangladesh.

These landmark trials provided evidence for innovative approaches to optimise the place of treatment and duration of inpatient care for newborns, paving the way for better neonatal outcomes and are crucial for resource-limited countries like Bangladesh, where limited hospital beds and challenges in referring young infants hinder neonatal care.

Infections in young infants are a major global health concern and a significant contributor to under-five mortality, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). In Bangladesh, neonatal mortality stands at 20 per 1,000 live births, with infections accounting for 20%-40% of these deaths. Approximately 8-10% of infants experience at least one episode of PSBI in their first two months of life.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) currently recommends inpatient care, including injectable antibiotics and supportive treatment to treat neonatal infection. However, many of these infants may not require hospitalisation, which carries additional risks such as hospital-acquired infections, complicating care, and longer hospital stays. Hence, there is a need to conduct multicountry, large-sample clinical trials to improve the management of PSBI in young infants less than 2 months of age. In this context, WHO coordinated two

clinical trials concurrently across six countries, including Bangladesh, Ethiopia, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Tanzania, with funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

In Bangladesh, PRF and Johns Hopkins University, USA, led these trials in collaboration with WHO and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of Bangladesh, in the Sylhet district. These trials evaluated the safety and efficacy of outpatient care versus currently recommended inpatient treatment for infants with low-mortality-risk signs of PSBI.

Key findings reveal that young infants with any low-mortality-risk signs can be safely treated with outpatient care, simplifying care for families while maintaining effectiveness. Young infants with moderate-mortality-risk signs who respond well to a 48-hour course of injectable antibiotics can benefit from switch therapy (early discharge on oral antibiotic therapy at home).

These trials prove that infants with PSBI could be safely and effectively treated with first-generation antibiotics, such as amoxicillin, ampicillin, and gentamicin. These innovative approaches may minimise unnecessary hospitalisations, reduce healthcare costs by optimising health systems and family resources, reduce the risk of hospital-acquired infections, and offer families in resource-limited settings a safe, effective, and accessible alternative to standard inpatient care.

The dissemination meeting highlighted the potential impact of these findings and discussed strategies for scaling up evidence-based practices across Bangladesh and other LMICs. These strategies are expected to significantly enhance neonatal care, save countless lives, and address one of the most urgent global health challenges.



## Keys: From teenage prodigy to Grand Slam champion



**Madison Keys arrived in Australia under the radar and with the modest goal of seeing how well she could perform with her 30th birthday looming next month. The resilient American now has the answer after defeating two-time defending champion Aryna Sabalenka in three sets in Saturday's Australian Open final to clinch her first major title. Now ranked 14, Keys will return to the top 10 for the first time since 2019 next week. She made her first semi-final at Melbourne Park in 2015 as a prodigious 19-year-old to showcase her potential.**

Keys was born in Rock Island, Illinois and started playing tennis at the age of four.

Having made her professional debut in 2009 aged 14, Keys won her first title on the ITF circuit in 2010 and added two more in 2012.

In 2013, she broke into the top 100 before finishing the year ranked as world number 39.

Her first WTA title came at 2014 Eastbourne International.

The following year she reached the quarter-finals at Wimbledon as well as the semis of the Australian Open, where she lost to eventual champion Serena Williams.

She missed out on a bronze medal at the Rio Olympics, losing to Czech Petra Kvitová in three sets.

She reached her first Grand Slam final at the 2017 U.S. Open, falling to compatriot Sloane Stephens in straight sets.

The biggest title of her career came at the 2019 Cincinnati Open after she defeated twice major winner Svetlana Kuznetsova in the final.

She started the 2025 season on a high by clinching her ninth WTA Tour singles title at the Adelaide International, which she also won in 2022.

After reaching the Australian Open semis in 2015 and 2022, Keys reached the 2025 final with a victory over five-times Grand Slam champion Swiatek.

29-year-old Keys became the second-oldest woman to claim her first Australian Open singles title in the Open era after China's Li Na, who was 31 when she triumphed at Melbourne Park in 2014.

## AUSTRALIAN OPEN MEN'S FINAL

# Sinner wary of 'physical beast' Zverev

AFP, MELBOURNE

Jannik Sinner is wary of "physical beast" Alexander Zverev as the Italian bids to join an elite group with back-to-back Australian Open titles in a final that pits the world's top two players.

The ice-cool runaway world number one goes into Sunday's Melbourne Park decider on a 20-match win streak, dropping just two sets in his six matches

**The ice-cool runaway world number one goes into Sunday's Melbourne Park decider on a 20-match win streak, dropping just two sets in his six matches so far.**

so far.

Sinner is favourite to secure a third Grand Slam crown and second at the Australian Open after his maiden triumph over Daniil Medvedev last year.

Only three other men have managed the feat on Rod Laver Arena since the turn of the century -- Andre Agassi, Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic.

But the 23-year-old, who suffered from cramp in his semi-final with Ben Shelton, offered Germany's Zverev a glimmer of hope ahead of their showdown.

"No," he replied when asked if he had become unbeatable after his run in Melbourne, on the back of winning eight titles last year, including the US Open and season-ending ATP Finals.

"I know that I put a lot of work in. I know I just try to stay calm, never taking things for granted. Just well-prepared, to be honest.

"Every day is a big challenge. Every day you have a different opponent," he



added.

"Sometimes you have some issues and then trying to understand that whatever works best for that day and trying to go for it. Everyone makes mistakes. Nobody's perfect."

Sinner's coach Darren Cahill said it was no surprise for him to see his young charge back in the final, but they were wary of the threat posed by Zverev's overarching desire to finally win a Slam.

"He's a physical beast," Cahill said. "He's put those years of work into his body. He is a great athlete and has a



great five-set record.

"They're both physically prepared. They're both incredible athletes," he added.

"It's the number one and two in the world so it's the perfect final as far as the rankings are concerned."

