



PHOTOS: SHAHEEN MOLLA, PRABIR DAS

**Clockwise from left: A father carries his child, whose legs are in casts, home from the hospital. Commuters, including people going to work, students on their way to classes, and people leaving and arriving in the capital, head to their destinations on foot. Exhausted after a long trip from their village, a family navigates the capital in search of transport, their journey home far from over. The photos were taken from Shyamoli Shishu Mela area yesterday morning. There was no public transport on this road as there was a demonstration blocking the Mirpur Road.**



## Saraswati Puja today

BSS, Dhaka

Saraswati Puja, the worship of the goddess of knowledge, music, art, and culture, will be celebrated across the country today amid much enthusiasm, festivity, and religious fervour.

Saraswati Puja or Basant Panchami, falls on the fifth "Tithi" of the Bangla month of Maagh every year.

Traditionally, children are introduced to the alphabet on the day of Saraswati Puja, and this ritual is called "Hatekhor".

Toddlers are usually given a slate and chalk to scribble with on the auspicious day.

Major Hindu temples, schools, colleges, universities, and other educational institutions stage the festival with traditional gaiety and religious fervour.

The students in particular seek

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## 12kg LPG cylinder to cost Tk 19 more Price now Tk 1,478

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The price of a 12kg LPG cylinder has risen by Tk 19 and is now selling at Tk 1,478 in retail points, according to the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission.

The BERC authorities in a press conference at their office yesterday set the new prices of the bottled Liquefied Petroleum Gas for the month of February.

According to the new pricing, per kg LPG will be sold at Tk 123.16. Prices of other cylinder sizes, ranging from 5.5kg to 45kg, will adjust accordingly.

Additionally, auto gas (LPG for motor vehicles) prices have increased by Tk 0.47 per litre and are set at Tk 67.74 per litre.

## No hasty decision

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said giving a deadline to meet such a demand was illogical.

"We will no longer make decisions under pressure. Taking a hasty and illogical decision now will become a burden in the future," he told reporters after an ECNEC meeting.

If the Titumir College students wished to protest, they should have done it without causing public suffering, he said. The demonstrators should also realise that the interim government was not formed to fulfil every demand, the adviser added.

"Our goal is to establish a well-governed democratic system, and in the process, we can introduce some minor reforms, but not necessarily can we meet every demand."

Regarding the affiliation of seven colleges with Dhaka University, the education

Wahiduddin mentioned that Titumir College was among seven colleges affiliated with Dhaka University, but the colleges and the university recently took a "reasonable" decision to part ways.

The education ministry then formed a special expert committee led by the University Grants Commission chairman to explore the possibility of bringing the seven colleges, including Titumir College, under a new independent university-like institution.

"This committee is already engaging with students from these colleges to understand their grievances," Wahiduddin said.

Besides these seven colleges, there are many prestigious and historic colleges across the country, none of which was turned into a university, he said.

He criticised the previous Awami League government for the rapid establishment of public universities without preparation during its rule.

"We have 55 public universities in the country and half of them have been established in the last seven years. Bangladesh has set a record for the rapid establishment of universities, whereas, under normal circumstances, it takes years to do that from planning to execution," he said.

The protesting students of Titumir College continued their demonstration on Bir Uttam AK Khandakar Road outside the institution in Mohakhali, rejecting the adviser's statement.

They resumed the blockade of the road that links Mohakhali and Gulshan 1 around noon yesterday for the fourth consecutive day, bringing traffic to a complete halt.

After the education adviser made the comments on their demand, the protesters marched to Amtoli intersection in the evening, blocking the Mohakhali-Banani road as well.

They ended the demonstration for the day around 8:00pm, vowing to return to the streets if their demands were not met. Their other demands include the opening of law and journalism departments at the institution.

## Commute goes haywire in city of protests

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gave them an assurance in writing.

Around 1:45am, they began to leave Hare Road after Hasnat promised he would try to make sure some of their demands were met within a week.

