



A charter of reforms for next govt

Consensus commission decides at maiden meet

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR and SAJJAD HOSSAIN

The National Consensus Commission will come up with a charter based on its talks with political parties, and the next government will implement the short- and long-term reforms in line with that charter.

At the first meeting of the consensus commission yesterday, Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus said the goal of the reforms should be eliminating the legal and institutional frameworks that allow one to become an autocrat.

"In the past, autocrats took advantage of the loopholes in the legal and institutional frameworks. The reforms will be designed to ensure that all systems and institutions function in an orderly manner," Yunus, also chief of the



Political leaders and others join the National Consensus Commission's inaugural meeting, chaired by Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus, at the Foreign Service Academy yesterday.

PHOTO: CA PRESS WING

- Parties must determine how to fix the society: Yunus
- No local polls before national elections: BNP
- Local elections before national polls: Nagorik Committee
- Canecel registration of Awami League: Hasnat

consensus commission, said at the meeting held at the Foreign Service Academy.

He urged some 100 leaders from 26 political parties to seize this opportunity to build a new Bangladesh so that future generations remember their contributions.

The sacrifices made by the students and masses should not go in vain, he said.

The consensus commission was formed to review and adopt the recommendations made by six key reform commissions.

The beginning of the talks marks the conclusion of the first phase of the interim government, the chief adviser said in his opening remarks.

"Reform commissions have made their suggestions. Now it is our duty to decide how many of these we accept, how quickly we adopt them, and how we proceed."

The discussions on reforms are not academic, he said, addressing the political parties. "It is your responsibility. You represent the people and you must decide how to fix the structure of the society."

Yunus said the interim government took power amid disorder. But support from people and political parties enabled it to face challenges.

"There could be some fresh turmoil. Those who had been rejected and ousted by the people are desperate to return. We need to stay united, strong, and focused."

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AN APOLOGY TO OUR READERS

We deeply regret and most sincerely apologise to our readers, patrons and well-wishers for our report on US President Trump's meeting with Indian Prime Minister Modi in Washington, published online on February 14. We recognise that our coverage of President Trump's reference to Bangladesh was inaccurate and misleading. The moment we found out about the mistake, we corrected it. We have also thoroughly investigated the matter and taken measures in the digital newsroom to prevent such errors in future.

This paper's editorial policy from its very inception has strongly supported all aspects of Bangladesh's

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POLITICAL PARTY BY UPRISING PARTICIPANTS

New student body may also be launched

It will be 'independent, autonomous'

ASHIK ABDULLAH APU

The July uprising participants are set to launch their much-anticipated new political party in the last week of this month, and they may also announce a new student organisation.

Initially, the party and the student organisation are expected to announce their convening committees. Nahid Islam, a key organiser of the anti-discrimination student movement and an adviser to the interim government, will likely take on a significant role in the new party, either as the convener or member secretary.

Besides, Jatiya Nagorik Committee Convener Nasir Uddin Patwary, Member Secretary Akhter Hossen and Chief Organiser Sarjis Alam, and Students

Adviser Nahid may become convener of new party

Hasnat, Hannan, Umama likely to contest polls

Abu Baker, Abdul Kader may lead new student body

Work ongoing to choose name, draft charter

No one from AL will be allowed in

Against Discrimination Convener Hasnat Abdullah may assume other key positions in the party, five leaders of the civic and students' platforms told The Daily Star.

The two platforms held a series of meetings over the last few weeks to discuss the top posts of the new political party.

"The consensus so far is that Nahid Islam will be the convener of the new party. However, it all depends on Nahid's decision," said two key leaders of the Jatiya Nagorik Committee, requesting to be

unnamed.

Two other student representatives in the government – Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuiyan and Mahfuj Alam – may join the party as well.

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Abu Sayed's autopsy report altered 6 times

Doctor alleges coercion

SHARIFUL ISLAM and SIRAJUL ISLAM RUBEL

The world saw how Abu Sayed was shot by policemen from across the street. His outstretched arms brandishing a tree branch in one, his chest pushed out in defiance, the young Rangpur undergrad had dared the police to shoot. And shoot they did.

Soon afterwards, he collapsed on the street and then was carried away by other protesters. For the millions who watched the clip, it was clearly evident how he died on July 16, 2024. Sayed became an icon of resistance in the uprising almost overnight.

An assistant professor of forensic medicine at the Rangpur Medical College, Dr Rajibul Islam, had clearly



stated in his initial report that Sayed had died from shotgun pellet wounds. The doctor was forced to change his findings six times as external forces closed in.

He had to mention external head injuries, other wounds, and blood clots in various parts of Sayed's body. His final "conclusion" for the cause of death was shock and haemorrhage resulting from these injuries.

The case is currently being investigated by the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT). Investigators say the doctor has named four people closely linked with the deposed Awami League regime who forced his hand. They include two former deputy commissioners of Rangpur Metropolitan Police, a senior official of Rangpur Medical College, and a leader of the pro-Awami League doctors' platform Swadhinata Chikitsak Parishad (Swachip). Investigators say that the four people involved in manipulating the post-mortem report

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Pratul Mukhopadhyay (1942-2025)

Legendary voice of 'Ami Banglay Gaan Gai' no more

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The music world mourns the loss of a truly remarkable figure, Pratul Mukhopadhyay, the legendary singer-songwriter who passed away on Saturday at the age of 83 after a prolonged illness. Forever etched in the hearts of Bengalis, he is immortalized by his iconic songs "Ami Banglay Gaan Gai" and "Dinga Bhashao Sagore," which continue to stir deep emotions. His music, intricately connected to

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The Jurain level crossing area has become a major traffic bottleneck, with commuters regularly trapped in gridlock caused by the overwhelming numbers of street vendors and CNG-run autorickshaws.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

DCs may push for greater control over police

BAHARAM KHAN

At least two DCs have sent proposals to the cabinet division ahead of the Deputy Commissioners' Conference today seeking full control over superintendents of police and officers in charge.