That will prick the ears of world number two Zverev, long seen as the sport's most unfulfilled talent, without a Grand Slam title after a decade of trying.

The German has bulked up in recent months and is also on a red-hot streak, winning 16 of his past 17 matches dating back to his title run at November's Paris Masters.

He holds a 4-2 record over the Italian, but the 27-year-old knows all too well that's he's fallen short when it's mattered most on tennis's biggest stages.

Zverev blew a two-set advantage against Dominic Thiem in the 2020 US Open final and gave up a 2-1 lead in the French Open title match against Carlos Alcaraz last year.

# Barishal's Nabi eyeing top-two finish

SPORTS REPORTER

Fortune Barishal's Afghan star Mohammad Nabi is upbeat about their remaining four games, aiming to finish in the top two to boost their chances of reaching the finals of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL).

The league phase of the BPL has arrived at the business end, with the tournament back in Dhaka following the Sylhet and Chattogram phases.

"Yeah, still have four games left here to focus on and put our team in the top two. All four matches here and also playoffs are in Dhaka, and we are already used to this condition as well," Nabi said yesterday, on the eve of his side's game against Sylhet Strikers.

"Everyone is trying to put his team in the top two to get that extra chance. If they lose, they have an extra chance to play one more game to put their team in the final," he added.

Barishal's only two losses in this BPL have come against table-toppers Rangpur Riders. With 12 points and the fewest matches played, they aim to refine their combinations in the run-



PHOTO: STAR

up to the playoffs. In their last outing against Khulna Tigers, Jahandad Khan and Rishad Hossain turned up with performances.

"Yeah, every team have a different combination. Some players are going, some players are coming, and we have to find the right combination for those four games left in the league stage and put a good combination for the playoffs," Nabi said when asked if the team were catching momentum at the right time.

He also praised the improved quality of pitches this season.

"I think this time there is more rest for the pitches. They make proper pitches for every single game, and that's why they put three venues in this BPL. Most of the time they have three venues, but this time they're more focused on the pitches, and they put better pitches this year... That's why most of the games are high-scoring games, and chases have been well," he added.

Meanwhile, Rangpur Riders, who suffered their only defeat against Durbar Rajshahi during the Chattogram phase, will face the same opponents in Sunday's evening fixture.

# BCB suspends activities of constitution reform committee

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) arrived at a decision regarding the much-talked-about constitution reform committee, suspending its activities following the 17th meeting of the BCB board of directors yesterday.

A five-member committee, led by director Najmul Abedeen Fahim, was set to present proposed reforms to the board. However, before they could present their suggestions, Dhaka clubs decided to boycott the first division league, influencing the decision.

Following the meeting, BCB directors Iftekhhar Ahmed Mithu and Mahbub Anam addressed the media in a press briefing, during which the standing committees of the board were also announced.

"They [reform committee] did not present anything to the board or the NSC [National Sports Council]. The board of directors felt that the process [of the committee] should be a bit more transparent because the constitution is something where there can't be any secrecy," Mahbub told reporters yesterday.



"It's public information that will be public. We felt their activities need to be suspended and the discussions that are coming should be stopped. In the same way, the changes in the committees and their expansion are necessary because it's important for the stakeholders to be involved, which the board felt. In light of those, these decisions have been taken. We will announce the committee's scope of work before any changes and expansion decisions are executed," he added.

The BPL's payment issue was also a major topic at the meeting. News circulated that players from Durbar Rajshahi and Chittagong Kings were still facing payment-related complications. As a result, BCB has decided to meet with its governing council and franchise owners in the next 48 hours to resolve the players' payment issue.

"The things that have to be maintained under franchise contracts, BCB will do everything to ensure that the franchise owners abide by them. In the next 48 hours, those activities will continue," Mahbub informed further.

The board had also been functioning without standing committees. Twenty-one standing committee chairmen were announced after the board meeting. The BCB discussed the two remaining vacant committee positions and will decide how to fulfil those positions.

# Windies lead after Noman hattrick in Multan

AGENCIES

The West Indies gained a slender nine-run lead over Pakistan Saturday as spinners dominated the opening day of the second Test in Multan, with Noman Ali achieving a hat trick for the home side. Jomel Warrican took 4-43 and



Gudakesh Motie 3-49 as Pakistan were bowled out for 154 at the close, replying to the West Indian first innings total of 163. Left-arm Noman picked up a hattrick during his 6-41 as the visitors were bowled out at the stroke of lunch in 41.1 overs, having won the toss and batted.

**Noman became the first Pakistan spinner to pick up a hattrick in Tests.**

**Sixteen wickets fell to spinners -- the most on the opening day of a Test. The previous record was 14 between England and South Africa at Leeds in 1907.**

**Motie (55), Roach (25) and Warrican (36) -- West Indies' bottom three batters - became the highest scorers in an innings, a feat they had achieved in the first Test against Pakistan in the ongoing series.**

## Tigresses miss out on direct WC entry

SPORTS REPORTER

With the eight-wicket defeat against West Indies in the third ODI yesterday, Bangladesh women's cricket team missed out on direct qualification for the upcoming ICC Women's ODI World Cup and will now have to compete in a qualifying tournament for the right to compete in the marquee event set to begin in India in August this year.

The defeat in St Kitts cost Bangladesh the three-match series, which the hosts took 2-1, and also kept them from overtaking New Zealand in the ICC Women's Championship table, who finished sixth to secure the sixth and final direct spot for the World Cup.

Both New Zealand and Bangladesh finished with 21 points from 24 matches in the Championship, however, the White Ferns won nine games, one more than the Tigresses, to finish one rung higher.

The other five teams that have qualified are: Australia (39), India (37), England (32), South Africa (25) and Sri Lanka (25).