Helal Hafiz, who was shot in the stomach in July, told The Daily Star they would not leave until they were promised better treatment and rehabilitation.

Meanwhile, Titumir students, who want the college upgraded to a university, blocked roads in Mohakhali for the fourth day.

Around 11 last night, Habibullah Rony, an organiser, told reporters that the college would be shuttered until the demand was met.

The students will keep Gulshan-Mohakhali road and railway lines in Mohakhali blocked from 11:00am to 10:00pm today, he announced.

In another scene of protest, Inqilab Mancha, an organisation of mostly students, blocked the Eidgah Road in front of Shikkha Bhaban, demanding that the home adviser resign over the "state forces' failure" to stop the Awami League leaders and officials complicit in the July killings from leaving the country.

They tried to march to the Secretariat, but police stopped their procession near Shikkha Bhaban where they demonstrated for several hours in the

afternoon.

On major streets, tailbacks stretched across the city.

"This is a nightmare for my two ailing daughters. One has an ear infection and another has a fever. My wife and I brought them to the hospital after walking for 40 minutes only to find that the outdoor services have closed," Muhammad Rabbi told this correspondent at the Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College and Hospital.

He and his wife had to walk, carrying their toddlers for over a kilometre. As garment workers, they cannot afford to take the girls to a private clinic.

Mizanur Rahman, 55, was also stranded outside the National Institute of Ophthalmology with his 18-year-old daughter.

"We missed her doctor's appointment. We were stuck near Kalyanpur for over an hour. There are 10 major hospitals in the area where thousands of patients visit. At least one side of the road should have been left open," he said.

Traffic gridlock was also seen in Mohakhali, Banani, and Gulshan as students of Titumir College roads.

Some students have been fasting unto death for 98 hours as of 7:00pm.

Iman Ali had to leave his Mymensingh-bound Alam Asia bus after it was stuck for more than half an hour due to the blockade.

## 56 migrants were aboard capsized boat

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"Two people have been rescued in a critical state and they are in the intensive care unit of a hospital under the police or the army, but we are not sure where they are. We are still waiting for a clearance to travel to the region," said the ambassador.

The bodies retrieved so far were buried in Ajdabiya, which is about 40 kilometers away from Brega, on Friday, as they were decomposing.

Brega is governed by a parallel government.

Shakib Chowdhury from Gauripur in Narshingdi is fearing that his brother is among the missing. "My brother Rakib Miah was on board a boat that set sail in the early hours of January 25. The Libyan time would be approximately 3:00am. After he was given 'game', we got a call from a person in Libya who told us that our brother was put on a boat two hours before," said Shakib.

"Game" is the colloquial term used to refer to the process of smuggling a migrant from Libya to Europe by boat via the Mediterranean sea.

Meanwhile, another boat carrying 25 migrants was rescued off the coast of Malta by the NGO Alarm Phone. The NGO reported that two people from the group

had died at sea. The rescue took place on January 29, according to posts made on X (formerly Twitter) by the NGO.

It is being claimed that at least one of the two dead was a Bangladeshi man named Foyzal Ahmed Riyad.

Riyad's cousin Tushar told The Daily Star that their broker in Libya contacted the family and informed them that Riyad died on board but that the boat had reached Malta.

"Riyad was given 'game' on January 25. The broker called on January 29 to let us know the news," said Tushar.

The broker who had organised the "game" was a Bangladeshi man from Cumilla, claimed Tushar.

Tushar is yet to get any official confirmation about the death of his cousin.

Alarm Phone first received news about the boat on January 27, according to its social media posts.

An AFM patrol vessel took off to respond to the call. It took the vessel over 16 hours to reach the boat in distress, reported Malta Today.

While the AFM patrol vessel was en route, a nearby vessel provided interim assistance to the people on the boat. Upon reaching the site, AFM personnel

conducted a rescue operation and recovered 23 survivors and two dead bodies, reported Maltese newspaper.

Riyad had left Bangladesh four months ago and travelled first to Dubai. "Then he went to Egypt and finally to Libya. It took him six days to reach Libya," said Tushar.

