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Operation Devil Hunt launched

Joint forces begin nationwide drive to maintain law and order

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has launched Operation Devil Hunt, a drive of the joint forces, to maintain law and order across the country following Friday night's attack on "students and common people" in Gazipur.

The home ministry made the decision at a meeting with law enforcement agencies yesterday, according to a press release signed by Faisal Hasan, director (public relations) of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

The joint forces are conducting the operation in Gazipur and areas concerned across the country "to bring the criminals to justice", said the release.

Ministry sources say the officers will go after "the saboteurs who attacked the students, individuals against whom there are warrants and troublemakers" in order to lower the incidents of mob violence and to restore law and order.

Details of the drive will be announced at a press conference today.

Ministry sources say, the officers will go after "the saboteurs who attacked the students, individuals against whom there are warrants and troublemakers" in order to lower the incidents of mob violence and to restore law and order.

Top officials of the agencies concerned will meet in the morning today to work out a coordinated plan for the operation, Shahjada Ashadujaman, additional deputy inspector general (operations) at Police Headquarters, told The Daily Star.

The Police Headquarters have issued primary instructions to superintendents of police in different districts, he said, adding that more coordinated instructions would be given today.

In Gazipur, several individuals were seriously injured in Friday night's attack by "criminals with ties to the fallen dictatorship", said the home ministry release.

Yesterday evening, Gazipur Metropolitan Police Commissioner Nazmul Karim Khan said, "Operation Devil Hunt will be conducted to combat Awami fascism."

Sixteen people have been arrested in connection with the attack, he told reporters.

Chowdhury Zaber Sadeque SP Gazipur told The Daily Star last night that eight people had been arrested.

"A thorough search will be conducted [Saturday] night. Everyone involved will be brought under the law. A decision has already been made by the home ministry."

Last night, army vehicles patrolled different streets and highways in Gazipur.

The attack took place around 10:00pm on Friday, when a group of individuals gathered near the residence of former Liberation War affairs minister AKM Mozammel Haque in Gazipur.

Then somebody announced from a nearby mosque that robbers had attacked the house. Soon, a large group

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DIG Molla Nazrul among 4 cops held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Molla Nazrul Islam, a deputy inspector general (DIG) at Bangladesh Police Academy in Rajshahi, has been detained.

Three officials with the rank of a superintendent of police (SP) have also reportedly been detained.

Molla Nazrul was held yesterday afternoon with the assistance of Rajshahi District Police, a top official of Bangladesh Police's Rajshahi Range told The Daily Star.

Later, a team from Dhaka Metropolitan Police's Detective Branch arrived and took Molla Nazrul with them, the Rajshahi Range official said.

Molla Nazrul had served at the Criminal Investigation Department. After being promoted to DIG, he worked as the commissioner of Gazipur Metropolitan Police for several months in 2022. Then he was transferred to the Armed Police Battalion.

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A person taking away bricks while others look for recyclable construction materials from the ruins of the Dhanmondi-32 residence of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman yesterday.

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PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

DHAKA SUNDAY FEBRUARY 9, 2025

ATTACK ON STUDENTS IN GAZIPUR OC suspended as students protest all day

GMP chief apologises for delay in police response; man shot near Gazipur DC office

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

After day-long student protests, the authorities yesterday suspended the officer-in-charge of Gazipur Sadar Police Station for negligence during Friday night's attack on leaders and activists of the Students Against Discrimination.

In the afternoon, GMP Commissioner Nazmul Karim Khan at a protest rally held by the student platform in front of the Gazipur deputy commissioner's office said, "On behalf of the police force, I apologise for the incident that happened Friday night. I admit my failure. No attacker will be spared. Action will be taken against all the policemen for their delayed response.

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Leaders of Students Against Discrimination demonstrate at Rajbari Math in Gazipur city in protest at Friday night's attack on "students and masses" in the Dhrasram area.

PHOTO: MONJURUL HAQUE

6 MONTHS OF INTERIM GOVT

Citizens still in fear for safety

MUNTAKIM SAAD and SHAHEEN MOLLAH

The law and order situation remains a huge concern six months after the interim government assumed office, with incidents of mugging, extortion, and even murder continuing to occur.

Many citizens feel unprotected and vulnerable since law enforcement agencies, particularly the police, have not been able to regain control despite arresting a significant number of suspected criminals, including muggers and extortionists.

In parts of Dhaka, residents are afraid of venturing out after dark as machete-wielding muggers targeting people in broad daylight have made headlines several times in recent months.

Tanvir Islam, a software engineer, said he was mugged two times in the Mohammadpur area — once in September last year and again in January this year.

"I don't feel safe after dark any more. In fact, no hour is safe in Mohammadpur. People are not only being robbed, but also stabbed and hacked," he said.

Meanwhile, law enforcers' inability to control large crowds was evident

during the demolition of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's residence in Dhanmondi and structures linked to the Awami League and its leaders across the country.

Official data also show a rise in the rate of crimes.

- Official data show rise in crime rates
- Lack of trust between police, people blamed
- Police officers say they fear public outrage
- Criminologists say deterrents to crimes are not sufficient

Between September and December 2024, police reported a significant increase in dacoity, with 243 cases filed, up from 98 during the same period in 2023.

In these four months, 553 robbery incidents were recorded, along with 302 kidnappings and 949 burglaries,

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BUSINESS

In fragile trust, economy falters

Six months since the interim government took charge following the fall of the Awami League government in August last year, the country's economy remains fragile.

Although inflation eased slightly in the past two months, it continues to burden low-income families as they struggle to afford food and other essentials.

Economists point at stagnant private investment, slowed credit growth and rising default loans, with GDP growth dropping to 1.81 percent in the first quarter of FY25 — the lowest in four years.

While some ongoing reform measures offer hope, economic headwinds like high price pressures, supply chain disruptions and a weak law and order situation hinder recovery. Business confidence remains low, with fears of prolonged economic stagnation.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Govt has no intention to extend its stay in power
Says law adviser

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law Adviser Asif Nazrul yesterday assured political parties that the interim government has no intention to "prolong its stay in power" by unnecessarily wasting time.

"We want to move towards the national election after ensuring the urgent, fundamental, and necessary reforms based on political consensus, which are crucial to ensure free and fair election polls," he told a press briefing at the Foreign Service Academy.

The briefing was held on the report submissions of six major reform commissions — constitution, election, judiciary, police, civil service, and anti-corruption commission. The reports were published on the Cabinet Division's website.

He said political parties are suspecting that the reforms are not being made because the interim government is trying to extend its tenure. The necessary reforms can be completed if this suspicion is removed, he said.

Nazrul also said the government is keen on beginning talks with political parties from mid-February. "If the parties agree, the discussions could continue even during Ramadan."

"We've already said the election could be held between December 2025 and June 2026. Considering monsoon, it might be brought forward to March or April 2026... Everything will be finalised based on political consensus."

About how long it might take to carry out the necessary

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



Election rigging was catastrophic for country

Says Electoral Reform Commission about last 3 nat'l polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The extent of rigging and irregularities in the last three elections under the Sheikh Hasina-led government was not only surprising for Bangladesh but also for the world and had a catastrophic result, said the Electoral Reform Commission.

In the past decade and a half, Bangladesh has faced numerous crises, all of which began with the collapse of its electoral system, said the commission's full report, which was submitted to the interim government yesterday.

As institutions were destroyed and elections went into exile, the government led by Hasina unleashed "a steamroller of tyranny and oppression on the entire nation, severely trampling human rights and the rule of law".

Oligarchy, kleptocracy, and coterie politics have created a highly discriminatory society, turning Bangladesh into a haven for corruption.

As part of their plan to "cling to power illegally", Hasina in 2011 had amended the constitution to remove the election-time caretaker government system.

Subsequently, the old culture of rigged elections returned to Bangladesh, said the report, which contains more than 200 recommendations that would ensure citizens' voting rights and make the democratic system effective.

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SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

Full reports of 6 reform commissions made public

UNB, Dhaka

The government has published the full reports of the six reform commissions.

The full reports of the Electoral Reform Commission, Police Reform Commission, Judiciary Reform Commission, Anti-Corruption Commission Reform Commission, Public Administration Reform Commission, and Constitutional Reform Commission (Part One) were published on the website of the Cabinet Division (<https://cabinet.gov.bd/>) yesterday.

The reports of the commissions on constitutional reform, electoral reform, police reform, and ACC reform were submitted on January 15.

Later, on February 5, the reports of the Public Administration Reform Commission and the Judiciary Reform Commission were submitted to the chief adviser.

Five commissions, except for the Constitutional Reform Commission, were formed on October 3 last year.

The Constitutional Reform Commission was formed on October 6.

All the commissions were given 90 days to submit their reports. However, they all got several extensions.



Homeless people, many of whom are labourers, sleep near the entrance to the Kamalapur Railway Station. The photo was taken close to midnight when the area becomes relatively quiet.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Citizens still in fear for safety

FROM PAGE 1

compared to 396 robberies, 160 kidnappings, and 859 burglaries during the same period of the previous year.

The number of murder cases in these months last year stood at 947, just slightly down from 956 in the same months of 2023.

Deaths resulting from mob beatings saw a sharp rise, with 128 fatalities recorded in 2024, including 96 from August to December. The number of such deaths in 2023 was 51.

Many incidents of attacks on Sufi establishments were also reported. On January 23, the Global Sufi Organisation held a press conference alleging that over 80 mazars (shrines) and darbar sharifs (Sufi centres) were attacked by extremist groups across the country in the past six months. The government also confirmed that at least 40 such sites had been targeted in 44 separate attacks since August 4.

Yet, little action has been taken against the perpetrators.

The release of some top criminals after the political changeover last year, followed by a rise in reports of extortion, fuelled concerns over crimes in the city, said police officers and victims.

For instance, in November 2024, a contractor had to pay Tk 3 lakh to local gangs linked to top listed criminals to continue the Tk 16.5 lakh demolition work on a building in Dhaka's Moghbazar.

In January, top criminal Imamul Hasan Halal alias Pichchi Halal's brother Wahedul Hasan Dipu was among two computer traders who were hacked allegedly by another top criminal Sanjidul Hassan Emon's gang on Elephant Road for refusing to pay extortion money, according to the case statement filed over the incident.

Halal was previously named in a murder case filed at Mohammadpur Police Station on September 21, 2024, shortly after his release from jail.

With a good number of similar incidents reported in recent months, a climate of fear permeates the business community of Dhaka. Contractors in the construction sector are being forced to pay or stop work under threat, while businesspeople in other sectors are targeted with abduction or

attacks.

CCTV footage has shown criminals firing near an under-construction building in the capital's Hazaribagh area, apparently to intimidate the builder.

An automobile businessman from Beribadh, Mohammadpur, told these correspondents that he has never faced such a situation in his 30 years of business. Criminals extorted Tk 10 lakh from him after August 5 and demanded more, he alleged.

"Muggers have been attacking people openly in the Rayerbazar and Beribadh areas and fleeing through the nearby graveyard. After seeing some incidents with my own eyes, I now fear to move alone," said the businessman.

Petty criminals have also become more reckless, carrying out muggings on roads and alleys with machetes, even in broad daylight in several parts of the capital. Many videos of such incidents are circulating on social media.

In Mohammadpur, The Daily Star spoke with seven victims of mugging incidents that took place last month. Six of them chose to file general diaries, citing these as loss of valuables, instead of cases as they fear legal complications. One victim opted not to file a complaint at all.

City residents wonder why such crimes continue even after six months under the current government, which deployed joint forces, including members of the armed forces, across the country to maintain law and order.

Criminologists say that criminals perceive the current environment as favourable for carrying out illicit activities, given the demoralised state of the police and other law enforcement agencies.

Omar Faruk, a professor at the Department of Criminology and Police Science at Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University, said the deterrents to crimes were no longer sufficient because the criminals believed they would not face significant consequences.

"This lack of fear among the criminals has emboldened them further," Prof Faruk said.

"From the start, there was a lack of trust between the police and the public. Now it has deepened into a crisis of trust on both sides."

Many officers are not actively participating in their duties, and there is a noticeable lack of motivation within the force, Prof Faruk said.

Moreover, arms and ammunition looted during the uprisings have fallen into the hands of criminals. As a result, the severity of crimes has increased, Faruk added.

The Daily Star talked to several police officers about the persisting lack of morale within the force.

The officer in charge of a police station in the capital, who wished to be anonymous, said that people no longer fear the police. Even for trivial reasons, they behave aggressively toward law enforcers. As a result, many officers are reluctant to go on patrol.

A traffic constable from Dhaka Metropolitan Police's Ramna Division said that some traffic violators often refer to the "blood on the hands of the police" when the police try to penalise them.

Another police officer said, "We accepted that no cases were filed over the deaths and injuries of police personnel during the July protests or on August 5. But in Chattogram, an OC was publicly attacked and beaten in broad daylight in front of hundreds of people. The video of the incident spread on social media, yet no case was filed against anyone. This is disheartening."

Police officers said that the police themselves still feel insecure. As a result, they are reluctant to go on patrol or conduct searches. Many officers are unwilling to take risks during investigations or arrest operations.

Inspector General of Police (IGP) Baharul Alam earlier said that they were working to help the force regain confidence.

Before the uprising, he said, the police had become a tool of a "fascist government", leading to widespread public anger against them.

The current challenge is to structure the police effectively, make them acceptable to the public and ensure that they never revert to an anti-people stance," he added.

Home Adviser Lt Gen (retd) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury recently told reporters that the government was not 100 percent satisfied with law and order, but efforts were underway to improve it.

leaders of Students Against Discrimination and Jatiya Nagorik Committee demanded the attackers be arrested within 24 hours.

"If those responsible for the attack on students in Gazipur are not arrested by tonight [Saturday], we will take a stand against the government and the police," said Sarjis Alam, central coordinator of the Students Against Discrimination.

The joint forces, comprising the armed forces, BGB, Coast Guards, Police, Rab, and Ansar, have been deployed across the country since September 4 to recover illegal firearms and maintain law and order. Yet, the law-and-order situation saw little improvement.

After the fall of the Hasina-led government on August 5 last year amid a mass uprising, mobs looted firearms and bullets from different

police stations and establishments across the country.

In response, the government deployed the joint forces.

On September 17, the interim government gave the power of magistracy to commissioned army officers in order to improve law and order.

An officer with magistracy power has the power to arrest people and take them in custody. In self-defence and extreme need, the officer can open fire, according to the law.

Security measures at the Supreme Court were beefed up yesterday morning.