Nigar Sultana and Co will now have to compete against the three bottom-placed teams from the 10-team Women's Championship -- West Indies (18), Pakistan (17), Ireland (eight) -- and the next two highest ranked teams -- Scotland and Thailand -- in a qualifying tournament from which two teams will get to compete in the World Cup. ICC is yet announce the itinerary for the event.

In yesterday's match, Bangladesh went from 94-3 to 118 all out, courtesy of a four-wicket haul from off-spinner Karishma Ramharack. The hosts then cruised to 122-2 in just 27.3 overs.

The two sides will next face off in a three-match T20I series starting on January 27.

# Abahani close gap on Mohammedan

SPORTS REPORTER

Title aspirants Abahani spoiled a good opportunity to close the gap further with leaders Mohammedan SC after playing out a goalless draw against Brothers Union in their last match in the first-phase of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) at Bir Shrestha Shaheed Flight Lt Matiur Rahman Stadium in Munshiganj yesterday.

On Friday, Mohammedan SC lost 1-0 to Fakirerpool Young Men's Club, which ended their eight-match winning streak this season. It also presented Abahani a chance to reduce the gap with the league leaders from five points to two if they could beat Brothers yesterday.

However, the Sky Blue outfits left the field relieved that they did not end up dropping all three points against Brothers, who gave them a run for their money in a neck-on-neck contest.

With their second draw of the season, Abahani, who are playing without any foreign players, are now four points shy of leaders Mohammedan SC's tally of 24.

Defending champions Bashundhara Kings have benefitted from both

Mohammedan and Abahani dropping points in the ninth round, as they are now trailing the league leaders by seven points at the end of the first phase. The second-phase of the league will start mid-February.

In Munshiganj, Brothers, a team packed with out of favour national team players, dominated Abahani most of the first half barring the opening 10 minutes.

Abahani, who scored only 11 goals in their previous eight matches, could have taken the lead in the eighth minute had the woodwork not denied Mohammad Ibrahim's header.

Both sides were equally matched in the second half but neither could break the deadlock.

Brothers nearly snatched a victory in the stoppage time but Abahani goalkeeper Mitul Marma made a couple of crucial saves in the final few minutes to ensure the draw.

At Bashundhara Kings arena, Fortis FC handed a 1-0 defeat to Chittagong Abahani with Ghanaian Essa Jallow netting the all-important goal in the 34th minute.

This was Fortis' second win in nine matches, which helped them leapfrog to sixth position from eighth while Chittagong Abahani sat at the bottom with only one win and eight defeats in nine matches.





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## Khaleda now at Tarique's home

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia went to the house of her eldest son Tarique Rahman around 9:30pm on Friday (local time) after being discharged from The London Clinic where she was undergoing treatment for 17 days. Khaleda will continue her treatment at home under the supervision of Dr Patrick Kennedy and Dr Jennifer Cross of The London Clinic. Tarique, acting chairman of BNP, accompanied his mother from the hospital to their residence in Kingston, North London. Zubaidda Rahman, Tarique's wife, and Syeda Shamila Rahman, wife of Khaleda's late son Arafat Rahman Koko, were also with them. On Thursday night, Khaleda's personal physician, Dr AZM Zahid Hossain, stated that the medical board overseeing her treatment had not made a decision yet regarding her liver transplant. He added that the next course of action would depend on her age and overall health. Khaleda arrived in London on January 8 for advanced medical treatment. She was taken directly to the clinic from Heathrow Airport at 11:30am (local time).

Low water levels in the Sangu river force boats to navigate cautiously through the Raja Pathor (Boro Pathor) area of Tindu in Bandarban. Residents of Thanchi, Remakri, and Bormodak, who rely on river transport, are suffering as a result. One of the major reasons behind this is increasing deforestation and the illegal extraction of stones from streams that feed the river.

PHOTO: MONG SING HAI MARMA

## KU STUDENT MURDER Family looking for answers, cops have no leads

DIPANKAR ROY

Arnob Kumar Sarker, an MBA student at Khulna University with aspirations of studying abroad, was brutally gunned down near his home in Khulna city Friday night, leaving his family devastated, and searching for answers. Arnob, 25, had recently completed his undergraduate studies in Electrical and Electronic Engineering (EEE) at Northern University and was pursuing his master's degree while assisting his father, Nitish Kumar Sarker, in their family construction business. His life was tragically cut short just as his family was making plans for his future, including seeking a bride for him. On Friday night, around 9:00pm, Arnob was sitting with friends near Tetultala intersection in the city when unidentified armed assailants on motorcycles opened fire. He was shot multiple times in the head and legs. Locals rushed him to Khulna Medical College Hospital, where doctors declared him dead.

Arnob Kumar Sarker

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

## Game of Thrones style ice wall on course to hit British island

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

The world's largest iceberg is on crash course with a remote British island, risking its inhabitants. The floating giant, compared to Game of Thrones' ice wall, stretches from horizon to horizon and is heading towards South Georgia Island, a remote Antarctic haven for millions of penguins and seals. The behemoth, dubbed A23a, poses a potential threat to the island's delicate ecosystem. Scientists are monitoring A23a closely, anticipating two possible scenarios: the iceberg could collide with

South Georgia and become lodged, or ocean currents might divert it around the island. If the trillion-ton slab of ice, called a megaberg, gets stuck it could make it hard for penguin parents to feed their babies and some young could even starve. Overall, however, researchers say they aren't too worried about major harm from the iceberg. It's also a natural process happening more frequently because of human-caused climate change, said British Antarctic Survey physical oceanographer Andrew Meijers, who examined the iceberg up close in December 2023 when it drifted past the research ship RRS Sir David Attenborough.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

## Yunus returns from Davos

UNB, Dhaka

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus returned to Dhaka from Switzerland yesterday evening after attending the World Economic Forum's annual meeting in Davos where he was hailed as a "beacon, hero and an amazing image of stability". Top private companies are "convinced" about the country's "potentials and its stability" in the post uprising months, said his Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam, adding that they were impressed with the latest economic numbers. "One thing was quite clear that the biggest decision the students made just after the fall of Hasina was to persuade Prof Yunus to lead the interim government. And that has made all the difference," he said.