Once there, he spent his time in hiding until he was given "game". "We spent Tk 16 lakh on him. He had not even finished high school and was uncertain about his future in Bangladesh," said Tushar.

The Bangladeshi ambassador to Libya said since he took over in June 2023, he had rescued and repatriated over 4,200 Bangladeshis from situations of exploitation.

Libya is a key entry-point for irregular migration to Europe through the Central Mediterranean route.

Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, said in a report published on January 14, that departures from Tunisia and Libya accounted for about 67,000 crossings into Europe in 2024. Bangladeshis predominantly use this route, said the report.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that 2,300 people of different nationalities lost their lives at sea in 2024.

## Cash-strapped Padma Bank struggling to pay employees

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a licence in 2013 on political considerations, has struggled with financial irregularities since its inception. More than Tk 3,500 crore was siphoned out of the bank within just three years of its establishment.

As of September last year, the bank's defaulted loans stood at Tk 4,856 crore, which is 86 percent of its total disbursed loans, according to BB data.

Some of the major loan defaulters include Mass Shipping Recycling Industries (Tk 140 crore), Nahar Agro (Tk 60 crore), Apollo Engineering (Tk 80 crore), Mim Jute (Tk 60 crore), and East West Properties (Tk 60 crore), a concern of Bashundhara Group.

Additionally, the bank recently rescheduled Tk 83 crore in loans for Meghna Cement, another concern of Bashundhara Group, while Tk 23 crore of Beximco Group's loans defaulted in the December quarter.

For years, it has failed to return depositors' money. Its unpaid deposits amount to Tk 6,100 crore.

Padma owes significant amounts to several corporate depositors, including Tk 722 crore to the Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund, Tk 182 crore to the Chittagong Port Authority, Tk 153 crore to the Investment Corporation of Bangladesh (ICB), Tk 109 crore to Bangladesh Jiban Bima Corporation, Tk 68 crore to the Mongla Port Authority, Tk 58 crore to Titas Gas Transmission & Distribution and Tk 80 crore to Bangladesh Infrastructure Finance Fund.

The bank, which has been incurring losses since 2017, currently faces a current account deficit of Tk 235 crore with the central bank.

The bank's financial health took a turn for the worse after its inclusion in the Awami League-led government's plan in March last year to merge 10 weak banks with stronger institutions.

This triggered fresh panic among depositors, leading to increased withdrawals. Since then,

approximately Tk 600 crore in deposits has been withdrawn from the bank.

After the fall of the Sheikh Hasina-led government in August last year, Padma's planned merger with Shariah-based EXIM Bank was aborted.

"Padma Bank was not as weak as some Shariah-based banks but its financial health worsened after the merger announcement by the government at that time," Talha said.

The merger uncertainty also led to an exodus of employees. Around 200 temporary officials, hired for loan recovery efforts, left the bank, and approximately 30 permanent employees resigned since the merger decision.

Bank officials admitted that they are struggling to recover the defaulted loans as many were issued through fraudulent means and irregularities.

The bank's financial troubles date back to 2015-16, when the central bank detected massive irregularities. In response, its ownership and management underwent significant restructuring in 2017, after Muhiuddin Khan Alamgir, a former presidium member of the Awami League, resigned as the chairman.

To rescue Farmers Bank from collapse, the government intervened with financial support. State-owned institutions, including the ICB, Sonali, Janata, Agrani and Rupali Bank, collectively acquired a 60 percent stake for Tk 715 crore.

In January 2018, Chowdhury Nafeez Sarafat, chairman of RACE Asset Management, took over as the chairman of the bank, which was subsequently rebranded as Padma Bank in 2019 in an attempt to restore credibility. However, the institution remained plagued by its past scandals.

Sarafat stepped down from the post of chairman in January last year.

## PHQ for halting recruitment to 310 police posts

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"Recruitment for a BCS batch involves multiple stages. The hiring process for these BCS batches has already progressed significantly. At this stage, we need to carefully assess whether suspending the recruitment would be appropriate," the official said, requesting anonymity.