SC Public Relations Officer Shafiqul Islam said, "There is a statue of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on the Supreme Court premises. That's why the security has been beefed up as a precautionary measure."

completed within a month."

Nazrul added that the government has already taken some steps towards reforms even before getting the commissions' reports. "Some issues, such as appointing court officials through a judicial service commission, have already

been considered as these are good for all."

He also said that the constitution reform commission has not yet given any timeline for implementing reforms as all it will be dependent on political consensus.

FROM PAGE 1

Before any vote was cast in the 2014 polls, candidates for 153 seats were declared winners unopposed -- enough to form a government.

"There is probably no other case in history where a government was formed in an electoral system before any vote was cast."

On the other hand, the biggest example of election manipulation to secure victory was the 2018 general election, dubbed the 'night vote'.

"The ballot boxes were already sealed the night before election day -- an extremely rare occurrence in world history."

For the 2024 elections that were boycotted by the opposition parties, the Awami League violated its own party constitution to artificially create an atmosphere of competition by allowing its allies and associates to contest against it.

The election became a rigged game played among candidates of the boat symbol and other candidates supported by the AL and its associates.

Against the backdrop, the reform commission recommended empowering the Election Commission to suspend the election for 90 days after showing reasonable cause if democratic processes are at risk due to controversial elections like those of 2014, 2018 and 2024.

But it should be done with the approval of the Supreme Court's Appellate Division through the president, the report said.

The commission proposed an "Election Commission Law 2025" to hold election commissioners

accountable for failure to perform, financial irregularities or breach of oath as it looks to usher in accountability for disputed and unacceptable elections.

A bipartisan parliamentary committee should investigate the issues and recommend appropriate action to the president.

If there are serious allegations of misconduct after the EC's term ends, a parliamentary committee should investigate and refer the matter to the president for action.

Besides, the reform commission also proposed having a rule on the "Code of Conduct for CEC and ECs".

If any participating political party is dissatisfied with the fairness, credibility and acceptability of an election, they can file a complaint with the National Constitutional Council or the Appellate Division within 48 hours.

The complaint must be resolved within a maximum of seven working days.

The role of the executive during elections in Bangladesh is often contentious, particularly under a party-government system, where the ruling party's influence and misuse of administrative power have led to controversial and unacceptable elections.

So the reform commission proposed that the executive would require prior approval from the EC for any actions that could influence elections.

It also proposed appointing returning and assistant returning officers from the EC's own staff on a

priority basis, stating that in recent years, civil service appointments, particularly in the last 15 years, have become increasingly politicised.

It is nearly impossible for a politically appointed district commissioner to maintain neutrality during elections."

The report also proposed barring individuals accused of extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, inhumane torture and attacks on journalists or human rights activists from contesting elections if the charges are accepted by an International Crime Tribunal.

The reform commission proposed an integrated 'Election Commission Law' with provisions to ensure the appointment of honest, capable and reputable individuals as CEC and EC.

To strengthen the EC as an institution, it should be given the full authority to finalise election candidates and limit judicial powers, the report said.

The recommendations have been made to establish a system that would hold the EC accountable while simultaneously being empowered to hold free and fair elections, said Badul Alam Majumdar, the reform commission's chief.

Implementation of the recommendations will depend on four key stakeholders: the interim government, the Election Commission, political parties and the people.

"Ultimately, the extent of implementation will largely depend on the willingness of political parties," the report said.

Election rigging was catastrophic

FROM PAGE 1

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blame on us."

He urged people to be alert and resist what he said was a concerted effort to frame the uprising leaders.

Ali Rasel Khan, the platform's central organiser, demanded the cancellation of Awami League's registration as a party.

"The officials who failed to maintain law and order [on Friday night] should be removed," he said.

ONE SHOT IN THE EVENING

Prothom Alo reported that a young man named Mobasher Hossain got shot in front of the deputy commissioner's office.

Mobasher, who is involved with the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, said criminals arrived on a motorcycle and shot one bullet at a group of students and left.

The bullet hit him on his right forearm. Later, he was taken to Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Medical College Hospital.

Speaking to reporters at the hospital, Medical Officer Manjur Morshed said, "He has been admitted to the surgery department after receiving first aid."

SARJIS WANTS ACTION

Also speaking at the rally, Jatiya Nagorik Committee Chief Organiser Sarjis Alam said, "We want to clearly say that the criminals involved in the attack must be arrested by tonight [Saturday]. We don't believe in empty promises anymore. Rather, we want to see visible action."

The official said the government has already taken strong steps "to combat Awami fascism" and added that 16 people have already been arrested for their alleged involvement in Friday night's incident.

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Π



Army personnel stand guard in front of the Supreme Court yesterday. Security at the SC has been heightened as part of precautionary measures in light of the ongoing situation in the country.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

'Indian media involved in AL's campaign against Yunus' says press secretary

UNB, Dhaka

Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam yesterday accused the "fallen" Awami League of carrying out a "well-orchestrated campaign" against Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus.

"Look at their messages -- their message is 3,000 police died; their message is Yunus is a militant leader; their message is Yunus is surrounded by militant leaders. It is a very well-orchestrated campaign," Alam said, adding that the Indian media is also involved in this campaign.

He said that Hasina's oligarchs are spending millions of dollars to create a new narrative challenging the July uprising in their efforts to make the global community understand that it was not an uprising but a big conspiracy.

He said this at a book launching ceremony at Jatiya Press Club.

Referring to Dr Yunus' decades of public life and his global repute, he said they need to document it all. Alam said they, through research, will let everyone know the facts and hold seminars in all the campuses so that the "fallen autocrat and her followers" cannot make a return.

ROHINGYA CRISIS
UN chief pledges to mobilise aid

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The United Nations is committed to supporting Bangladesh in addressing the Rohingya crisis, said UN Secretary-General António Guterres while discussing the upcoming UN International Conference on Rohingya Muslims and Other Minorities of Myanmar scheduled for later this year.

The statement came during a meeting in New York with Dr Khalilur Rahman, high representative of Bangladesh's chief adviser on Rohingya issues and priority matters, yesterday.

The UN General Assembly unanimously decided to hold the conference as some 80,000 Rohingya entered Bangladesh, joining the more than one million already there.

More than 80 percent of the Rakhine State is now controlled by the Arakan Army, further complicating the crisis.

During the meeting, Khalilur emphasised the urgent need for international action to achieve a sustainable resolution to the Rohingya crisis, which continues to threaten regional peace and security.

He urged Guterres to mobilise the international community to ensure that

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CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM PROPOSAL What rights will it ensure?

Commission submits full report to govt

MD ABBAS

The Constitution Reform Commission, led by Prof Ali Riaz, has recommended expanding fundamental rights, including making the right to education an enforceable constitutional provision.

The state must ensure free and compulsory education for all up to a level determined by law, with opportunities for higher education based on merit and inclusive education for children with disabilities.

In its full report submitted to the government yesterday, the commission provided an observational analysis and evaluation of the constitution, alongside proposals from political parties and civil society organisations.

Among its key recommendations, the commission advocates for an enforceable right to health, guaranteeing emergency medical care for all citizens without exception.



AT A GLANCE

Right to education	Expansion of social security
Right to health	Guaranteed fair wages
Adequate food rights	Right to learn in native language
Access to clean water	Right to information
Housing for all	Access to internet for all

It also recommends including rights to adequate food, clean water, sanitation, and housing within the state's available resources.

To enhance social security, the commission proposes recognising unemployment, maternity, illness, disability, old age, and orphanhood as grounds for enforceable social

protection rights.

It further calls for ensuring fair wages, safe working conditions, and the right to cultural identity, including language preservation and participation in cultural life.

The commission also emphasises the right of ethnic groups to protect and develop

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



Vehicles find it difficult to navigate the eroded road beneath the Major Hanif flyover in the Sayedabad area. Neglect and a lack of repairs have worn the road down to the point where the underlying bricks are now exposed. This deterioration has led to increased dust pollution and traffic congestion, adversely affecting the daily lives of pedestrians and commuters. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

JONNY'S CUSTODIAL TORTURE, DEATH 11 years without justice

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

Final justice is yet to be delivered to the family members of Ishtiaque Hossain Jonny, a garment waste trader in the capital's Mirpur area, who was tortured to death in law enforcers' custody 11 years ago.

Jonny's family members, who have been suffering emotionally and financially, are now awaiting the High Court's adjudication of the appeals filed by the convicts challenging the trial court judgement.

"My son was tortured to death by the law enforcers of Pallabi Police Station. February 9 is his 11th death anniversary. I don't know whether I will be able to get justice. The accused parties are trying to harm us in various ways," alleged Jonny's mother Khurshida Begum.

It is still uncertain when the HC will conclude hearing of the appeals of convicts and deliver its verdict, as jurisdiction of its bench concerned has been reconstituted by the chief justice around six months ago.


My son was tortured to death by the law enforcers of Pallabi Police Station. Today (February 9) is his 11th death anniversary. I don't know whether I will be able to get justice.
Khurshida Begum
Jonny's mother

Since then the hearing remains adjourned.

Jonny's family members are yet to get any compensation from the convicted accused though the trial court directed them to give Tk 6 lakh to Jonny's family as the HC has issued a stay order to this effect.

said Advocate Md Rezaul Karim, the victim family's lawyer.

A group of 25 to 26 police officers -- including then sub-inspector of Pallabi Police Station Zahidur Rahman -- raided a house during a wedding ceremony in Pallabi's Irani camp area and picked up Jonny, who was then 28, and his brother Imtiaz Hossain Rocky, on February 8, 2014.

Police informers Sumon and Russell called the law enforcers after Jonny slapped Sumon for stalking and harassing women at the programme. Police then tortured the brothers at the police station, according to the case statement.

After Jonny fell sick the next day, he was admitted to a local clinic. Later, he was transferred to Suhrawardy Hospital, where doctors declared him dead.

On August 8, 2014, Rocky filed the murder case with the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court of Dhaka.

On September 9, 2020, a Dhaka court sentenced former

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

BNP to launch nationwide programmes from Feb 11

STAR REPORT

The BNP yesterday announced a series of nationwide political programmes starting February 11, demanding government actions on key issues including improving law and order and reining in the price of essentials.

Speaking at a press conference at the party's central office in Naya Paltan at 5:00pm, BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi Ahmed said the party will organise rallies and gatherings in every district, followed by similar events in metropolitan and divisional cities.

Senior leaders, including members of the party's Standing Committee, will participate in these programmes, he said.

The programme schedule and the list of participating senior leaders will be shared with the media soon. All activities are expected to conclude before the start of Ramadan, he added.

Empower women, bridge leadership gap: speakers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Despite an increase in women's labour force participation from 36.3 percent to 42.67 percent, their representation in mid- and senior-level leadership roles remains disproportionately low, speakers said at an event yesterday.

Structural barriers such as entrenched societal norms, institutional biases, and career breaks due to family responsibilities continue to hinder women's professional growth, they added.

The event, titled "Anirban -- Rise and Lead", aimed at empowering mid-career women, was held at a city hotel. It brought together key stakeholders from industries, development organisations, and policymakers.

Jointly organised by Oxfam in Bangladesh and WaterAid Bangladesh, the event also marked the launch of Anirban, a leadership initiative designed to empower mid-career women professionals and support their reintegration into the workforce and leadership roles after career breaks.

Humaira Azam, managing director of LankaBangla Finance, said, "Success isn't just about academic excellence -- it's about interpersonal skills, mental training, and how we

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

Police recover 3 crude bombs at Farmgate



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police recovered three crude bombs abandoned on the street near Ananda Cinema Hall at Farmgate yesterday.

Confirming the matter, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Police Station Officer-in-Charge Golam Azam said after receiving information about a bomb-like object, police immediately arrived at the scene and found three such objects.

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police's bomb disposal unit was dispatched to the location.

Around 12:30pm, a man named Arif called the national emergency service 999 to report the bomb-like object. Upon receiving the report, police rushed to the scene.

The OC said the recovered objects were crude bombs, which were later disposed of by the bomb disposal unit.



Hasan fills this drum with mola fish that were caught from a local pond in Barishal. He will send this fish to the capital's Karwan Bazar area, where it will be sold at markets there. The photo was taken from the Charcowa area of Sadar upazila recently.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

What rights will it ensure?

FROM PAGE 3
their heritage, religion, language, and culture, as well as the right to receive education in one's mother tongue.

Additionally, it proposes recognising the right to development as a fundamental right, ensuring participation in economic, social, cultural, and political progress.

Regarding governance reforms, the commission recommends explicitly including the right to

criticise judicial rulings under freedom of expression.

It proposes establishing a permanent parliamentary committee on human rights to review draft legislation.

Moreover, individuals and institutions violating fundamental rights should be held accountable in court, with appropriate remedies and penalties imposed by law.

The commission recommends a bicameral legislature with a 400-seat lower house, or National Assembly, and a 105-seat upper house, or Senate. The tenure of both houses would be set at four years. Of the 400 assembly members elected directly,

100 seats would be reserved for women.

On legislative procedures, the commission suggests that the upper house should not have the power to propose legislation but must review all non-monetary bills passed by the lower house.

It may approve, reject, or return bills with suggested amendments. If a bill is passed twice by the lower house but rejected by the upper house, it may be sent to the president for assent without further approval.

Additionally, the upper house cannot indefinitely block legislation; any bill delayed for more than two months will be considered approved.

The commission's

proposals aim to strengthen constitutional protections, ensure inclusive governance, and expand fundamental rights to create a more equitable society.

Among other proposals, the commission suggests replacing nationalism, socialism, and secularism with equality, human dignity, social justice, and pluralism as fundamental principles of state policy.

The only core principle retained from the 1972 constitution is democracy.

UN chief

FROM PAGE 3
the conference adopts concrete measures for an early and lasting solution.

He drew António Guterres' attention to the worsening external funding situation and urged him to use his influence to secure sufficient resources.

Guterres reaffirmed UN's commitment to finding a solution to the Rohingya crisis and assured Khalilur of his support in securing funding for these efforts.

Khalilur also briefed António on Bangladesh's ongoing reform initiatives under the leadership of Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus, while also emphasising the need for a stronger role for Bangladesh in UN peacekeeping operations.

Guterres recalled his recent meeting with Yunus in Davos and reiterated his strong support for Bangladesh's reform efforts.

CONVOCATION CORNER DIU holds 12th convocation

CITY DESK

Daffodil International University (DIU) held its 12th convocation at Daffodil Smart City in Savar yesterday.