## US freezes almost all aid except for Israel, Egypt

Reveals memo; all kinds of aid to Ukraine suspended

AFP, Washington

The United States, the world's biggest donor, has frozen virtually all foreign aid, making exceptions only for emergency food, and military funding for Israel and Egypt. Secretary of State Marco Rubio sent an internal memo days after President Donald Trump took office vowing an "America First" policy of tightly restricting assistance overseas. "No new funds shall be obligated for new awards or extensions of existing awards until each proposed new award or extension has been reviewed and approved," said the memo to staff seen by AFP. The sweeping order appears to affect everything from development assistance to military aid -- including to Ukraine, which received billions of dollars in weapons under Trump's predecessor Joe Biden as it tries to repel a Russian invasion. The directive also means a pause of at least several months of US funding for PEPFAR, the anti-HIV/AIDS initiative that buys anti-retroviral drugs to treat the disease in developing countries, largely in Africa. Launched under president George W Bush in 2003, PEPFAR is credited with saving some 26 million lives and until recently enjoyed broad popular support along partisan lines in Washington. But the memo explicitly made exceptions

for military assistance to Israel -- whose longstanding major arms packages from the United States have expanded further since the Gaza war -- and Egypt, which has received generous US defence funding since it signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1979. Rubio also made an exception for US contributions to emergency food assistance, which the United States has been contributing following crises around the world including in Sudan and Syria. Lawmakers from the rival Democratic Party said that more than 20 million people relied on medication through PEPFAR and 63 million people on US-funded anti-malaria efforts including nets. "For years, Republicans in Congress have decried what they see as a lack of US credibility vis-a-vis countries like China, Russia, and Iran," said Representative Gregory Meeks, the top Democrat on the House Foreign Relations Committee, and Representative Lois Frankel. "Now our credibility is on the line, and it appears we will cut and run from American commitments to our partners around the world," they wrote in a letter. Washington has long leveraged aid as a tool of its foreign policy, saying it cares about development and drawing a contrast with China, which is primarily concerned about seeking natural resources.

## MATARBARI SCAM Arrest warrant issued for ex-DC, judge of Cox's Bazar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

A Cox's Bazar court has issued arrest warrants against former deputy commissioner Ruhul Amin, former district and sessions judge Sadikul Islam Talukder, and three others in connection with a case related to Matarbari thermal power plant. The five are accused of removing their names from the case involving the embezzlement of Tk 20 crore during land acquisition for the thermal power plant. The alleged forgery included falsifying the complainant's signature and tampering with the case documents. The three other accused are advocate Mostaq Ahmed Chowdhury, who worked at the Cox's Bazar District and Sessions Judge Court; Swapan Kanti Pal, a Nazir (overseer of collectorate) from the deputy commissioner's office; and Zafar Ahmed, a stenographer at the District and Sessions Judge Court. The arrest warrants were issued on Thursday by Munshi Abdul Majid, senior special judge of Cox's Bazar. Public Prosecutor Siraj Ullah confirmed that the court accepted an Anti-Corruption Commission report on forgery and issued the warrants.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

## Publish white paper on all crimes since 1971

Jamaat chief urges govt

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinaipur

Jamaat Ameer Shafiqur Rahman has urged the interim government to publish a white paper on the killing, looting, and siphoning off money that happened since 1971. Only the interim government, which is free of political influence, can ensure the publication of such a document, he told a rally in Dinaipur yesterday. Governments formed by political parties will not undertake such a task, he said. "Over the last 53 years, numerous incidents occurred. The nation deserves to know the perpetrators and their victims." Hundreds of people from different districts attended the rally organised by Jamaat. Shafiqur said Jamaat had been the target of Awami League's attack for 15 years. He then urged leaders and activists of his party to stay vigilant, calm, and disciplined.

USA's Madison Keys [R] beams with the Australian Open trophy alongside runner-up Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus following a hard-fought 6-3, 2-6, 7-5 victory in the women's singles final in Melbourne yesterday. Story on page 6.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## MORE NEWS

### Awami League's melodramatic redemption arc

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WE ARE SADDENED



We are deeply saddened to announce the passing of Mrs. Salma Choudhury, Founder and Chairperson of Ashik Foundation for Childhood Cancer. She passed away on Friday, January 24, 2025, at 5:01 AM (Inna Lillahi wa Inna Ilaihi Rajiun) while undergoing treatment at MGM Hospital in Chennai, India.

Mrs. Choudhury was the beloved wife of Mr. Afzal Hossain Choudhury, Chairman of Sheba Group and a prominent businessman. She is survived by her mother Mrs. Saleha Zaman, her children Asif, Maheen, their spouses Rifat and Adnan, and four beloved grandchildren, Saira, Arhan, Azaan and Aariz.

Her Janazah will be held today, Sunday, January 26, 2025, after Asr prayers at Masjid-Uq-Taqwa, located on Dhanmondi, Road 12/A.

We extend our heartfelt condolences to her family and loved ones during this difficult time. May her soul rest in eternal peace.



## BUILDING SAFELY, BUILDING BETTER

Construction goes beyond merely assembling materials; it is about crafting safe, durable, and efficient spaces for living and working. Ensuring long-lasting structures requires the use of high-quality materials, advanced technologies, and rigorous safety measures. From choosing robust steel and cement to integrating reliable systems like lifts and prioritising worker safety, the construction process must embody a steadfast commitment to both excellence and human welfare. By cultivating a culture that values safety and innovation, we can build a future where progress is seamlessly aligned with protection.