A source from the public administration ministry said it did not have updated information on the current status of recruitment from these BCS exams. It may consult the Public Service Commission (PSC), which oversees BCS recruitment, for its opinion. The ministry was yet to officially communicate with the PSC.

Another source said that the government has already faced significant criticism due to repeated police verifications in recent BCS recruitments. Suspending police cadre recruitment from four BCS exams could further complicate matters for the government.

A revised notification for the 47th

BCS exams on December 26 last year announced 3,487 vacancies, including 100 under the police cadre. The application process started on December 29 and will run until January 30.

Revised results of the 46th BCS exams were published on November 27 last year, and the remaining process to fill 3,140 vacant posts, including 80 under the police cadre, is pending.

The 45th BCS had 2,309 vacancies, including 80 under the police cadre. The written exams took place in January last year, but the results are yet to be published.

The number of vacant posts for the 44th BCS is 1,710, including 50 under the police cadre. As many as 3,930 candidates for the 44th BCS are taking fresh viva voce since the newly constituted PSC cancelled the previously conducted oral examinations and scheduled fresh tests from January 5 to February 5.

## Polls only way for quick state overhaul: Tarique

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Tarique said the faster reforms are implemented, the quicker it will be possible to protect the country and its people from danger. "I believe accountability to people can be ensured through elections. Everyone must understand this."

He said some people ask whether all the country's problems will be solved by holding just an election. "I say, no, not all problems will be solved immediately. But through elections, through the votes and decisions of the people, the party or persons given the opportunity to govern the country will gradually begin to untangle the knots and resolve the problems."

Tarique cautioned that the autocrats, driven out by all the people of Bangladesh, irrespective of political party or profession, will once again find an opportunity to re-establish themselves if the election process is delayed and discussions on reforms drag on for too long.

"So, from a political party's position, I appeal to all wise and respected individuals in society who are talking about reforms not to prolong these discussions. The longer you extend talks on reforms, the deeper the country will fall into crisis. The longer you extend the discussions, the more opportunity the conspirators will have to plot," he said.

Tarique also vowed that if their party

is voted into power, they will try their utmost to fulfil the reform promises they have made to the people.

He said the BNP wants to bring about a qualitative change in politics by implementing the 31-point proposal, alongside taking effective steps to keep commodity prices within the people's buying capacity, ensuring fair prices for agricultural produce, and providing quality and cost-effective education and healthcare services.

Stating that traffic congestion and pollution are two major problems in Dhaka city, Tarique said effective steps must be taken, if BNP returns to power, to improve the traffic situation and air quality.

He said it is not possible for any government alone to resolve all civic problems without the help of the people. "So, city dwellers must remain alert and play a responsible role in overcoming many civic problems. There are many such problems in the country, and we must take measures to address them gradually," Tarique said.

He said the autocratic regime of Sheikh Hasina destroyed institutions and plundered public money in the name of development, as it was not accountable to the people. "When public representatives are elected through free and fair elections, they remain accountable to the people."

Tarique said many BNP leaders and activists endured torture in the struggle

to restore people's rights. "To restore people's rights, accountability must be ensured, and accountability is ensured through elections."

From the national to local and institutional levels, he said, elections must be held regularly after a stipulated time to ensure good governance.

## Former AL leader

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scene and, after nearly two hours of a tense situation, took the AL leader into custody.

According to social media posts, Bangladesh Tariqat Federation Chairman and former AL MP Syed Najibul Bashar Maizbhandari and former MP (Chattogram-2) Khadizatul Anwar Soni were also present at the wedding. Khadizatul Soni is Fakhruul Anwar's niece.

Meanwhile, police yesterday arrested 28 more leaders and workers of Jubo League, banned Chhatra League, and other AL-affiliated organisation members conducting raids in different areas of the city.

They have been accused in various cases filed with different police stations in the port city, said the Public Relations Department of CMP yesterday.