Prof Dr Bidhan Ranjan Roy Podder, adviser, Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, presided over the convocation ceremony and conferred the degrees.

Prof Dr Hassan Diab, former prime minister of the Republic of Lebanon, attended the event as the convocation speaker.

The event was also addressed by Dr Md Sabur Khan, chairman, Board of



Trustees, and Prof Dr M Lutfar Rahman, vice chancellor of the university.

A total of 3,951 students were conferred upon graduation and post-graduation degrees. Of them, 12 graduates were awarded gold medals.

IUB's 25th convocation



CITY DESK

Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB) held its 25th convocation yesterday, conferring degrees on 1,969 graduates. The ceremony took place at the university campus in Bashundhara Residential Area.

Among the graduates, 1,550 received undergraduate degrees, while 419 postgraduate degrees. Two students were honoured with the Chancellor's Gold Medal.

Prof Dr M Aminul Islam, special assistant to the Ministry of Education, presided over the ceremony. Bangladesh Bank Governor Dr Ahsan H Mansur was the convocation speaker while Prof Md Saidur Rahman, UGC member, was the guest of honour.

IUB VC Prof M Tamim also spoke.

2nd convocation of BUFT held

CITY DESK

The 2nd Convocation of the BGMEA University of Fashion & Technology (BUFT) was held at Bangladesh-China Friendship Exhibition Center yesterday.

Adilur Rahman Khan, adviser, Ministry of Industries and Ministry of



2nd Convocation 2025

Housing and Public Works, conferred the degrees upon 2,731 graduating students.

Industrialist Kihak Sung, chairman of Youngone Corporation, was the convocation speaker.

Faruque Hassan, chairman of the Board of Trustees, BUFT, and Prof Ayub Nabi Khan, acting vice chancellor, spoke on the occasion.

Empower women, bridge leadership gap

FROM PAGE 3

SI Zahidur and former assistant SIs Qamruzzaman Mintu and Rashedul Islam of Pallabi Police Station to life imprisonment and sentenced police informers Sumon and Russell to seven years in jail.

The court also asked each of the former officers to pay Tk 2 lakh compensation to the complainant, Rocky, through Bangladesh Bank and fined Zahidur and Rashedul Tk 1 lakh each.

Sumon and Russell were fined Tk 20,000 each.

This was the first and sole verdict under the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, 2013.

Mintu is on the run, and Russell, who had been absconding during the delivery of the trial court's judgement, surrendered to the lower court later.

Zahidur, Rashedul, Sumon and Russell filed appeals with the HC challenging the trial court verdict. Russell secured bail from the HC on November 22, 2022. Zahidur, Rashedul and Sumon are now in jail.

Rocky said he is yet to get any compensation from the convicts as their appeals are yet to be disposed of by the HC.

Advocate Rezaul Karim, who is conducting the case on behalf of Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust, said, "The hearing jurisdiction of the High Court bench led by Justice SM Kuddus Zaman, who held hearing of the appeals for few days in July last year, has been reconstituted by the chief justice."

"We will now pray to the chief justice to allow this bench to resume hearing and deliver verdict in the case," he said. Rashedul's lawyer Md Abdur Razzak Razu claimed that all three convicted accused have deposited the compensation and fines to Bangladesh Bank while filing their appeals.

women still face invisible barriers that limit their career growth," said Ashish Damle, country director of Oxfam in Bangladesh. "It's time to create workplaces that nurture diverse leadership and ensure equal opportunities for all professionals."

She called for systemic change and urged men to act as ambassadors for women's leadership journeys.

The Anirban initiative aims to dismantle barriers to women's leadership by providing mentorship, skills training, and advocacy.

"Despite progress, many

offering mentorship and guidance, we can help women re-enter the workforce with confidence and contribute their valuable skills to leadership roles," she said.

Nusrat Anwar, project coordinator of WaterAid's Women's Returnship Programme, and Bidwora Tahmin Khan, head of Economic Inclusion and Justice at Oxfam, delivered a keynote presentation detailing how Anirban supports women navigating career transitions and

leadership challenges.

A panel discussion titled "Breaking Barriers: Women's Leadership in the Modern Workplace" was moderated by Kabita Bose, country director of Plan International. Other panelists included Md Rubaiyat Sarwar, co-founder of Innovation Consulting, and Shaheen Anam, executive director of Manusher Jonno Foundation. The discussion explored workplace gender biases and pathways for systemic change.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Office of the Upazila Health & Family Planning Office
Upazila Health Complex
Rangunia, Chattogram.

Ref No: UHC/Rangunia/Chattogram/MSR/24-25/256

Date: 08/02/2025

Invitation for Re-Tender Notice (OTM)

FY-2024-2025 e-Tender (Re-Tender) is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of the following works given below:

Sl No	Tender ID	Description and Name of the Package	Tender Publication Date & Time	Tender Last Selling Date & Time	Tender Closing/Opening Date & Time
1	1073418	Rangunia/MSR/24-25/6 Procurement of Furniture for the F.Y 2024-25 in Upazila Health Complex, Rangunia, Chattogram.	11/02/2025 10:00	25/02/2025 10:30	25/02/2025 13:00
2	1073417	Rangunia/MSR/24-25/5 Procurement of Reagent, Chemical for the F.Y 2024-25 in Upazila Health Complex, Rangunia, Chattogram.	11/02/2025 10:00	25/02/2025 10:30	25/02/2025 13:00
3	1073416	Rangunia/MSR/24-25/4 Procurement of Linen for the F.Y 2024-25 in Upazila Health Complex, Rangunia, Chattogram.	11/02/2025 10:00	25/02/2025 10:30	25/02/2025 13:00
4	1073415	Rangunia/MSR/24-25/3 Procurement of Gauze, Bandage and Cotton for the F.Y 2024-25 in Upazila Health Complex, Rangunia, Chattogram	11/02/2025 10:00	25/02/2025 10:30	25/02/2025 13:00
5	1073414	Rangunia/MSR/24-25/2 Procurement of Surgical Instruments for the F.Y 2024-25 in Upazila Health Complex, Rangunia, Chattogram	11/02/2025 10:00	25/02/2025 10:30	25/02/2025 13:00
6	1060885	Rangunia/MSR/24-25/1 Procurement of Non EDCL Medicine for the F.Y 2024-25 in Upazila Health Complex, Rangunia, Chattogram	11/02/2025 10:00	25/02/2025 10:30	25/02/2025 13:00

This is an Online Tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no office hard copies will be accepted to submit e-tender, registration in the national e-GP system portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. The fees for downloading the e-tender document from the national e-GP portal have to be deposited online through any registered banks within the date mentioned in the tender notice.

Amila
08/02/2025

Dr. Jainab Jamila
Upazila Health & Family Planning Officer
Upazila Health Complex
Rangunia, Chattogram.

PRAYER TIMING

FEBRUARY 9

Faz	Zohr	Asr	Magrib	Esha
AZAN 5:30	12:45	4:15	5:52	7:15
JAMAT 6:05	1:15	4:30	5:56	7:45

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

GD-386

WHAT'S THE HAPS

'Pet Carnival with Live Music'



Merging entertainment with a cause, the **'Pet Carnival with Live Music'** is set to take place at the capital's Mirpur area. It promises a blend of music and entertainment, aiming to raise awareness about responsible pet ownership and animal welfare. The line up of musicians includes popular band Shironamhin and renowned singer and actor Tahsan Khan.

Date: Tuesday | February 11

Time: 2pm to 10pm

Venue: National Govt Primary School, Mirpur-2

Jaya elated as 'Putulnacher Itikatha' felicitated at IFFR

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

On February 6, **'Putulnacher Itikatha'** made its world premiere at the prestigious International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR).

Jaya Ahsan, along with the film's team, attended the event in person. Draped in an elegant green embroidered saree, she graced the red carpet with poise and radiance, capturing the attention of the audience and media alike.

In an interview with The Daily Star over the phone from the Netherlands, the actress shared her excitement about the reception of the film, saying, "We had a wonderful turnout at the festival. Everybody loved the film and they expressed it to us with immense praise. I am overwhelmed to be at such a prestigious film festival."

Addressing the film's achievement in the competition, she said, "**'Putulnacher Itikatha'** has competed in the



Film Festival."

The film is set to have three screenings at the festival, allowing more international viewers the chance to watch the film.

In **'Putulnacher Itikatha'**, Jaya Ahsan portrays the character of Kushum. Reflecting on her role, she shared, "**'Putulnacher Itikatha'** is one of my favourite novels. After **'Padma Nadir Majhi'**, this is one of Manik Bandopadhyay's most widely read works. It is a powerful piece of literature, and I feel honoured to have played the role of Kushum in this remarkable story."

Jaya Ahsan also took a moment to convey her admiration for director Suman Mukhopadhyay, saying, "He has made this film with great care. We have poured our hearts into our performances with utmost dedication and love. The result is a truly wonderful film, and the audience here has embraced it wholeheartedly."

main competition (Big Screen Competition), which is a huge achievement. It is the only Bengali-language film in the primary competition at a prestigious festival like the Rotterdam International

Vikings' guitarist signs with Wampler Pedals as first South Asian artiste



Faruque Hossain, popularly known as Shuvo and the lead guitarist of the Bangladeshi band Vikings, has achieved a trailblazing milestone by becoming the first South Asian artiste to be endorsed by Wampler Pedals. This recognition underscores his impressive musical talent and places Bangladesh on the global music map.

Wampler Pedals, a renowned boutique manufacturer of guitar effects pedals, is based in Martinsville, Indiana, USA. According to the company, Shuvo's ability to deliver deeply soulful and electrifying performances aligns perfectly with Wampler's mission of enhancing musicians' artistry.

By becoming an official artiste of Wampler Pedals, Faruque joins a prestigious group of musicians, including Brad Paisley and Brent Mason.

'Neelchokro' earns spot at Golden State Film Festival

Bangladeshi film **'Neelchokro (Blue Circle)'** has been officially selected for the Foreign Language category at the eighth Golden State Film Festival 2025, set to take place in Los Angeles from February 14 to 21.

The film will have its world premiere at the festival. Director Mithu Khan told The Daily Star that the English dubbed version of **'Neelchokro'** has been completed.



Starring Arifin Shuvoo, the film also features Monder Chakraborty, Priyonee Urbee, and Fazlur Rahman Babu, among others. Notably, it marks the big-screen debut of musician Balam. Previously, **'Neelchokro'** had a special premiere at the American Film Market in Las Vegas for buyers and distributors.

Music icons to unite to honour Shafin Ahmed's legacy

A tribute concert titled **'Shafin Ahmed: Echoes of a Legend'**



has been organised to honour the late band icon Shafin Ahmed. Scheduled for February 13 at Aloki in Tejgaon, Dhaka, the event will feature performances by Miles, Feedback, Dalchhut, Artcell, AvoidRafa, and rapper Ozzy.

The legendary musician had travelled to the United States last year but fell ill before a concert in Virginia on July 20. After two days on life support, he passed away on July 24. Nearly seven months since his passing, the concert aims to celebrate his legacy.

Organised by Velvet Events, tickets are available on Get Set Rock, priced at Tk 3,000 (VIP) and Tk 1,500 (Regular). Gates will open at 6pm, while the concert is scheduled to begin at 9pm.

'Squid Game' challenges to come to life at Kick Off Football Ground

In a bid to introduce a unique community engagement event that blends entertainment and competition, Stayverz Bangladesh has organised a thrilling and immersive experience titled **'Squid Game Parody'**—scheduled for February 10 (Monday) at 4pm at the Kick Off Football Ground in Purbachal 300 Feet, Dhaka.

This extraordinary experience will engage participants in the thrill, suspense, and strategic elements of the globally acclaimed series **'Squid Game'** in Bangladesh.

Participants will be able to earn exciting rewards for facing off live-action games and heart-racing challenges. They will also be allowed photo and video opportunities to capture significant moments and reactions.

This event is host Stayverz Bangladesh's way of introducing a fresh marketing innovation to captivate clients.



NEWS

Pak crackdown on Weekly Sangram

FROM PAGE 12

book **'Bhasha andolan: Teknaf to Tetulia'**, the student community in Feni played an important role in the 1948 movement, with Kobbad Ahmed, the general secretary of the Feni College Student Union, at the forefront. Local political leaders Shamsul Haque Chowdhury and Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury were also instrumental in mobilising student support.

Besides, the now late eminent journalist ABM Musa, then a student at Feni College, actively participated in the movement, and Khawaja Ahmed, the editor of the local newspaper **"Weekly Sangram,"** played a crucial role in raising public awareness.

March 11, 1948, was an important day in the nationwide movement. On this day, Feni saw a wave of protests, with students organising strikes, demonstrations, and rallies. The movement gained significant momentum, with students of Feni College spreading the message of resistance throughout the region.

However, the dissemination of information and activism came at a cost. **"Weekly Sangram,"** published by Sujat Press in Feni, faced administrative harassment due to its critical stance and support for the language movement. In 1950, the Pakistani administration banned the newspaper, and in October of the

same year, its editor, Khawaja Ahmed, was arrested under the Public Safety Act.

While the 1948 movement had a limited impact on Noakhali town, the events of 1952 ignited a fierce wave of protest. The declaration of Urdu as the sole state language by Pakistan Prime Minister Khawaja Nazimuddin on January 27, 1952, provoked widespread outrage among the people of Noakhali.

As per Ahmed Rafiq's book, on February 4, 1952, students from Chaumuhani Vidyamandir and other schools organised a strike and held a meeting that evolved into a public gathering.

Meanwhile, in Feni, the All-Party State Language Action Committee, led by Ziauddin Ahmed, the general secretary of the Feni College Student Union, spearheaded the movement.

On February 21, the main day of protest, a complete shutdown was observed in Majidjee town, the administrative centre of Noakhali.

Hundreds of students marched through the town and held a rally in front of the staff quarters of the district administration, writes Ahmed Rafiq.

After receiving the news of student killings in Dhaka on February 21, classes were boycotted and businesses were closed. Spontaneous protests

erupted throughout the town.

In the afternoon, a student-public meeting was held at the premises of Sonamuri High School. The Bar Association of Noakhali also convened a meeting to condemn the police firing and demand justice for the martyrs.

In Feni, the students also took to the streets, chanting slogans like "We want Bangla as the state language!"

The police responded with brutality, resorting to baton charges and arresting student leaders, including Ziauddin Ahmed, Zulfikar Haider Chowdhury, Lutful Rahman, Farman Ullah, and Shamsul Huda, Ahmed Rafiq writes.