ILLUSTRATION: SOJIB ROY



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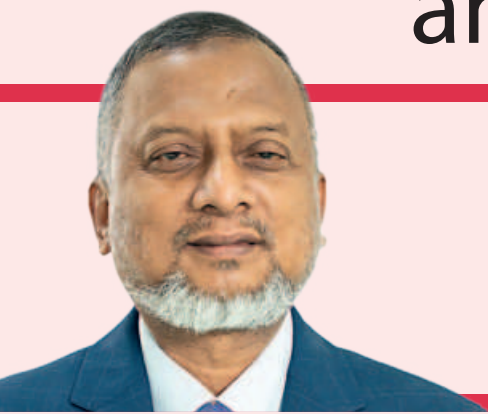
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# INTEGRATING SAFETY FOR A SUSTAINABLE and Resilient Construction Industry



MOLLAH MOHAMMAD MAJNU,  
Managing Director,  
Crown Cement

**THE DAILY STAR (TDS):** What measures do you recommend for ensuring general safety in construction, both in maintaining structural integrity and protecting workers on-site?  
**Mollah Mohammad Majnu (MMM):** Safety in construction is a multifaceted issue that begins with proper planning and extends throughout every stage of a project. To maintain structural integrity, we emphasise the use of high-quality materials, adhering to proper mix designs, following construction codes, and conducting regular testing on cement and concrete mixes. Skilled labour and strict compliance with standards are also crucial to ensure structures can withstand environmental stresses like floods and earthquakes.

Crown Cement is the pioneer in the

construction industry who has launched the “Nirman Nirapotta” campaign for worker safety to raise awareness and safeguard contractors and masons working in projects using our cement. The initiative includes the free distribution of personal protective equipment (PPE) such as helmets, gloves, and goggles, as well as safety training and workshops to prevent accidents. Additionally, the campaign offers financial support in case of injuries or fatalities, providing non-recurring grants of BDT 100,000 for accidental death, BDT 50,000 for major injuries, BDT 30,000 for treatment staying at hospital and BDT 10,000 for general treatment. However, stakeholders must register under the campaign beforehand to access these benefits.

Crown Cement also ensures safe working

environments through partnerships with contractors and builders. We promote site-specific safety protocols, proper scaffolding, and emergency preparedness measures. Our sub-teams actively visit construction sites to conduct safety inspections and awareness programmes. By fostering a culture of safety and continuously advocating for worker welfare, we aim to make safety an integral part of the construction process while supporting the development of a sustainable and resilient construction industry.

**TDS:** What types of cement or construction materials do you offer, and how do you ensure their suitability for different construction purposes while prioritising safety and environmental sustainability?

**MMM:** At Crown Cement, we offer a variety of cement types to meet the diverse needs of the construction industry. We have CEM-I, or Portland Cement (PC), which is ideal for special large-scale projects (e.g., 40-storey buildings) requiring early high strength, and CEM-II, or Portland Composite Cement (PCC), which is more versatile and suitable for everything from multistoried buildings to flyovers, roads and bridges.

CEM-II is more commonly used these days and has two variations: A-M and B-M. The maximum mineral content of B-M cement is 35%, while A-M contains 20%. The quality of this cement is highly

dependent on the quality of the minerals present in it. We also produce a type 3 cement, which was specifically used in the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant and was not distributed commercially.

Different types of cement are suited for different construction purposes. For instance, massive structures like the Burj Khalifa can use cement blended with slag (a mixture of silicon dioxide, calcium oxide, and iron oxide), which improves density, durability, and helps reduce corrosion of steel in concrete. Normal cement usually requires 28 days to gain strength, whereas slag cement takes 90 days to reach full strength. This type of cement is ideal for large multi-storey buildings and underground constructions as well.

In terms of environmental considerations, our PCC contains supplementary materials like fly ash and slag, which not only reduce the carbon footprint but also enhance the durability of the cement. Additionally, we've invested in energy-efficient manufacturing technologies that minimise waste and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We are also committed to educating the market about the importance of using the right type of cement for specific purposes. For example, while PC might be more suitable for high-rise construction, PCC is often the better choice for general structures due to

its lower environmental impact.

**TDS:** What technological advancements have you adopted to improve the quality and efficiency of your products? Furthermore, what are your future plans for innovation and sustainability?

**MMM:** Technological innovation is a cornerstone of Crown Cement's success. Unfortunately, we do not have the raw materials required for producing cement in our country, so we need to import them. We maintain a strict quality control procedure at every stage, from importing the raw materials to transporting them to construction sites. We use 'Analyzer' technology to examine the raw materials, which gives us accurate results regarding their quality and content. Maintaining this technology is quite costly.

Additionally, we have upgraded our manufacturing facilities with advanced machinery such as high-efficiency vertical roller mills (VRMs), which reduce energy consumption by 25% and cut pollution by around 70% compared to traditional ball mills (TBMs). We have installed VRM in our fifth and sixth production line to increase cost efficiency and make the production process more eco-friendly. We are committed to furthering innovation in the future, not just in production but also by driving sustainable and innovative industry practices.

## Cementing Best Practices: Safety in Every Layer



**Protective equipment is non-negotiable at a construction site. Helmets, gloves, steel-toed boots, and high-visibility vests form the first line of defense against common site accidents. For cement work specifically, add safety goggles and dust masks to protect eyes and lungs from cement particles, which can be harmful if inhaled.**

MIFFTAHUL JANNAT

Cement is one of the key ingredients in making concrete, which is the most used construction material worldwide. It gives strength to concrete through a chemical reaction called hydration that takes place when it is combined with water. This inorganic powder possesses the power to shape entire skylines and requires careful handling. When used correctly, cement lays the foundation for marvels of engineering; when mismanaged, it can lead to structural flaws and hazardous consequences.