The following day, February 22, a complete hartal was observed in Noakhali.

The movement, while facing repression from the authorities, continued to gain momentum, spreading beyond the town of Noakhali to encompass surrounding areas.

Despite facing numerous challenges, the people of Noakhali, particularly the students of Feni, stood united in their demand for the right to the mother language, contributing significantly to the struggle for Bangla as the state language.

Translated and edited by Subrata Roy.

Trump revokes Biden's security clearance

FROM PAGE 12

and ending his daily intelligence briefings.

"JOE, YOU'RE FIRED," he added in all caps.

US presidents are traditionally given the right to receive intelligence briefings even after they step down.

Trump also stepped up his assault on the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which distributes humanitarian aid globally.

"THE CORRUPTION IS AT LEVELS RARELY SEEN BEFORE. CLOSE IT DOWN!" he wrote on his Truth Social app about USAID, without offering evidence.

USAID has received the most concentrated fire since Trump launched a crusade led by Musk -- the world's richest person -- to downsize or dismantle swaths of the US government.

On Friday, Musk -- who along with Trump has spread blatantly false information about USAID's finances -- reposted photos of the agency's signage being removed from its Washington headquarters.

The Trump administration has frozen foreign aid, ordered thousands of internationally-based staff to return to the United States, and begun slashing the USAID headcount of 10,000 employees to around only 300.

Labour unions are challenging the legality of the onslaught. A federal judge on Friday ordered a pause to the administration's plan to put 2,200 USAID workers on paid leave by the weekend.

Democrats say it would be unconstitutional for Trump to shut down government agencies without the legislature's green light.

The United States' current budget allocates about \$70 billion for international assistance, a tiny fraction of overall spending.

But it gets a big bang for its buck. USAID alone runs health and emergency programmes in around 120 countries, including in the world's poorest regions, boosting Washington's battle for influence against rivals such as China.

"We are witnessing one of the worst and most costly foreign policy blunders in US history," Samantha Power, the USAID chief under former president Joe Biden, wrote in a scathing New York Times opinion piece.

Baltic nations decouple from Russia power grid

FROM PAGE 12

mode" for about 24 hours to test their frequency, or power levels, according to Lithuania's state-run grid operator Litgrid.

"We need to carry out some tests to assure Europe that we are a stable energy system," Litgrid head Rokas Masilius had said last month.

"We'll switch power stations on and off, observe how the frequency fluctuates and assess our ability to control it."

The states will then integrate into the European power grid via Poland.

Authorities have warned of potential risks linked to the change.

"Various short-term risks are possible, such as kinetic operations against critical infrastructure, cyber-attacks and disinformation campaigns," Lithuania's state security department told AFP.

Poland's power grid operator PSE had said it would use helicopters and drones to patrol the connection with Lithuania.

Latvian President Edgars Rinkevics told LTV1 the countries could not "rule out possible provocations".

In Estonia, police and volunteer defence corps will man critical electrical infrastructure until next weekend because of the risk of sabotage.

Several undersea telecom and power cables have been severed in the Baltic Sea in recent months. Some experts and politicians have accused Russia of waging a hybrid war, an allegation Moscow denies.

A total of 1.6 billion euros (\$1.7

BJP returns

FROM PAGE 12

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who helmed BJP's poll campaign, termed BJP's victory in Delhi as a "historic mandate" and a "triumph of development and good governance." He vowed to leave no stone unturned in developing Delhi and improving the overall quality of life for the people.

Senior AAP leader incumbent chief minister Atishi, who replaced Kejriwal following the latter's imprisonment in graft cases last year, won against senior BJP leader Ramesh Bidhuri in the Kalkaji constituency.

The council also issued an ultimatum, demanding that the dismissal orders for officials from different cadres over social media comments be withdrawn.

They said if these "unjust dismissal orders" are not withdrawn within a week, all cadre officials under the council will be compelled to go on work abstention and take further action.

It also said that despite similar allegations surfacing against the administration cadre, the public administration ministry has not yet taken any action.

Tk 2,500 fine for speeding from February 21

FROM PAGE 12

The expressway authorities have recorded an average of over 400 incidents of speeding (above 100 km/h) each month, said another official.

At least 10 major accidents have occurred since the expressway opened, Hasib said.

"Fortunately, none have resulted in fatalities. However, if speeding continues, casualties are inevitable. That's why we told DMP that video-based case filing should begin."

The expressway authority will provide the DMP with a video link to monitor the footage from their office, Hasib said.

Currently, police are filing cases against speeding vehicles on the elevated expressway and Purbachal Expressway using speed guns, Md Sarwar, additional commissioner (traffic) of DMP, told The Daily Star yesterday.

However, speed guns cannot detect the number plates of vehicles that are excessively speeding.

In some cases, the vehicles are out of reach by the time the police check their speed and hence the move towards video-based case filing.

The expressway authorities will set up a video link at the Gulshan Traffic Division office by February 20, he said, adding that case filing is

expected to begin the following day.

The DMP is connected to the vehicle database of the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority and will file cases by observing the number plates of speeding vehicles.

The notice of the case will be sent to the address listed in the database of the vehicle owner, he said. If the fine is not paid within the deadline, a warrant will be issued, he added.

Built under a public private partnership model, the country's first elevated expressway was partially opened to traffic in September 2023.

Last month, an average of 66,000 vehicles used the expressway per day.



Bharatiya Janata Party supporters celebrate as they lead in Delhi legislative assembly polls, at BJP state headquarters in New Delhi yesterday. BJP has not controlled the local legislature in the capital Delhi since 1998.

PHOTO: STAR

Jihadist attack kills 32 in Mali

AFP, Dakar

A suspected jihadist attack on a convoy escorted by Malian soldiers and Russia's Wagner mercenaries has killed 32 people in northern Mali, officials said yesterday.

The attack took place on Friday between the northern cities of Gao and Ansongo, they said.

The death toll was initially put at 10 but soon rose to 32.

"We have more than 30 bodies from the scene," said a hospital source in Gao.

The jihadists ambushed a civilian convoy escorted by Malian soldiers and Wagner mercenaries, a local official told AFP, requesting anonymity.

"There are civilians and soldiers among the dead."

A source from a transport trade union said: "According to a transporter who managed to escape, jihadists ambushed the convoy's escort and opened fire on everyone at random to cause the largest number of victims."

Another local official told AFP: "The Malian soldiers and Wagner (mercenaries) were in around 10 vehicles protecting a convoy of 22 minibuses with civilian passengers, six large buses and eight lorries."

IS has not claimed responsibility for the attack.

Hamas, Israel complete fifth hostage-prisoner swap

Three hostages freed; 183 Palestinian prisoners released; US approves sale of \$7.4b in bombs, missiles to Israel

AFP, Deir El-Balah

Israel and Hamas completed their fifth hostage-prisoner swap under a fragile Gaza ceasefire deal yesterday, with the frail, disoriented appearance of the three freed Israelis sparking dismay among their relatives.

Out of the 183 inmates released by Israel in return, the Palestinian Prisoners' Club advocacy group said seven required hospitalisation, decrying "brutality" and mistreatment in jail.

The fifth exchange since the truce took effect last month comes as negotiations are set to begin on the next phase of the ceasefire, which should pave the way for a permanent end to the war.

Yesterday's swap also follows remarks by President Donald Trump suggesting the United States should take over the Gaza Strip and clear out its inhabitants, sparking global outrage.

But the joy at their release was quickly overtaken by concern for their condition, with all three Israelis appearing thin and pale.

The choreographed handover included forced statements from the three on stage, in which they stated support for finalising the next phases of the Israel-Hamas truce.

The "disturbing images" from Gaza show that "we must get them all out", said

the Hostages and Missing Families Forum campaign group.

The office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whose dejected-looking portrait appeared on a banner at the Deir el-Balah handover site, said the images out of Gaza were "shocking".

In the occupied West Bank city of Ramallah, seat of the Palestinian Authority, relatives and supporters gathered to welcome inmates released by Israel, embracing them and cheering as they stepped off the bus that brought them from nearby Ofer prison.

Israel's prison service said that "183 terrorists... were released" to the West Bank, annexed east Jerusalem and Gaza.

Gaza militants have so far freed 21 hostages in exchange for hundreds of mostly Palestinian prisoners released from Israeli jails.

The ceasefire, mediated by Qatar, Egypt and the United States, aims to secure the release of 12 more hostages during its first 42-day phase.

Negotiations on the second stage of the ceasefire were set to begin on Monday, but there have been no details on the status of the talks.

Netanyahu's office said that after Saturday's swap, an Israeli delegation would head to Doha for further talks.

Since October 7, 2023, Israel's offensive

has killed at least 48,181 people in Gaza, the majority civilians, according to the Hamas-run territory's health ministry. The United Nations considers the figures reliable.

Meanwhile, the United States on Friday announced the approval of the sale of more than \$7.4 billion in bombs, missiles and related equipment to Israel, which has used American-made weapons to devastating effect during the war in Gaza.

The State Department has signed off on the sale of \$6.75 billion in bombs, guidance kits and fuses, in addition to \$660 million in Hellfire missiles, according to the US Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA).

The proposed sale of the bombs "improves Israel's capability to meet current and future threats, strengthens its homeland defense, and serves as a deterrent to regional threats," DSCA said in a statement.

And the missile sale would "improve Israel's capability to meet current and future threats by improving the ability of the Israeli Air Force to defend Israel's borders, vital infrastructure, and population centers," it said.

Meanwhile, Netanyahu gave Trump a golden pager during their meeting at the White House this week, in a symbolic gesture marking Israel's shocking attack on Hezbollah last year.

The gift symbolises "a turning point in the war" against Hezbollah, when Israel carried out a deadly operation against the Lebanese group using exploding pagers in September 2024.

"This strategic operation showcases Israel's strength, technological superiority, and ingenuity against its enemies," it said on Thursday.

Trump may meet Zelensky next week

Russia claims key Ukraine town

AFP, Kyiv

US President Donald Trump said Friday he would "probably" meet Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky next week, as Russia said its forces had seized the key mining town of Toretsk in east Ukraine.

Zelensky said Washington and Kyiv were planning "talks", but did not confirm a meeting between the two leaders.

Russia has been steadily grinding into east Ukraine for over a year, claiming dozens of mostly abandoned towns and villages despite heavy losses.

Toretsk is the biggest settlement Russia claims to have captured since Avdiivka in February 2024. Kyiv denied Russia had full control of the industrial hub.

The capture of Toretsk, which lies on elevated ground, would allow Moscow to further obstruct Ukrainian supply routes, paving the way for it to punch deeper into the northern part of the Donetsk region, according to military analysts.

Once a bustling coal mining centre, Toretsk had about 30,000 people before Russia's 2022 invasion, but by July last year the number of residents had fallen by 90 percent, according to the local administration.

European foreign ministers are to meet in Paris next Wednesday to discuss the conflict and the Politico website said US Secretary of State Marco Rubio could attend the meeting.

Trump said he would "probably" meet Zelensky "next week" in comments to reporters at the White House. Asked if such a meeting would be in Washington, Trump replied it "could be Washington -- well, I'm not going there" to Kyiv.



This aerial view shows a destroyed section of the Great Colonnade and the 13th-century Mamluk-built Fakhr al-Din al-Maani Castle (Tadmur Castle) on the hilltop, at the ancient ruins of Palmyra in central Syria. Palmyra is one of six Syrian sites listed on the UNESCO elite list of world heritage and all of them sustained some level of damage throughout the 13-year civil war.

US judge blocks Musk's DOGE dept from Treasury data

AFP, Washington

A US judge issued an emergency order early yesterday blocking Elon Musk's government reform team from accessing personal and financial data stored at the Treasury Department, court documents showed.

US District Judge Paul A. Engelmayer's order restricts giving access to Treasury Department payment systems and other data to "all political appointees, special government employees, and government employees detailed from an agency outside the Treasury Department."

The temporary restrictive order, which remains in effect until a February 14 hearing, also says any such person who has accessed data from the Treasury Department's records since Donald Trump was inaugurated as president on January 20 must "immediately destroy any and all copies of material downloaded."

Musk, the world's richest person, is leading Trump's federal cost-cutting efforts under the so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE).

The case was brought against Trump, the Department of the Treasury and Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent on Friday by attorneys general from 19 states. The attorneys general alleged the administration violated the law by expanding access to sensitive Treasury Department data to staff from Musk's DOGE.

Engelmayer's order said the states that sued would "face irreparable harm in the absence of injunctive relief."

Lebanon's PM names new govt

AFP, Beirut



Lebanon's prime minister named a new government yesterday, the presidency announced, with the weakening of long-dominant Hezbollah bringing to a close a two-year period of rule by caretaker authorities.

Premier Najib Mikati said he hoped to head a "government of reform and salvation", pledging to rebuild trust with the international community after a devastating conflict between Israel and Hezbollah, and years of economic collapse blamed on corruption and mismanagement.

His new government faces the daunting task of implementing reforms needed to unlock funding from international donors after years of economic crisis, overseeing a fragile Israel-Hezbollah ceasefire and rebuilding the country.

President Joseph Aoun signed a decree "to form a government of 24 ministers", the presidency said in a post on X.

It also announced two other decrees, in which the newly appointed president "accepted the resignation of (caretaker) prime minister Najib Mikati's government" and formally appointed "Prime Minister Najib Mikati to form the government".

Lebanon's incoming government includes five women as well as well-known figures like Ghassan Salame, a former United Nations envoy to Libya.

Long the dominant force in Lebanese politics, Hezbollah suffered staggering losses in a war with Israel that saw its leader Hassan Nasrallah killed in a massive air strike in September.

Hezbollah suffered another seismic blow with the ouster on December 8 of Bashar al-Assad in Syria, which it had long used as its weapons lifeline from Iran.

30 missing after landslide hits China's Sichuan

AFP, Beijing

More than 30 people are missing after a landslide in China's southwestern Sichuan province yesterday, state broadcaster CCTV reported.

The landslide hit Jinping village in the city of Yibin at around 11:50am.

"Ten houses had been buried and more than 30 people were missing," CCTV said.

China's president Xi Jinping had ordered authorities to do "everything possible to search and rescue missing people, minimise casualties, and properly handle the aftermath", it added.

China's Ministry of Emergency Management said in an online post that two people had been rescued.

Emergency response teams were on site searching for survivors, it added.