“Maintaining safety on a construction site

requires supervision by someone knowledgeable about the proper use, storage, and handling of cement and construction materials, along with a clear understanding of Building Code. Ensuring safety doesn't demand extensive expertise; a basic level of knowledge can go a long way,” commented Engr. Md. Shamsul Alam, Principal Structural Engineer at The Designers and Managers (TDM).

### The Basics of Construction Safety

Before diving into cement-specific guidelines, it is essential to understand the broader context of construction safety. Protective equipment is non-negotiable at a construction site. Helmets,

gloves, steel-toed boots, and high-visibility vests form the first line of defense against common site accidents. For cement work specifically, add safety goggles and dust masks to protect eyes and lungs from cement particles, which can be harmful if inhaled. Regular training sessions should be held to reinforce safety protocols, address new risks, and remind workers of best practices.

### A Guide to Different Types of Cement

There are mainly two types of cement which are commonly produced in our country, namely CEM I and CEM II. “Different areas or buildings require specific types of cement. Unfortunately, consumer awareness is quite low in our country. Selecting the appropriate type of cement is crucial to ensuring the durability of your construction,” mentioned Mollah Mohammad Manju, Managing Director of Crown Cement.

CEM I is known as Portland Cement (PC), which comprises 95% of clinker and has no SCM (Supplementary Siliceous Materials such as fly ash, slag, silica fume) added to it.

CEM II cement is known as Portland Composite Cement (PCC), where a portion of clinker is replaced by different mineral admixtures or combinations of different mineral admixtures, such as fly ash, slag, limestone, silica fume. The amount of replacement clinker varies from 20% to 35%. There are nineteen sub-class of cement in this category. Among them, the CEM II/A-M and CEM II/B-M subclasses are commonly produced in Bangladesh.

It is important to note that the quality of mineral content plays a critical role in PCC (CEM II) cement. The quality can vary depending on the sources of the mineral admixtures. “Understanding properties of different cement is essential for proper use. Key aspects such as fineness, setting time, and strength should always be considered, and both workers and engineers must remain vigilant about these,” added Principal Structural Engineer, Alam from TDM.

In short, PC offers rapid strength for quick-

setting needs, while PCC ensures durability against environmental challenges like exposure to sulphates and chlorides. Additionally, structural design engineers may specify particular types of cement for specific structural elements within the design drawings.

### Storing and Handling with Care

Improper storage and handling of cement can compromise cement quality and pose risks. Even a small amount of moisture can cause cement to clump and lose its binding properties. “In general, a bag of cement should be used within 60 days after production, however, if the storage condition is good, it is possible to store for 90 days or more,” said an expert from Crown Cement. In case of any doubt, cement should be tested before use.

**Dry and Elevated:** Cement should be stored in a cool and dry area, preferably on wooden platforms to keep them off the ground. The platform should be at least 200mm (8”) above the floor and 300 mm (12”) away from the brick walls. This prevents moisture from seeping in from any side.

**Stack Wisely:** Maximum height of the stack shall be 15 bags and width not more than 4 bags.

### Difference between PCC sub-classes in terms of compressive strength

PCC Sub-class	2 Days Strength	28 Days Strength
CEM II/A-M	16-20 MPa	45-48 MPa
CEM II/B-M	13-16 MPa	42-45 MPa

SOURCE: CROWN CEMENT

If stacks are more than eight bags high, the bags should be arranged alternately in length and crosswise.

**FIFO Principle:** Follow the FIFO (First In, First Out) method. Older cement should be used first to prevent it from exceeding its shelf life.

**Lift with Care:** Since cement bags are heavy, use proper lifting techniques to avoid back injuries, or employ mechanical aids where possible. Hooks should not be used during movement of cement.

**Avoid Contact:** Direct skin contact with cement can cause burns or rashes. Always wear gloves and long sleeves when handling it. If cement enters into the eye, immediately wash with enough water, and seek advice from a doctor. Workers must use protective hand and face coverings at the construction site.

While cement is essential, it is also a major contributor to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Incorporating sustainable practices, such as using blended cements with fly ash or slag to reduce carbon footprints, disposing excess cement responsibly, and mixing only daily requirements to minimise waste, not only benefits the planet but also improves site safety. Moreover, eco-friendly production process that reduces energy consumption and advanced technologies which cuts health hazards and pollution must be made mainstream within the industry.





**MD. JENAN-  
UL-ISLAM**  
Chief Business Officer (CBO),  
Walton Lift



**HOSSAIN  
KHALED**  
Group Managing Director, AG  
Industrial Solutions Limited

# Building Safety, DRIVING INNOVATION

**The Daily Star (TDS):** What measures do you recommend to ensure general safety in lifts?  
**Md. Jenan-Ul-Islam (MJUI):** A safe and reliable lift system must adhere to stringent safety standards to ensure user protection. This involves integrating advanced safety gear for emergency braking, seamlessly coupled with an overspeed governor to prevent uncontrolled descents. Proper door contact mechanisms are essential to ensure doors are securely closed before operation. Additionally, lifts should feature high-quality buffers to absorb shock, precisely calculated steel ropes or belts for optimal load-bearing capacity, and robust motor braking systems to reliably halt the lift when needed. Functioning limit switches are crucial for regulating movement within predefined limits, ensuring smooth and secure operation. In summary, it is vital to follow European safety standard guidelines at every stage, including design, production, manufacturing, installation, and regular maintenance.

**TDS:** What types of lifts do you provide, and how do you ensure they are both suitable for their intended purposes and prioritise safety?  
**MJUI:** We offer a range of lifts tailored to various needs, including passenger lifts, freight/cargo lifts, panoramic lifts, hydraulic lifts, hospital lifts, and custom-designed solutions. Each lift type is

engineered to meet specific requirements while adhering to the highest safety standards in line with EU regulations.

To prioritise safety, we comply with EN 81-20 and EN 81-50 guidelines. Additionally, we incorporate quality- and safety-certified components such as gearless machines with certified motor brakes, suitable steel ropes, high-quality door contacts, and advanced emergency braking systems.

**TDS:** What technological advancements have you adopted to improve the quality and efficiency of your products? What are your plans for innovation and sustainability?  
**MJUI:** We have embraced advanced technologies to enhance the quality and efficiency of our products. Our innovations include integrating AI-powered access control devices for superior security and user convenience, holographic COP (Car Operating Panels) and LOP (Landing Operating Panels) for an intuitive user interface, and optimised designs featuring stylish and refined interiors.

Looking ahead, we are committed to fostering innovation and sustainability. As part of this vision, we plan to introduce regenerative drive systems that capture and reuse energy during operation, significantly reducing energy consumption. This aligns with our dedication to a greener future and sustainable practices in lift system design.

# Safety First, EXCELLENCE ALWAYS

**The Daily Star (TDS):** What measures do you recommend to ensure general safety in lifts?  
**Hossain Khaled (HK):** Safety is our top priority for elevators—it is not just an added feature. To ensure smooth and secure operation, we incorporate essential safety systems such as overspeed governors, car safety gears, and emergency brakes to prevent mechanical failures. Additionally, we use overload sensors, speed-limiting devices, and automatic leveling systems to maintain seamless and safe functionality.

For fire safety, we provide emergency fireman services and fire-resistant doors to protect passengers during critical situations. Our lifts are equipped with advanced door safety features, including full-height sensors and automatic reopening mechanisms, to prevent accidents during entry and exit.

AG Industrial Solutions Ltd. (AGISL) installs OTIS elevators with all these advanced features, fully compliant with international safety standards, including EN 81-20/50, ISO, and CE.

**TDS:** What types of lifts do you provide, and how do you ensure they are both suitable for their intended purposes and prioritise safety?  
**HK:** We offer a wide range of OTIS elevators tailored to diverse needs, including Passenger Lifts, Home Lifts, Freight/Goods Lifts, Glass & Panoramic Lifts, Bed Lifts, Firefighting Lifts, and Escalators. By

working closely with architects and building owners, we gain a thorough understanding of project-specific requirements, allowing us to select the most suitable lift for each application.

In Bangladesh, we maintain over 250 OTIS units, including 187 in the Dhaka Metro Rail project, and have contributed to high-profile developments like Pan Pacific Sonargaon Dhaka, demonstrating our commitment to sustainable service.

**TDS:** What technological advancements have you adopted to improve the quality and efficiency of your products? What are your plans for innovation and sustainability?  
**HK:** OTIS has been a pioneer in elevator innovation since 1853, consistently introducing technologies that enhance performance and reliability. One standout advancement is the Gen2® System, which reduces noise, increases durability, and includes a Built-in Regenerative Drive that saves up to 75% of energy usage. The Coated Steel Belt boosts load capacity, reduces maintenance, while Pulse Monitoring and NexGen™ Controllers optimise efficiency and energy use.

AGISL is committed to sustainable innovation, focusing on regenerative technologies, AI systems, and smart building integrations to create greener, more efficient urban environments supporting Bangladesh's growing infrastructure needs.

# SAFE LIFTS From setup to ongoing maintenance

**Proper installation is just the first step; ongoing servicing is equally crucial to ensure lift safety.**

**PRIYAM PAUL**

Lifts have evolved from being a luxury to an essential component of modern living. As buildings grow taller and more complex, vertical transportation has become a vital part of everyday life. However, with the increasing reliance on lifts, safety concerns have naturally risen. Ensuring safety at every stage—from installation to regular maintenance—is paramount in preventing accidents and ensuring the longevity of these critical systems.

Consumers often lack in-depth knowledge about lifts, gaining experience over time, but awareness of lift safety is steadily

increasing. Elevator experts advise that customers should prioritise understanding whether the lifts they use meet European Norms (EN) safety standards. These standards cover various stages, including production, design, installation, commissioning, and post-sale maintenance services. It is vital for customers to select reputable brands that consistently adhere to these standards. Leading lift brands today ensure quality installations and reliable maintenance through

robust after-sales services. "For lifts, international guidelines such as the European Standard EN 81-50 or ISO are followed during manufacturing. However, non-branded and mid-range companies often bypass these safety measures, which can lead to serious accidents," shares Md. Jenan-Ul-Islam, Chief Business Officer (CBO), Walton Lift.

He adds, "Walton adheres to the same safety standards as any leading European or US company, with no compromises. We ensure 100 per cent compliance in maintenance, alongside meticulous attention to production, installation, and after-sales services."

Yeasser Arafat Khan, Head of Business & Operations at AG Industrial Solutions Limited, notes, "Otis, one of the oldest and most renowned lift companies globally, incorporates advanced US technology that prioritises safety in all innovations. The company adheres to strict European and ISO standards, ensuring that the drive used in Otis lifts cannot bypass essential safety measures."

Safe installation is crucial for a reliable lift system. Certified professionals following international safety standards ensure that components, including emergency brakes, door sensors, and overload protection, are properly installed and functional. Improper installation can compromise safety, affect performance, and lead to costly repairs. Experts stress the importance of choosing reputable brands and qualified installers for optimal safety. Poor installation can disable key safety mechanisms, posing risks to passengers. Additionally, a poorly installed lift may demand frequent maintenance, increasing operational costs. Ensuring professional installation from the outset establishes safety and long-term reliability.

Proper installation is just the first step; ongoing servicing is equally crucial to



ensure lift safety. Merely opting for a branded lift doesn't guarantee its safe operation. Lifts are complex systems that require continuous maintenance to function effectively. Experts advise monthly safety inspections to keep them in top condition. In Dhaka, with its high pollution levels, dust and sand pose a significant risk to sensitive lift components, underscoring the need for regular upkeep to maintain safety and performance.