Govt should now focus on reforms

Its first six months were fraught with challenges

The interim government has completed its first six months in office amid numerous challenges. The government, led by Professor Yunus, assumed power during a turbulent time, with unanimous support from students, the public, and major political parties. People had extremely high expectations of the government, which, naturally, was going to be difficult to fulfil. While there have been inefficiencies and weaknesses in governance, the previous regime's rampant corruption, irregularities, and destruction of major public institutions have also hindered the interim government's ability to meet those expectations. On the flipside, the government's own failure to address key concerns and major issues effectively has been disappointing. With recommendations to reform the constitution, electoral system, judiciary, civil service, police, and the Anti-Corruption Commission now in place, the government faces new challenges in implementing these reforms through political consensus.

Unfortunately, Prof Yunus and his advisory team have been unsuccessful in satisfactorily reducing the rising prices of food and essential goods. With Ramadan set to begin in March, a time when food prices typically increase, the government will face significant challenges if it does not implement effective measures to control food prices. The closure of major factories, particularly those associated with Awami League leaders or beneficiaries of the prior administration, has exacerbated the employment crisis due to job losses. Economic predictions for the year are bleak, showing little signs of improvement. Despite some reforms in the financial sector, the overall economy remains largely stagnant.

Additionally, the government's inability to improve the law and order situation in the country has been concerning. The general perception is that the government has taken this issue lightly, as evidenced by their lack of action in curbing petty crimes and rampant muggings in the capital. Even after six months of this government's tenure, the police force's morale remains low. Furthermore, the government has not been able to effectively handle the series of protests and demonstrations that have been taking place on our streets regularly. Whether it's job seekers, students, or deprived madrasa teachers, these ongoing protests and demonstrations continue to cause chaos in Dhaka, resulting in immense suffering for the citizens.

Now, as the six reform commissions have put forward their recommendations, the interim government has reached a crucial stage in fulfilling its mandate. Since it is the political parties that will decide the extent of reforms on each front—along with other stakeholders we hope—expediting consensus-building on the reform proposals is crucial. The interim government is reportedly proceeding according to the timeline set for the reform drive, with talks with political parties scheduled to begin in mid-February. While we hope the chief adviser will play a significant role in facilitating the reform dialogue, it is crucial for political parties as well to reach a consensus for the greater national interest.

CA's response should have come earlier

Everyone must respect the rule of law

We endorse the chief adviser's recent statement urging all citizens to restore complete law and order and to ensure that there are no further attacks on properties associated with Sheikh Hasina, her family, others associated with the Awami League, or any citizen. We support his appeal to the citizens to abide by the law and to show the world that Bangladesh is a nation that respects the rule of law—this is what should differentiate the "new Bangladesh" from the autocratic regime it has now freed itself from. While empathising with people's pent-up anger against Hasina's tyrannical rule, he urged them not to undermine Bangladeshis' sense of security and stability and stated that disregarding the law endangers the lives and property of citizens.

All that he said in this statement can only be considered wise, sensible, and befitting of the head of government. However, it is a statement that has come after the fact, when it should have come long before, accompanied by strong preventive steps. We are baffled that the government did not take adequate measures to stop the attacks when it was quite clear from announcements on social media that they were imminent. What we saw unfold on our screens was a well-orchestrated series of attacks on properties all over Bangladesh, starting, of course, with Dhanmondi 32. Those who took part in this violence were no doubt provoked by Sheikh Hasina's call to her supporters to mobilise and march towards Road 32, as well as by another one of her regular hate speeches from Delhi, where she has taken refuge.

However, that this should result in such violent reactions in the form of vandalism and arson is unacceptable. These acts have only served to increase people's insecurity in an environment where incidents of lawlessness are occurring with a sense of impunity among those who want to indulge in violent acts and crime. They have also provided fodder for Indian media propaganda, portraying the country as one where militancy is being allowed to thrive. Most of all, it serves Sheikh Hasina's agenda to show the world that without her, the country has fallen into lawlessness and mayhem.

This is the last thing we, the people, or the interim government would want. Rights organisations and noted citizens have expressed their concern over the attacks and criticised the government for its failure to take preventive measures. The government has now stated that it will firmly resist attempts by individuals and groups to vandalise and set fire to establishments across the country. We hope these are not empty words and that the government's forces will take the necessary measures to ensure that no one feels emboldened to carry out attacks on any piece of property, regardless of who it is associated with.

EDITORIAL

Impact of USAID programme freeze on Bangladesh



Dr Nawshad Ahmed
is an economist and
urban planner.

NAWSHAD AHMED

The abrupt decision by the Trump administration to freeze almost all USAID operations globally has surprised millions of vulnerable people around the world, including in Bangladesh. In an unprecedented move, the White House issued an executive order on January 20 to temporarily suspend USAID's operations in over 100 countries worldwide to enhance efficiency and align with US foreign policy. The executive order has imposed a 90-day pause on US foreign development assistance, stating: "It is the policy of the United States that no further United States foreign assistance shall be disbursed in a manner that is not fully aligned with the foreign policy of the President of the United States."

USAID has a long history spanning six and a half decades. The organisation was created immediately after the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 was signed into law by President John F Kennedy. The United States has been the world's largest donor, disbursing about \$65 billion in official development assistance in 2023. Yet, US foreign assistance constitutes less than one percent of its budget, which is lower than that of some other countries. US official development assistance accounts for about 0.24 percent of its total gross national income (GNI). Most donor countries provide aid below the United Nations' ODA target of 0.7 percent of GNI.

Donor fund management is a complex task, and USAID executes it through its offices worldwide, managing thousands of contracts and agreements with international and national NGOs, government agencies, and the private sector. In 2023, USAID provided assistance to about 130 countries. The 10 largest recipient countries were Ukraine, Ethiopia, Jordan, Congo, Somalia, Yemen, Afghanistan, Nigeria, South Sudan, and Syria. Most of the nearly 10,000 employees of the agency worldwide have been placed on leave due to the executive order issued on January 20, except for those engaged in critical functions, core leadership responsibilities, and specially designated programmes.

USAID is now dealing with the aftermath of a sudden suspension of operations at the start of Trump's second term in office. President Trump

was already interested in overhauling the organisation during his first term. Between 2017 and 2021, he repeatedly attempted to cut US development assistance and, in fact, reduced funding for programmes related to reproductive health and climate change. This time, the president and his advisers are likely to implement far-

decision to freeze USAID funds. Additionally, beneficiaries of these NGO programmes will also be significantly impacted. I managed USAID programmes for government institutions, which facilitated upstream policy, governance, electoral and legal reforms, and health and family planning initiatives to create capacity and enabling conditions for inclusive development and equal opportunities for disadvantaged people.

The discontinuation of USAID-funded projects will have several consequences, as the future of these programmes and their funding is now uncertain. Those working on these projects will likely face frustration, as many may not be able to wait for

aid support for the Rohingya relief programme, for which USAID pledged \$121 million.

A globally reputed organisation that will be adversely affected by USAID's suspension of operations in Bangladesh is the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (icddr,b). The suspension order has rendered the jobs of over a thousand icddr,b officials and employees uncertain, as they have already received termination letters. As USAID undergoes restructuring over the next three months, organisations like this should be given priority due to their critical role in delivering life-saving health interventions for thousands of children and women every month.



People hold placards as the USAID building sits closed to employees after a memo was issued advising agency personnel to work remotely, in Washington, February 3, 2025.

PHOTO: REUTERS

reaching reforms in the US aid system.

There is growing concern among USAID recipient countries about the fate of ongoing projects and the people employed in them. I have had the privilege of managing USAID funds in Bangladesh for about a decade—funds utilised by the government and two dozen NGOs to support the establishment of human, legal, land, water, employment, and other rights for disadvantaged people. Thus, I can confidently say that there is no doubt that those employed in these programmes will be directly affected by the US government's

a resolution and will struggle to find alternative employment. More than 100 projects were being implemented with USAID funds in Bangladesh, with a total value of \$200 million across various sectors, including health, agriculture, environment, good governance, and social and economic opportunity. According to a news report published in *The Daily Star* on January 26, USAID issued a letter directing all implementing partners in Bangladesh to stop, cease, and/or suspend all USAID-funded project activities immediately. However, the directive thankfully excludes

The US deserves credit for providing 40 percent of the world's humanitarian assistance. At the same time, there is a need to periodically assess the effectiveness of the over \$40 billion the US spends annually on development aid. However, such assessments could have been conducted while the aid agency remained operational. Since the government has already decided to pause USAID's operations, we hope that it has a solid plan to ensure that the many valuable contributions of USAID are not lost in the process of making the organisation more efficient and effective.

Caviar dreams, rice-and-lentil reality



MIND THE GAP

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NOSHIN NAWAL

Dhaka, my beloved city, where even the air charges rent. If breathing deeply doesn't suffocate you, the price of living surely will. Bangladesh's cost of living has soared so high that even Elon Musk might pause before buying groceries here. Meanwhile, our standard of living? Let's just say it's like serving instant noodles on a platinum plate.

Picture this: you're at the local bazaar, trying to buy onions. That quintessential Bangladeshi rite of passage where your bargaining skills are tested alongside your cardiovascular health. You approach the onion vendor, fully prepared for a duel of wit. The vendor quotes a price that could fund a one-way trip to Bangkok. You laugh nervously, hoping it's a joke. It's not. You hand over half of your monthly salary for a kilo, knowing that the next stop is the kidney exchange booth, where desperate buyers and sellers of human organs congregate to fund their grocery bills. And there you are, trading half your paycheck for a vegetable that's as essential as oxygen but priced like a Chanel handbag. By the time you're done collecting your overpriced onions, tomatoes, and

eggs, you've calculated that dinner tonight will cost more than your last vacation.

The tomatoes are staring at you like forbidden fruit, each one priced as if it were signed by Cristiano Ronaldo. Eggs? Oh, darling, eggs are a status symbol now. If you serve a fried egg at brunch, expect your neighbours to whisper about your suspiciously lavish lifestyle.

But what are you returning home to? A Dhaka apartment—a marvel of minimalist living where you pay for the square footage of your dreams but inhabit the reality of a sardine can. Your walls are so thin you can hear your neighbour's life story, unprompted, every night. The bathroom? A multi-purpose space where you can shower, brush your teeth, and scream into the void—all within arm's reach. And yet, the rent is astronomical, as if the cockroaches come with gold-plated shells and the leaky ceiling is some avant-garde water feature.

Transportation is another gem in the crown of our high-cost, low-standard economy. You can pay a hefty toll to cross the Padma Bridge in your beat-up car that will break

down halfway, forcing you to walk the rest of the way like a medieval pilgrim. Meanwhile, public transport is a lottery system where you either make it to your destination or meet your maker, whichever comes first.

Then there's the dining-out experience. A dinner date in Dhaka will cost you a fortune for mediocre food served in dim lighting (because who needs electricity when

Transportation is another gem in the crown of our high-cost, low-standard economy.
You can pay a hefty toll to cross the Padma Bridge in your beat-up car that will break down halfway, forcing you to walk the rest of the way like a medieval pilgrim. Meanwhile, public transport is a lottery system where you either make it to your destination or meet your maker, whichever comes first.

candlelight is "romantic?"). Your significant other might gasp at the price, but don't mistake it for love—they've just realised they won't eat for the rest of the month.

And what of education, the beacon of hope for the next generation? Schools charge fees that could fund a

small country, only to teach children how to spell "orange" as "orange." Tuition costs rise faster than Dhaka's air pollution levels, but the only thing your child learns with absolute certainty is how to pronounce "homework." University fees? Let's not even go there.

But wait—there's hope! Our government's strategic response to inflation is ingenious: import luxury cars for ministers. Because nothing screams "fiscal responsibility" like a line of black SUVs zipping through waterlogged streets while regular citizens are waist-deep in sludge, wondering how to afford next month's rice.

And while we're speaking of potholes, they're the unofficial mascot of Dhaka. No matter how much you pay in taxes, these craters remain untouched, like ancient relics. Tourists might mistake them for archaeological sites, while we locals treat them as impromptu swimming pools during floods.

And yet, we carry on. We joke about smuggling onions, make memes about egg inflation, and laugh so hard at our own misery that we forget we're crying. Dhaka has taught us resilience, and not the glossy, Instagrammable kind. No, this is the gritty, street-smart resilience that makes us experts in survival and sarcasm.

So, here's to us—living champagne-priced lentil lives, dodging manholes, and making humour our unofficial currency. Because if there's one thing Bangladeshis excel at, it's laughing in the face of absurdity. And honestly, with the price of onions, laughter is the only thing left that's still free.

'A truly democratic society must not suppress differing opinions'

Samina Luthfa, a faculty member at the Department of Sociology at Dhaka University, speaks with Monorom Polok of The Daily Star about the performance of the interim government, six months since it took office on August 8, 2024.

Six months after the interim government assumed office, do you think the country has progressed as expected?

The expectation of the July uprising was that Bangladesh would move forward, breaking free from the repression, mismanagement, corruption, and lack of freedom of speech that had persisted until then. People from all walks took to the streets, hoping for change. Students played a key role, but it was a mass movement—workers, professionals, and ordinary citizens all participated. However, despite the sacrifices, the reforms people hoped for have not been fully realised.

How do you assess the government's response in ensuring justice for the victims of violence during the uprising?

The progress of getting justice for the victims of mass killings has been slow. During the uprising, crimes against humanity were committed—people were shot at close range, fired upon from helicopters, and even killed while standing on their balconies. Yet, those primarily responsible for these atrocities have not been identified or arrested. The scores of Awami League (AL) ministers arrested were mostly from the past tenure of the AL regime. Even information on the Aynaghars has not been fully disclosed. The government should have prioritised investigation and justice for the July killings, ensuring that AL leaders and their affiliates—Jubo League, Chhatra League, as well as several paramilitary forces—faced legal action. There were videos and photos of the perpetrators, and a truth commission was initially proposed to address these crimes. However, progress has been alarmingly slow. Even the UN investigators complained about not getting sufficient cooperation from the concerned forces.

The ISPR stated that they gave shelter to over 600 individuals, which most likely included AL activists,



DR SAMINA LUTFA

PHOTO: COURTESY

corrupt government officials and other AL beneficiaries right after the ouster. Where are they now? How did they escape? Expect for one or two, most of the top AL leaders who ordered the mass killings were never caught. Now, they sit abroad, conspiring against the country, making provocative statements and inciting violence. Why were the criminals allowed to leave?

Professor Yunus's government must ensure accountability, and also exercise control over price hikes of essentials, and establish rule of law in the country. While change doesn't happen overnight, certain immediate actions were expected. The government needed to demonstrate a strong commitment to justice, the rule of law, and institutional reform. Instead, we have seen bureaucratic inefficiency and indecisiveness. Even medical treatment for wounded protesters of the uprising and support for the families of the deceased have been mismanaged. Many of those who lost limbs or became permanently disabled were from working class backgrounds. Their families are

struggling, yet bureaucratic obstacles prevent them from receiving adequate compensation or assistance.

Ironically, this cabinet includes many human rights activists and NGO workers, whose expertise lies in providing aid to vulnerable communities. Yet, they have failed to ensure the most basic relief efforts. The families of victims have been left in limbo, with no clear answers and no support system to help them rebuild their lives. The government must investigate and identify the obstacles and expedite fund disbursement to these people.

Do you think the reform commissions, formed by the government, are moving in the right direction?

Some positive steps have been taken, such as the revision of certain laws and the formation of reform commissions. However, these commissions appear to be heavily urban-centric, catering more to elite and middle-class interests rather than addressing the general public's concerns. For instance, can peasants and informal sector workers send reform proposals to the

government? If yes, then how? There is a disconnect from the realities faced by ordinary citizens. Reform should not be limited to paperwork; it must be rooted in ground-level realities.

Another issue is the lack of political consensus. Even if these commissions produce valuable recommendations, there's no guarantee they will be implemented. We've seen this before—after the 1990 mass uprising and even the One-Eleven period (2007-08)—when major reform proposals were abandoned. Without political will, these commissions are just symbolic gestures. Real reform requires collaboration, political will, transparency, and an unwavering commitment to justice.

Since the uprising, do you see any improvement to freedom of speech, which was largely restricted during the previous regime?

People have more freedom to speak, now. However, the way this freedom is being exercised is problematic. Instead of fostering open discussions, and listening to criticism, we're seeing bullying, misinformation, disinformation, and a pattern of labelling and stigmatisation of opinions with minorised voices. Anyone expressing an alternative opinion is quickly branded as an Awami sympathiser. This mirrors the very fascist tactics that we fought against.

Under the previous regime, critics were labelled as "Rajakar" or "Islamic extremists." Now, new labels have emerged, but the objective remains the same—to silence dissent/alternative opinions. This intolerance prevents meaningful political discourse and institutional development. A truly democratic society must encourage differing opinions, not suppress them with a cyber mob or attack. Real progress can only be achieved through open dialogue, mutual respect, and an acceptance of differing viewpoints. Here the interim government can help by meting out exemplary

punishment to people abusing the cyber space to harass women and children.

While law enforcers were used as tools of oppression previously, has the interim government taken effective steps in ensuring law enforcement and security, which today remains a major concern?

Even though the army was given magisterial power, we have not seen effective law enforcement. Crimes such as robberies, looting, and attacks on marginalised communities continue unchecked. One particularly alarming incident was the demolition of a historically significant landmark using bulldozers and then continued violence and vandalism across the country. The political implications of these actions are enormous. Yet, the government measures to prevent it was not timely.

Additionally, women's mobility and participation in the workforce have been severely restricted. Women have been attacked while travelling, working, or simply being in public spaces. Cultural communities have also faced persecution—*baul fakirs* had their hair forcibly cut off, shrines were attacked, art and cultural shows were disrupted, and women's football matches were cancelled due to pressure from conservative groups. If these trends continue, Bangladesh risks regressing socially, undoing decades of progress in gender equality and cultural freedom.

How do you evaluate the government's handling of Bangladesh's economic issues?

The economy is in crisis due to the unchecked and massive plundering by the Awami regime. However, the reserve increased which is good news. But the previous government's loan from the International Monetary Fund which came with several conditionalities, led to the recent imposition of new VAT policies that disproportionately burden the poor.

Inflation is still out of control, the cost of living has skyrocketed, and no meaningful social safety nets have been introduced.

There have been improvements, such as increased remittances and the recovery of a small portion of the looted funds. Structural economic reforms should have been implemented further, instead, we see rising inequality and stagnation. Small businesses are struggling, the agricultural sector is in distress, and unemployment rates remain high. Without targeted policies to support the most vulnerable, the economic crisis will only deepen.

Given all these shortcomings, do you think the government can still turn things around?

There's still a chance, but only if decisive actions are taken. First, justice for the July massacre must be prioritised. Without accountability, lawlessness will continue. Second, institutional reforms must be pursued with sincerity—especially in education, agriculture, and law enforcement. Third, the government must address economic disparities and ensure that policies benefit the working class, not just elites.

Political leaders must also acknowledge the importance of protecting marginalised communities. Any political group that seeks to suppress women, minorities, or cultural communities will lose public support. The new generation of voters is highly aware and demands transparency, justice, and progressive policies.

Finally, institution-building must be the top priority. We need patience and perseverance. If everyone rushes to secure personal gains, no real progress will be made. A structured, collective approach is necessary to build a just and functional democracy. The people of Bangladesh fought too hard for change—we cannot afford to let these efforts go to waste.

Why consolidation is crucial for Bangladesh's banking future



Syed Sadaf Sultan is the founder of Finprojections, a financial consultancy firm, and a former private equity investor based in Singapore.

SYED SADAF SULTAN

By all objective measures, Bangladesh's banking system is overcrowded. There are 62 scheduled banks under the supervision of Bangladesh Bank, a number that far exceeds that of regional peers when considering banks per capita.

To put this in perspective, India, despite having a population nearly eight times that of Bangladesh, has only 137 scheduled banks—just over twice the number in Bangladesh. Moreover, India's banking system has proven significantly more effective in terms of service penetration: approximately 78 percent of Indians own a bank account compared to only 53 percent of Bangladeshis.

In addition to lower reach, Bangladesh's banking sector struggles with performance. The non-performing loan (NPL) ratio in India stands at around 3 percent, while in Bangladesh, it has skyrocketed to a staggering 13 percent of all outstanding loans (a conservative estimate that may increase further), indicating severe governance and risk management issues.

This raises a critical question: If having more banks hasn't translated into better outcomes, should a reduction in the number of banks be considered as part of the broader reform agenda? And, perhaps most importantly, what approaches can be pursued to drive this consolidation process, and what are the trade-offs involved?

Why is banking sector consolidation necessary?

The overbanked yet underperforming

state of Bangladesh's banking sector is no coincidence. Over the past few decades, the proliferation of commercial banks has been fuelled by a political culture that treats banks as tools for patronage and, at times, avenues for looting. This uncheckered expansion, driven more by political interests than economic needs, has created systemic vulnerabilities.

The consequences are stark. NPLs have surged to an alarming \$17 billion, posing a severe systemic risk to the financial sector. The threat of contagion is real: The failure of weak banks with hollowed-out balance sheets could ripple across the system, eroding depositor confidence and destabilising the economy.

To date, Bangladesh Bank has relied on stopgap measures, such as printing money with the intention of mopping it up later, to provide liquidity support to struggling banks. While this offers temporary relief, it does little to address the structural flaws: poor governance, lack of accountability, and unsustainable banking practices.

Experts often point to improving governance across the entire banking system as the solution. However, reforming governance across dozens of weak banks is a monumental challenge. It would require replacing entire boards, overhauling management teams, and retraining operational staff. Even with these measures, weak banks would still

face the uphill battle of growing their balance sheets in a contractionary monetary environment.

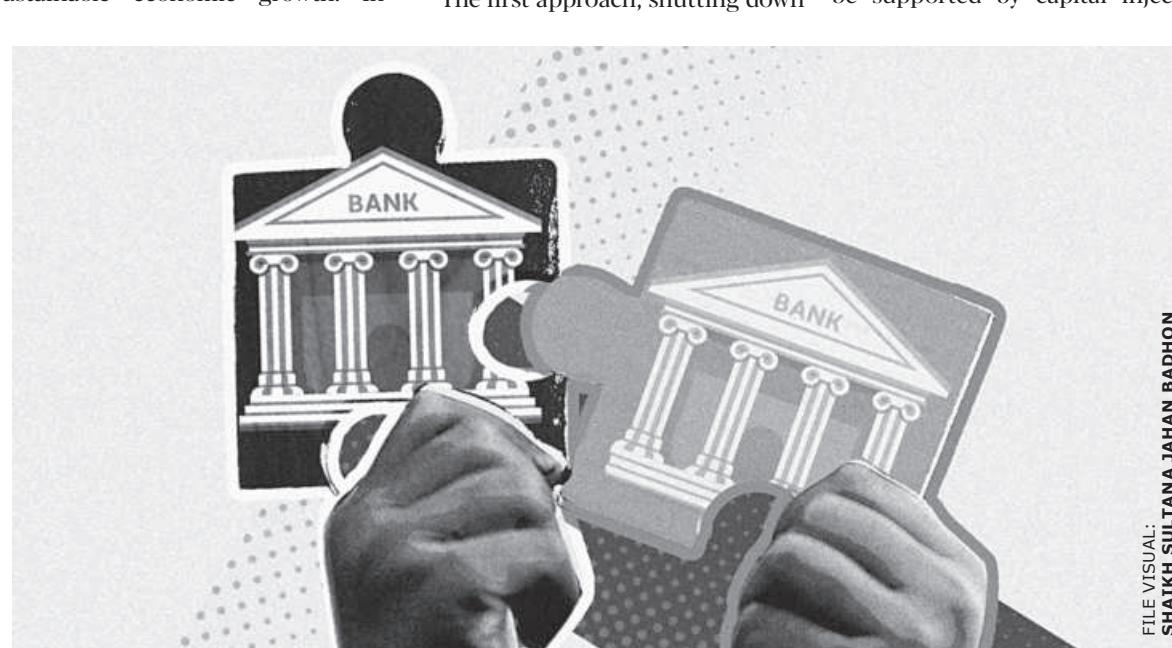
In light of these challenges, consolidation of the banking system emerges as a pragmatic solution. A smaller banking system would be simpler to govern, more resilient, and better equipped to support sustainable economic growth. In

collapse. Potential approaches include shuttering non-viable banks, merging a large number of weak banks together, or integrating weak banks into stronger ones. Each method poses unique challenges and demands careful consideration of the specific circumstances surrounding the banks involved.

The first approach, shutting down

and its inflationary impact.

Another approach is to merge banks with similar client bases and products to create larger, more resilient institutions. Islami Shariah-based banks, many of which have been severely affected by corruption, could be prime candidates for this strategy. Such consolidation could be supported by capital injections



FILE VISUAL: SHAIKH SULTANA JAHAN BADHON

non-viable banks, should focus on institutions with hollowed-out balance sheets due to irrecoverable loans. The assets of these banks can be transferred to a government-backed asset management company (AMC) for a token value, while depositors can be compensated using government funds. While this approach ensures deposit holders are made whole, it carries the significant downside of being inflationary if it relies on money printing to fund the initiative. Therefore, it should be limited to the smallest, weakest banks to minimise money printing

through foreign direct investments (FDI), particularly from Middle Eastern sovereign wealth funds or banking groups capable of providing patient capital and expertise. However, this approach hinges on the ability to attract foreign investments into a distressed and fragmented banking system—a task that will require offering incentives such as tax holidays, exemptions from capital gains tax, and other similar measures.

A final approach, though controversial, is forced consolidation, where weak banks are merged with

stronger ones. Even though forced, such a strategy would require substantial liquidity support and regulatory flexibility to ensure it does not significantly impair the financial health of strong banks. To make these deals more viable, the most toxic loans of the weak banks must first be transferred to a government-backed AMC and excluded from the consolidation process. Strong banks must also be granted the discretion to close overlapping branch networks, cherry pick assets, and selectively retain only essential staff from the weak banks. However, even with such adjustments, strong banks will have little incentive to take on this burden, making forced consolidation a solution that should likely be reserved as a measure of last resort.

Navigating the pain

There is no painless solution for Bangladesh's banking system. Short-term turmoil is inevitable—equity holders of failing banks may be wiped out, and job losses in the sector will be significant. Inflation may spike if significant money printing becomes necessary. Yet, much like treating a sick patient, the medicine must be administered even if distasteful. The focus must remain on managing the immediate side effects while driving the sector towards a full recovery.

The alternative—lapping up failing banks indefinitely with government funds—is unsustainable. It merely postpones the inevitable while compounding the cost of reform. Pursuing consolidation will require more than policy directives—it will demand tailored deal-making and robust post-merger integration support. The interim government and Bangladesh Bank must be prepared to engage deeply, navigating complex negotiations to steer this process towards success.

WORLD LEPROSY DAY 2025

Unite. Act. Eliminate.

World Leprosy Day is observed on the last Sunday of January every year. In 2025, World Leprosy Day was on 26 January. This international day is an opportunity to celebrate people who have experienced leprosy, raise awareness of the disease, and call for an end to leprosy-related stigma and discrimination.

The theme for World Leprosy Day 2025 is "Unite. Act. Eliminate." The theme is a call to action aiming to raise awareness of leprosy, highlight the challenges faced by persons affected by leprosy, and inspire collaborative action to eliminate leprosy.

Global Commitment ("Unite"): Eliminating leprosy requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders, including governments, healthcare providers, NGOs, communities, and individuals.

Immediate Action ("Act"): Proactive measures, including public education, early diagnosis, prevention programs, prompt treatment, and empowering persons affected by leprosy, are essential to interrupt transmission and eliminate the disease.

A Clear Goal ("Eliminate Leprosy"): Eliminating the disease—the World Health Organisation's global goal—is achievable with sustained commitment. Current medical interventions and collaborative efforts have brought us closer, but continued investment in diagnostics, innovative treatments, and outreach is essential.

Source: World Health Organisation



SWEET TRAP

The dangers of SUGAR ADDICTION and how to break free

DR SHAHJADA SELIM

Consuming too much sugar can lead to dependency-like behaviours and serious health issues. Sugar activates the brain's reward system by releasing dopamine, creating a cycle of cravings and overeating similar to addictive substances. Over time, this can cause energy crashes, increased reliance on sugar, and withdrawal symptoms when intake is reduced.

From a health perspective, excessive sugar consumption—especially in processed and refined forms—can contribute to obesity, metabolic disorders, insulin resistance, and fatty liver disease.

It also promotes inflammation, accelerates aging, and increases the risk of chronic conditions like heart disease and diabetes. Cutting back on sugar and focusing on whole, unprocessed foods can help break the cycle of dependency and improve long-term health.

Health risks of excessive sugar consumption

1. Metabolic Disorders: **Insulin resistance and type 2 diabetes:** High sugar intake leads to consistently elevated blood sugar levels, causing insulin resistance, a key factor in type 2 diabetes.