"Neglecting maintenance can lead to issues like broken loops or failed hydraulic brakes. Additionally, components like hydraulic buffers and safety gears, designed to lock in the event of overspeed, may fail without proper servicing. It's crucial to keep these sensitive components in mind when selecting lifts and during installation to avoid bypassing safety features," says Yeasser Arafat Khan.

To guarantee long-term reliability, companies should offer comprehensive after-sales support, including maintenance and spare parts.

"We ensure thorough after-sales service by inspecting all lift components

during each visit. This includes checking the speed, level alignment, and ensuring all parts are functioning as expected. The inspection process can take several hours to ensure everything is in optimal condition," adds Yeasser Arafat Khan.

"Walton is dedicated to providing lift parts for up to 25 years after purchase, offering customers reliable after-sales service and prompt support for maintenance and spare parts," concludes Md. Jenan-Ul-Islam.

Finally, raising awareness among lift users ensures safety and prolongs the lift's lifespan. Clear signage with load limits, emergency instructions, and usage guidelines educates users effectively. Training sessions or videos can promote safe practices, such as avoiding overloading, forceful door handling, and promptly reporting unusual sounds. Encouraging adherence to protocols, like standing clear of doors and not obstructing sensors, is crucial. Regular awareness campaigns by building management further reinforce responsible usage, reducing wear and tear and ensuring a safer, more reliable system.





# Superior Steel, Safer Structures



Selecting the appropriate steel for construction is a critical decision that impacts the safety, durability, and performance of any structure.

SAUDIA AFRIN

The foundation of any safe construction lies in its structural components, among which steel plays an indispensable role. It forms the backbone of modern construction, ensuring stability, durability, and resilience against environmental stresses such as earthquakes, storms, and floods.

Bangladesh's steel industry has witnessed significant growth in recent decades. The country has numerous manufacturers offering high-quality materials that meet international standards. Trusted local manufacturers have supplied steel for many of Bangladesh's mega projects, ensuring quality and reliability. "The steels available in Bangladesh adhere to strict standards, such as ISO 9001 and BSTI certifications. BSRM, AKS, KSRM, and GPH Ispat are some of the manufacturers producing high-quality steel. Modern technologies such as Quantum Electric Arc Furnace have made it possible to produce high-quality products, ensuring the first step in the safety process," said Engr. Md. Shamsul Alam, Principal Structural Engineer of The Designers and Managers (TDM).

**Key Factors in Choosing the Right Steel**  
Selecting the appropriate steel for construction is a critical decision that impacts the safety, durability, and performance of any structure. Below are the key factors to evaluate when choosing the right steel:

**1. Steel Grade and Standards**  
Ensure that the steel meets international and local standards such as ISO 9001, BSTI, and BNBC guidelines. Grades like Fe-415, Fe-500, and Fe-550 are commonly used in Bangladesh and are suitable for varying structural requirements. Understanding the grade ensures that the steel aligns with the project's load-bearing and environmental needs.

**2. Tensile and Yield Strength**  
The tensile and yield strength of steel determine its ability to bear loads and resist deformation under stress. These properties are crucial for structural integrity, particularly in high-rise buildings or seismic zones where the steel must endure dynamic and static forces.

**3. Ductility**  
Steel's ability to withstand deformation without cracking is essential for earthquake-resistant structures. High ductility steel absorbs seismic energy, minimising structural damage and ensuring safety during earthquakes.

**4. Environmental Factors**  
Consider the environmental conditions of the construction site. High-quality steel should be resistant to environmental stresses such as wind, water, and temperature fluctuations.

**5. Manufacturer Reputation and Certification**  
Choose steel from trusted manufacturers with proven track records for quality assurance. Brands like BSRM, KSRM, and GPH Ispat in Bangladesh are known for adhering to global standards and employing advanced technologies.

**6. Compliance with Safety Codes**  
Following the Bangladesh National Building Code (BNBC) is essential to ensure the safety and resilience of any construction. BNBC outlines specific requirements, such as minimum diameters for rebars used in critical structural elements like columns, beams, and slabs. These guidelines ensure that the steel reinforcement can adequately handle dead loads, live loads, and environmental stresses, including wind and seismic forces.

**Corrosion Resistance**  
In Bangladesh, the humid climate and salinity in coastal regions pose significant challenges to infrastructure due to corrosion. The demand for corrosion-resistant steel is, therefore, steadily increasing. To ensure the longevity of structures, it is essential to treat and maintain reinforcement rods effectively, enhancing their resistance to corrosion and weathering.

One prominent example of corrosion-resistant innovation is BSRM Centura, which offers Fusion Bonded Epoxy Coated Rebars (FBECR) specifically designed for structures in coastal regions. GPH Quantum range is another trusted name, known for its reliable performance against corrosion.

**Earthquake Resistance**  
Bangladesh, located in a seismically active region, faces a constant risk of earthquakes. Building earthquake-

resistant structures is essential to reduce damage and ensure the safety and resilience of communities in the event of a quake. The seismic resistance of concrete structures largely depends on the properties and arrangement of rebar (reinforcing steel). Key engineering properties of rebar for seismic design include: a) unit weight – the weight of a 1-meter rod, b) yield strength – the stress level at which

the rod elongates proportionally, c) ultimate strength – the maximum stress the rod can withstand before breaking, d) elongation – the percentage the rod stretches before fracture, e) bend test – how easily the rod bends without breaking, and f) deformation measurement – the surface pattern of the rod. For seismic resistance, yield strength, ultimate strength, and

elongation are critical. Yield strength must meet or exceed the rated strength without exceeding it by more than 125 MPa. For Grade 420 rebar, the range should be 420 MPa to 545 MPa. The ultimate-to-yield strength ratio must be at least 1.25, and elongation should be 12%-14% over 200mm. Only a few MS rod brands meet these standards, so testing from a reputable lab is strongly recommended.

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