Fatty liver disease: Excess fructose, often found in sugary drinks and

processed foods, is processed in the liver and converted into fat, raising the risk of non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD or MAFLD).

Obesity: Sugary beverages, such as sodas and fruit juices, contribute to weight gain by adding calories without providing satiety.

2. Heart health risks:

High blood pressure: Excessive sugar consumption is linked to elevated blood pressure, a major risk factor for heart disease.

Chronic inflammation and cholesterol imbalance: High sugar intake increases LDL (bad) cholesterol while lowering HDL (good) cholesterol, contributing to cardiovascular problems.

3. Effects on brain and mental health

Addiction-like response: Sugar stimulates dopamine production, reinforcing cravings and encouraging overconsumption.

Cognitive decline: Research suggests that high sugar intake is associated with a higher risk of dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

Mood disorders: Blood sugar fluctuations can lead to anxiety, mood swings, and depressive symptoms.

4. Increased cancer risk

Chronic inflammation: Persistent inflammation caused by high sugar intake may contribute to cancer development.

Accelerated cell growth: Elevated insulin levels from excess sugar can promote the rapid growth of cancer cells.

5. Impact on skin and aging

Premature aging: Excess sugar triggers glycation, a process that damages collagen and elastin, leading to wrinkles and sagging skin.

Acne and skin issues: High sugar levels increase insulin production and inflammation, which can worsen acne and other skin conditions.

How to minimise sugar's harmful effects

Avoid processed and sugary foods – Reduce consumption of sodas, sweets, baked goods, and processed snacks.

Read ingredient labels – Watch for hidden sugars in packaged foods like sauces, yogurts, and cereals.

Use natural sweeteners sparingly – Replace refined sugar with alternatives such as honey, stevia, or monk fruit.

Increase fiber and protein intake – These nutrients help stabilise blood sugar and reduce sugar cravings.

Stay hydrated – Drinking plenty of water helps flush out excess sugar and prevents dehydration-related cravings.

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Thriving under stress

TASHRIF AREFIN

Stress is an inevitable part of modern life. Whether it's the constant stream of notifications, work pressures, or personal challenges, stress finds a way into our daily routines. However, instead of viewing stress as an enemy, we can learn to manage it effectively and even use it to our advantage.

Stress triggers the "fight-or-flight" response, prompting the adrenal glands to release adrenaline, which increases heart rate, sharpens alertness, and redirects blood to muscles. While this reaction is life-saving in emergencies, prolonged exposure to stressors—like traffic, work pressure, or family difficulties—can lead to chronic stress, negatively affecting health.

Stress comes in two main forms: acute and chronic. Acute stress is short-term and linked to immediate challenges, such as meeting a deadline or resolving an argument. It keeps us alert and fades quickly. Chronic stress, however, results from ongoing issues like financial struggles or an unfulfilling job, weakening the immune system and increasing health risks over time.

Not all stress is harmful. Eustress, or "good stress," enhances focus and productivity, such as the motivation felt when preparing for a well-studied exam. In contrast, distress



occurs when one feels overwhelmed and incapable of coping, leading to anxiety and burnout.

Building resilience is key to managing stress. Nassim Nicholas Taleb, in his book *Antifragile: Things That Gain from Disorder*, highlights the concept of antifragility, where stress strengthens rather than weakens us. He advocates for the "barbell strategy," balancing stability with calculated risks.

This involves maintaining steady habits—like regular exercise, mindfulness, and healthy eating—while also embracing challenges that foster growth, such as learning new skills or stepping out of comfort zones.

Elite groups like Navy SEALs thrive under extreme stress through calm, strategic thinking. Similarly, everyday strategies like decluttering, engaging in creative hobbies, and spending time with loved ones can reduce stress and enhance emotional well-being. Techniques like Progressive Muscle Relaxation help train the brain to remain calm and resilient.

Stress is unavoidable, but by shifting our perspective and developing resilience, we can harness it as a catalyst for growth, leading to a healthier, more fulfilling life.

The article is compiled by Tashrif Arefin. E-mail: meghdoot.drmc@gmail.com

FLOSSING

A simple habit for a healthier heart!

Cardiovascular disease (CVD), including stroke, remains the leading cause of death worldwide. While diet and exercise are well-known preventive measures, emerging research suggests that oral health—specifically flossing—may also play a role in reducing cardiovascular risk.

Flossing helps remove plaque and bacteria between the teeth, preventing gum disease and inflammation. Studies now indicate that this simple habit could also lower the risk of atrial fibrillation (AFib) and blood clot-related strokes. Researchers analysing data from thousands of participants found that those who flossed regularly had a significantly lower risk of ischaemic stroke and AFib. This suggests that maintaining good oral hygiene might protect against heart disease in ways previously underestimated.



Inflammation is a key factor in many chronic illnesses, including heart disease. Poor oral hygiene can lead to gum infections, which contribute to systemic inflammation and artery damage. By reducing oral bacteria and inflammation, flossing may help protect the cardiovascular system.

Although flossing alone will not eliminate heart disease risk, it can be an easy addition to a heart-healthy lifestyle. Alongside flossing, key preventive measures include eating a balanced diet, exercising regularly, maintaining a healthy weight, and managing conditions like high blood pressure and diabetes.

Heart health is not just about diet and exercise—oral hygiene plays a role too. A few minutes of flossing each day could be a small but powerful step toward better overall health and a stronger heart.

Eat your way to a healthy heart

A well-balanced diet plays a crucial role in protecting heart health by lowering blood pressure, reducing cholesterol, and preventing inflammation. Here are five diets that have been shown to support cardiovascular well-being:

1. Mediterranean diet: Inspired by the traditional eating habits of people in Greece and Southern Italy, this diet is rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, and olive oil. It includes moderate amounts of fish, poultry, and dairy while limiting processed foods, red meat, and added sugars. The combination of healthy fats and antioxidants helps lower the risk of heart disease.

2. DASH diet: Designed to combat high blood pressure, the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet promotes heart health by emphasizing whole grains, lean proteins, low-fat dairy, and plenty of fruits and vegetables. It also encourages reducing sodium intake, which can help control blood pressure levels.

3. Plant-based diets: Vegan and vegetarian diets focus on plant-based foods, eliminating or minimizing animal products. These diets are naturally high in fiber and antioxidants, which can lower cholesterol and reduce the risk of heart disease when based on whole, unprocessed foods.

4. Flexitarian diet: A more flexible approach to plant-based eating, this diet encourages primarily consuming plant foods while allowing occasional meat and dairy. It offers heart benefits similar to vegetarian diets while being easier to follow long-term.

5. TLC diet: The Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes (TLC) diet, developed by the National Institutes of Health, is designed to lower cholesterol by promoting fiber-rich foods, healthy fats, and regular exercise. It also emphasizes reducing saturated fats and maintaining a healthy weight.

Adopting one of these heart-friendly diets can be a powerful step toward better cardiovascular health.



Things to take control of your own health

DR A M SHAMIM

This reflection highlights the progress of the healthcare sector in Bangladesh, drawing from years of experience as a physician and healthcare entrepreneur. While the focus has been on developing innovative solutions to address gaps in the health system, it also offers valuable insights.

Over the years, the healthcare sector has grown significantly. Private hospitals now have more beds than public ones, and local doctors have gained global recognition for their expertise. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of patients were treated within Bangladesh. In light of concerns over visa restrictions, it's important to note that nearly all medical needs can be effectively met within the country. Bangladesh is well-equipped to handle these challenges.

However, gaps in the system remain. Many healthcare-related dissatisfaction can be avoided by taking the following steps.

Have a doctor or health professional as a confidant:

Think of this as having a "family doctor"—a trusted physician or healthcare professional who is a friend, not a paid service provider. This relationship is invaluable in navigating the healthcare system, providing advice during emergencies, recommending specialists, and helping make informed decisions about cost and quality. In a country where health counselling is not readily available, a trusted medical confidant is crucial.

Set aside 3-5% of your income for healthcare:

Financial security and health are closely linked. Medical emergencies can be financially devastating, especially in Bangladesh, where out-of-pocket expenses are high. A small but consistent health fund can cover hospitalizations, medications, and diagnostic tests,

preventing financial hardship. For example, dengue fever treatment can be costly, but a dedicated health fund can reduce stress and ensure timely care.

Maintain your personal health summary:

Keep a record of past illnesses, surgeries, allergies, medications, vaccinations, and family medical history. In Bangladesh, where medical records are often paper-based and fragmented, this is especially important. A personal health summary is invaluable in emergencies and helps doctors provide better care. Digitizing this record using mobile apps or online platforms can improve accessibility, even during travel.

Get a health check-up at least once a year:

"Prevention is better than cure." Many chronic diseases, such as diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease, develop silently. Annual check-ups help detect these conditions early, allowing for timely intervention and preventing serious complications. Basic tests should include blood pressure measurement, blood sugar testing, cholesterol screening, and urine analysis. Depending on individual risk factors, additional tests may be recommended. Health packages can be chosen based on affordability.

Trust local doctors and hospitals:

Healthcare is not a simple transaction; it requires a trusting relationship between providers and patients. Instead of being overly critical, ask your physician questions when in doubt. Avoid online gimmicks and quick fixes. Continuity of care with a trusted provider ensures better health outcomes, while frequently changing doctors can lead to fragmented care.

The media also play a role in positively communicating local healthcare capabilities. Patients can get the best treatment locally by following these simple steps, ensuring the best value for their money with confidence and peace of mind.

The writer is the Founder and Managing Director of Labaid Group.

Tips for managing underactive Thyroid

Hypothyroidism, or an underactive thyroid, occurs when the thyroid gland does not produce enough hormones to regulate metabolism. While some causes, such as autoimmune disorders and iodine deficiency, may not be entirely preventable, certain lifestyle choices can help maintain thyroid health and manage the condition effectively.

PREVENTION TIPS

Ensure sufficient iodine intake: The thyroid relies on iodine to function properly. Include iodine-rich foods like dairy products, eggs, fish, and iodized salt in your diet.

Maintain a balanced diet: A well-balanced diet with selenium, zinc, and iron can support thyroid function. Brazil nuts, shellfish, and lean meats are excellent sources.

Manage stress: Chronic stress can affect thyroid hormone levels. Engage in stress-reducing activities like yoga, meditation, and regular exercise.

Regular health check-ups: Routine thyroid function tests can help detect early signs of hypothyroidism, especially if you have a family history of thyroid disorders.

TREATMENT AND MANAGEMENT

Medication: The primary treatment for hypothyroidism is levothyroxine, a synthetic thyroid hormone. It must be taken as prescribed to maintain hormone levels.

Dietary adjustments: Avoid excessive consumption of soy products and cruciferous vegetables (like cabbage and broccoli), as they may interfere with thyroid function.

Monitor your symptoms: Fatigue, weight gain, and cold sensitivity can indicate imbalanced thyroid levels. Regular doctor visits ensure proper medication adjustments.

Exercise regularly: Moderate physical activity can help with weight management and improve energy levels.

By following these steps, individuals can support thyroid health and effectively manage hypothyroidism for overall well-being.



CHAMPIONS TROPHY Thin turnout marks Tigers' first training

SPORTS REPORTER

As several national cricketers were engaged in the just-concluded Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) final, the first training session for the upcoming ICC Champions Trophy began with an unusual sight -- more coaches than players -- at the National Cricket Academy in Mirpur yesterday.

Fast bowlers Mustafizur Rahman, Tanzim Hasan Sakib, and batters Jaker Ali Anik, Tanzid Hasan Tamim, and Soumya Sarkar received respective guidance from head coach Phil Simmons, senior assistant coach Mohammad Salahuddin, spin coach Mushtaq Ahmed, and pace bowling coach Andre Adams. Bangladesh Cricket Board's other coaches, Sohel Islam and Talha Jubair, were on hand as well for the two-hour session.

Skipped training for obvious reasons were players like Mushfiqur Rahim, Mahmudullah Riyad, Towhid Hridoy, Rishad Hossain, Najmul Hossain Shanto and Parvez Hossain Emom were part of the BPL final, which ended late Friday night.

However, the likes of Taskin Ahmed, Nasum Ahmed, Mehedi Hasan Miraz and Nahid Rana -- whose BPL teams did not make the BPL final -- were also absent.

The camp will continue until February 12 before they leave for the UAE on February 14 to participate in the marquee event, scheduled to start on February 19.

It was initially thought that the aforementioned absences, whose developmental years were shaped at Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protishthan (BKSP), might go there yesterday to attend a reunion programme. However, it was learnt that none of the national players attended the programme.

Meanwhile, BPL champions Fortune Barishal are set to visit the division with their two BPL trophies won on the trot, meaning those national players who represented the team will be unlikely to show up in today's training as well.

Bangladesh, who are in Group A of the eight-team Champions Trophy, will begin their campaign against India in Dubai on February 20, before facing New Zealand and Pakistan in their remaining matches on February 24 and 27, respectively, in Rawalpindi.

'Always believed I can do well in T20s'

Mahidul Islam Ankon was the surprise package of the just-concluded Bangladesh Premier League (BPL). The wicketkeeper-batter, who is better known for his steadfast run-making, plundered 316 runs in 12 innings for Khulna Tigers as a finisher with an astonishing strike-rate of 174.58 -- the highest among all batters with at least 300 runs in BPL 11. The 25-year-old on Saturday talked to **The Daily Star's Samsul Arefin Khan** regarding his batting transformation, his future plans and many other things. The excerpts are as follows:

DS: A different Ankon emerged in BPL 11. How did this transformation happen?

Mahidul Islam Ankon (MIA): In previous BPLs, I didn't get a lot of matches. But in the back of my mind, I always thought about how I can develop my shots, how I can make an impact batting at number six or seven. Before the season began, when the management told me about my batting position, it made things very easy and clear for me. I tried to execute my plans in the middle and whatever I have done, I'm happy with it.

DS: You were mostly warming the bench for Comilla Victorians in the last few editions. Do you feel unlucky for not getting more chances earlier?

MIA: I always believed that I could do well. I have that confidence. Due to the team combination, you may get fewer matches. At that time, I tried to improve myself day by day and not think too much. I always had the belief that whenever I get the opportunity, I can do really well in T20s.

DS: You made your national team debut against South Africa in last year's Chattogram Test but are yet to play in the white-ball formats. How do you view yourself, a Test specialist or someone who can excel in every format?

MIA: I feel very proud that I debuted for Bangladesh in Test cricket first. White-ball cricket is valued more in our country but in other Test playing nations, Test is considered the pinnacle. I believe I can play in all

three formats. As I have debuted in Tests, I hope to continue playing in this format. And whenever I get the opportunity in white-ball, I hope to deliver good performances there as well.

DS: There are quite a few wicketkeeper-batters in the Bangladesh team at the moment. It must be challenging to stand out, right?

MIA: I personally think this challenge is a good thing for Bangladesh cricket. I feel there is similar competition in other departments as well. I think we need even more competition in the team to do better in international cricket. Because of such competition, I always feel that I have no other option but to perform. If I can perform, the Almighty will take care of the rest.

DS: Do you see yourself as a finisher in white-ball formats or do you want to bat in other positions?

MIA: Personally, batting positions don't matter to me. From my childhood, I'm used to batting in different positions. In the Dhaka Premier League, I bat in the top-order whereas in the BPL, I bat lower down. I have no issues with batting positions.

DS: What are your next goals? **MIA:** I always try to perform well wherever I play. I don't think much about selection. I always try to maintain my process and make myself fitter to perform better. I'm more focused on that and I always believe that one day I can do well in all three formats.



Australia know how to win: Warner

REUTERS

Former Australia opener David Warner has backed the ODI World Cup holders to do well in the Champions Trophy later this month despite losing several key players close to the tournament.

Australia will need to make four changes to their preliminary squad for the eight-team tournament beginning on February 19 in Karachi, Pakistan.

Regular captain Pat Cummins, fellow quick Josh Hazlewood and all-rounder Mitch Marsh have been ruled out with injuries, while Marcus Stoinis withdrew himself after his shock decision to quit ODIs on Thursday.

"Australia are very good in the World Cups and Champions Trophies and in tournament play. So, the Australian team knows how to win. They know how to succeed. It doesn't matter what players they play," Warner told a virtual press conference.

"The guys are all built with playing under pressure. So, I think, whoever replaces those guys would do very well and the team in general would do great as well."

Australia have won the Champions Trophy twice, in 2006 and 2009, making them the most successful team in the tournament alongside India, who won in 2002 and 2013.

Australia are presently engaged in a two-match test series in Sri Lanka, leading 1-0 following a comprehensive innings and 242-run victory in the opening test in Galle.

Asked about Australia's decision to drop Sam Konstas and promote Travis Head as Usman Khawaja's opening partner, Warner deferred the question to the selectors. "I don't know. You'd have to ask them (selectors) why that happened," Warner said.

WOMEN'S FOOTBALL FEUD No 'amicable' solution yet

SPORTS REPORTER

The deadlock in women's football remains unresolved despite efforts from Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president Tabith Awal to mediate between the 18 senior players and head coach Peter Butler.

A reliable source within the federation confirmed that Tabith, who returned from the UK on Wednesday, held separate meetings with each of the boycotting players as well as Englishman Butler, who had recently been granted a two-year contract extension.

These discussions took place late on Thursday night at the BFF House, following the submission of a report by a special seven-member probe committee. The report highlighted disciplinary breaches by the players and violations of the code of conduct by the coach.

Despite this, Tabith has taken a balanced stance, reassuring players that their concerns would be addressed while also advising Butler to adopt a more accommodating approach. However, the players remain firm in their demand for Butler's removal, as evidenced by their continued absence from training on Saturday morning.

Informing **The Daily Star** yesterday, Tabith expressed optimism about resolving the issue. "Where there is will, there is a way. We will most definitely come to an amicable solution soon," he said.

He reiterated his commitment to dialogue, stating, "I have met them personally and individually on Thursday evening. We will continue our engagements with the individuals because, in the football family, we are all responsible for each other and depend on each other."

The BCB boss urged all involved to act with accountability. "We will keep our conversation with all individuals confidential. However, we continue to ask those who ask questions and those who speak out to maintain the highest level of responsibility," he said.

As the dispute drags on, the training camp under Butler continues with 13 players from the original squad and 20 from the under 20 camp. Tabith confirmed that selection for the upcoming friendly matches against the UAE on February 26 and March 2 will remain open.

"There is a deadline for when we have to submit the names of the squad. Anyone who is willing and fit at the time of the deadline will be considered," stated Tabith, who assumed the role at the helm following a landslide victory in the BFF polls in late October.

A member of the probe committee, speaking anonymously, reiterated that the 18 absent players remain welcome to rejoin at any time, adding, "The ball is in their court now."



Sri Lanka opener Dimuth Karunaratne walked off to the pavilion for the last time in national colours after he was dismissed by Australia spinner Matthew Kuhnemann on Day 3 of the second Test between the sides in Galle yesterday. The 36-year-old had announced to retire from all formats after the end of the two-match series against Australia. Sri Lanka managed to slip past a finishing blow on the third day after Angelo Matthews (76) propelled the hosts to 211-8 in response to Australia's 414 but are staring at a likely defeat today. Australia spinners Kuhnemann (4-52) and Lyon (3-80) dominated proceedings, sharing seven wickets between them.

Karunaratne has scored the most runs as an opener for Sri Lanka in Tests. Out of his 7222 runs, 7129 have come as an opener at average of 39.83 in 96 matches. Sanath Jayasuriya comes second with 5,932 runs in 90 matches.

Off-spinner Nathan Lyon, who took his match tally to six wickets after bagging three in the second innings so far, became only the third Australian to claim 550 Test wickets, joining the exalted company of Shane Warne (708) and Glenn McGrath (563).

PHOTO: AFP



With the theme "Run for Unity, Run for Humanity" the highly anticipated Dhaka International Marathon-2025 was held in 300 Feet area of Dhaka under the overall supervision of the Bangladesh Army. Principal staff officer of the Army Lieutenant General SM Kamrul Hasan, inaugurated the event on Saturday morning. It was the largest marathon ever organised in Bangladesh with participation of around 10,000 runners. Several participants from 10 different countries also took part, further adding to the event's international appeal.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

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AMAR EKUSHEY-9

This year marks the 73rd anniversary of the 1952 Language Movement. Drawing on research based on various published books, this 21-part series tells the story of the historic struggle for our mother tongue.

Pak crackdown on Weekly Sangram

AHMAD ISTIAK

The 1948 Language Movement had a more pronounced impact in Feni, then a part of Noakhali, compared to other areas within the district.

According to Ahmed Rafiq's

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300-year-old rare violin sells for \$11.3m

AFP, New York

A rare Stradivarius violin, made over 300 years ago by Antonio Stradivari during his so-called golden period, fetched \$11.3 million at auction in New York on Friday, Sotheby's said.

"This extraordinary violin represents the pinnacle of craftsmanship and classical music history, its unparalleled sound and storied provenance captivating collectors and musicians alike," Sotheby's chair Mari-Claudia Jimenez said in a statement.

It said the buyer chose to remain anonymous.

Known for its extraordinary sound, the "Joachim-MaStradivarius," named after its distinguished former owners, became the third most expensive musical instrument ever sold at auction.

The most expensive record belongs to another Stradivarius, the "Lady Blunt," which sold for \$15.9 million.

"What sets the Joachim-MaStradivarius apart is its exceptional sound -- rich, complex, and full of depth," the auction house said.

The instrument belonged to the celebrated Chinese violinist and pedagogue Si-Hon Ma, who before his death in 2009 donated the violin to his alma mater, the New England Conservatory in Boston, on condition that some day it sell the violin to fund scholarships.

BJP returns to power in Delhi after 27 years

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Riding on the charisma of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the BJP yesterday returned to power in Delhi, marking its first victory in the assembly elections in the Indian capital in nearly 27 years, ending a decade-long rule of Arvind Kejriwal-led Aam Aadmi Party.

With the counting of votes almost over, the final picture is clear -- BJP has bagged 48 seats out of the total seats of 70, much above the majority of 36, while AAP's tally remained at 22. A formal announcement of the results by the Election Commission is expected later in the evening.

In the previous assembly polls in Delhi, AAP won 62 seats and BJP just eight.

Delhi, with 1.55 crore eligible voters, recorded a turnout of 60.54 percent in the February 5, 2025 election.

Compounding the woe of AAP, Kejriwal, former chief minister for a decade, trailed from the upscale New Delhi constituency and his ex-deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia conceded defeat in the Jangpura constituency. Both of them were in jail for several months in connection with multiple scams, including alleged money laundering, that severely dented their as well as AAP's image in the last three years.

While Kejriwal lost to BJP nominee Parvesh Verma by 4,098 votes in New Delhi while Sisodia was defeated by saffron party candidate Tarvinder Singh Marwah by over 649 votes, according to EC data.



People walking on steel girders to cross over an unfinished canal at Bahaddarhat's Baraipara in Chattogram city yesterday. The project to construct this new 2.9km canal, which is supposed to lead to Karnaphuli river, was taken up in 2014 by the Chattogram City Corporation. Eleven years on, only 2km of earth has been excavated.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

DHAKA ELEVATED EXPRESSWAY Tk 2,500 fine for speeding from February 21

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police will begin filing video-based cases against speeding vehicles on the Dhaka Elevated Expressway from February 21 to prevent potential accidents, the expressway authorities said yesterday.

Vehicles exceeding 100 kilometres per hour (km/h) will be fined, said Hasib Hasan Khan, head of the Traffic Safety and Security Department at First Dhaka Elevated Expressway O&M Company, which oversees traffic-related issues on the expressway.

The fine for speeding is Tk 2,500 and will double if the offence is committed again.

If a vehicle is fined three times for exceeding the speed limit, it will be banned from the expressway.

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), however, said a case will be filed against any vehicle that exceeds the speed limit on the expressway. Currently, the speed limit on the Dhaka Elevated Expressway is set at 60 km/h.

However, the authorities have proposed increasing it to 80 km/h and are in discussions with the Bangladesh Bridge Authority regarding the change, Hasib said, adding that the issue will hopefully be settled by February 20.

The move to enforce the speed limit comes as many users are treating the expressway like a runway, with some driving at speeds over 190 km/h and many exceeding 150 km/h.

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Teen with disabilities raped in Patuakhali

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A teenage girl with disabilities was allegedly raped and her mother and an aunt were assaulted in Patuakhali's Baufal upazila on Thursday afternoon.

According to a case filed with Baufal Police Station the next day, Hossain Howlader, aged around 30, took the girl to an abandoned hut in the village, promising her treats, and raped her.

Her mother, who was at a neighbour's house, heard her screams for help and rushed to the hut. Seeing her, Hossain ran away, says the complaint.

The mother and her cousin then went to Hossain's house to tell his parents what happened, but his father Selim Howlader and brother Hasan Howlader physically assaulted the women.

Her mother was seriously injured and had been admitted to a hospital.

After the girl's father, a labourer, filed the case on Friday night, police arrested Selim and Hasan, said Kamal Hossain, officer in charge of Baufal Police Station, adding that police are looking for the main suspect.

Baltic nations decouple from Russia power grid

Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania to be connected with EU grid today

AFP, Vilnius

Three Baltic states yesterday cut ties with Russia's power grid to join the European Union's network, the culmination of a years-long process that gained urgency with Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania -- all former Soviet republics now in the European Union and NATO -- had wanted to block Russia's ability to geopolitically blackmail them via the electricity system.

"We have removed any theoretical possibility of Russia using energy (grid) control as a weapon," Lithuania's Energy Minister Zygimantas Vaiciunas told AFP yesterday.

EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas -- Estonia's former prime minister -- had on Friday hailed the grid switch as "a victory for freedom and European unity".

Vaiciunas said the Baltic states had completed the disconnection process at 9:09 local time (0709 GMT) yesterday.

"We have been waiting for this moment for a long time," he told reporters, after speaking with his Estonian and Latvian counterparts.

"The energy system of the Baltic states is finally in our own hands. We are in control," he added of the "historic" moment.

He said the Baltics were now operating in so-called "isolated mode", before they integrate with the European grid today.

Official celebrations are planned across the Baltics, and authorities were on guard for any potential cyber-attacks linked to the grid switch.

Latvia will physically cut a power line to Russia later Saturday and European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen is to attend

"We have removed any theoretical possibility of Russia using energy (grid) control as a weapon."



ZYGIMANTAS VAICIUNAS Lithuania's Energy Minister

a ceremony with Baltic leaders in Vilnius on Sunday.

The Baltics have long prepared to integrate with the European grid but faced technological and financial issues.

The switch became more urgent after Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, spooking the Baltic states into thinking they could be targeted.

They stopped purchasing Russian gas and electricity after the invasion but their power grids remained connected to Russia and Belarus, controlled from Moscow.

This left them dependent on Moscow for a stable electricity flow, which is crucial for factories and facilities requiring a reliable power supply.

The Baltic states will operate in "isolated

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PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION 25 cadres reject reform body's proposals

Term them 'anti-public'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Officials from 25 cadres of the Bangladesh Civil Service yesterday rejected the recommendations made by the public administration reform commission, terming them "anti-public".

Members of the Inter Cadre Discrimination Elimination Council, comprising 25 cadres except for the BCS Administration cadre, also said no quotas will be accepted for promotion to the position of deputy secretary.

At a press conference in the Dhaka Reporter's Unity, Shawkat Hossain, coordinator of the council, said, "Our fears have come true. We reject the Public Administration Reform Commission's vague report and anti-public proposals."

"Although the commission replaced the word 'Cadre' with 'Service' for all cadres in its report, it retained the term 'Administrative Service' for the administration cadre, thereby attempting to make it more powerful. However, administrative positions exist across all cadres."

About the commission's recommendation regarding promotion to deputy secretary post, he alleged the commission has presented an absurd and illogical proposal for allocating a 50 percent

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Workers sun drying recently harvested Aman paddy on a concrete surface in Khulna city's Gallamari. Sun drying is an eco-friendly and traditional drying method for reducing the moisture content of paddy. After drying, each worker gets Tk 10-12 per maund of paddy dried. They can process around 250-300 maunds at a time. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

'JOE, YOU'RE FIRED' Trump revokes Biden's security clearance

AFP, Washington

President Donald Trump has revoked his predecessor Joe Biden's security clearance in a blizzard of new orders, while escalating his campaign to dismantle the US humanitarian agency charged with helping the world's poorest and extending American influence around the globe.

In a new series of rapid-fire power plays, the 78-year-old billionaire on Friday also froze aid to South Africa, where his top donor Elon Musk was born, and named himself head of one of Washington's premier cultural venues, the Kennedy Center.

"There is no need for Joe Biden to continue receiving access to classified information," Trump said on his Truth Social network, adding that he was "immediately" revoking the Democrat's security clearances

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