Currently, DCs and upazila nirbahi officers (UNO) head the law-and-order committees at the district and upazila levels, but they do not have authority over the annual confidential reports (ACR) of SPs and OCs.

Until 1977, this power was vested in the DCs. Despite multiple attempts to reclaim this authority over the years, no government has reinstated it.

"This is the right time to establish DCs' control over SPs and OCs in field administration," said a top administrative official on the condition of anonymity.

Political governments tend to divide power strategically to keep both DCs and SPs under their influence. However, an interim government can implement such decisions more easily, he said.

While DCs at the district level and UNOs at the upazila level are responsible for law and order, they lack official control over law enforcement agencies, said the Satkhira DC in his proposal. This often makes it difficult to implement decisions effectively.

"To address this issue, the ACRs of law enforcement officials should be placed under the control of the DCs and UNOs," he said.

Similarly, the Gaibandha DC emphasised the need for police performance evaluation by the district magistrate.

"As the district magistrate, the DC is the head of the District Law-and-Order Committee and is accountable for maintaining law and order. Therefore, an assessment of police activities by the district magistrate is necessary."

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BRICS summit planned for July in Rio: Brazil

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

Leaders of the countries known as BRICS will hold a summit in Rio de Janeiro in July, the current chair Brazil announced yesterday.

Other members of the trading bloc include Russia, India, China South Africa and others.

Brazilian Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira said on the social media platform X that the summit will be held July 6-7 and feature leaders of 20 countries with full or associate status in the bloc.

At this meeting "we will make very important decisions for the development of all these countries, for cooperation and for improving the living conditions of all their inhabitants," Vieira said.

US President Donald Trump has threatened to impose 100 percent tariffs on the BRICS countries if they undercut the US dollar.

At a BRICS summit in October in Russia, the member countries discussed boosting non-dollar transactions and strengthening local currencies.

The government of President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has said that under the Brazilian presidency the BRICS bloc will focus on strengthening cooperation with developing nations of the so-called Global South and on reforming multilateral institutions.



Taking advantage of the government holiday, a large number of people, along with their friends and family, throng the Amar Ekushey Boi Mela at the capital's Suhrawardy Udyan yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Lalon Utsab rescheduled to February 23

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

The Lalon Memorial Festival in Tangail's Madhupur has been rescheduled and is now set to take place on February 23.

Earlier, the occasion to observe the 134th death anniversary of Fakir Lalon Shah was scheduled to be held on February 12 but the programme had to be called off in the face of objections by local Hefazat-e-Islam and Qaumi Ulama Parishad.

Sabuj Mia, the convener of the festival organising committee, confirmed the matter to The Daily Star yesterday.

Sabuj said, "The Lalon festival has been rescheduled. The new date has been mutually fixed at a meeting held on Friday night at the office of the Upazila Nirbahi Officer. There, Hefazat has promised that they will not create any obstacles in organising the event. Our organisation has also assured that no controversial speech will be given and controversial music will not be performed.

"It has been decided to hold the event at Madhupur Auditorium instead of Madhupur Bus Stand to avoid public inconvenience."

Contacted, Upazila Nirbahi Officer Zubair Hossain said, "The programme was initially postponed due to some misunderstanding. It will now be held at a changed date and venue."

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As the government has overwhelming international support, "other forces cannot take advantage".

The international community doesn't buy "their narratives".

"They even attempted to sell the story to Donald Trump, but it was futile."

The propaganda about Bangladesh has fallen flat, as the UN report clearly states who did what, he observed.

NATIONAL CHARTER

Prof Ali Riaz, co-chair of the consensus commission, said discussions between political parties and the commission will lead to the creation of a national charter.

The party that gains power will then implement both short-term and long-term reforms based on this charter.

This charter will act as guidelines on how the country will be governed. "It will also contain a roadmap to a new Bangladesh."

The commission will hold dialogues with all political parties individually and in groups, said Riaz, adding that there would be "unofficial discussions with the

parties too".

Talking to reporters, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said, "We hope a minimum consensus on reform will be reached soon. Based on that, the national election will be held without any delay. This is our expectation.

"We made it clear that local government elections must be held after the national election."

Jamaat-e-Islami Naye-b-e-Ameer Abdullah Muhammad Taher said, "It is our position that once the reform commission makes its final decision, the election should be held. The chief adviser said the election will be held in December. We are observing how it goes."

Leaders of several political parties said holding local government polls before the national election would result in bloodshed.

Hasnat Abdullah, convener of Students Against Discrimination, said, "All political parties have reached the consensus that the Awami League will be irrelevant in Bangladesh.

"We have urged the interim government to take legal steps to ban the Awami League... As a first step, we demand the cancellation of their registration."

Several Islamist party leaders said they would reject reform proposals that contradict the Quran and Sunnah. They also criticised the proposal to include pluralism as a fundamental principle of the constitution.

They also demanded a ban on the AL. Nagorik Oikya President Mahmudur Rahman Manna said, "Some participants in the meeting have demanded that Islam remain the state religion. They also insisted that the constitutional provisions related to Islam should not be altered and expressed dissatisfaction with some of the proposals."

However, he said, in a democracy, pluralism means embracing a diversity of opinions.

Jatiya Nagorik Committee Convener Nasir Uddin Patwary said the processes of constituent assembly, national election, and reforms should go on

simultaneously.

"We have begun the struggle for a new constitution and constituent assembly elections to put the last nail in the coffin of fascism. The government has started the struggle for reforms; we have started the struggle for creating a new constitution," he said.

Zonayed Saki, chief coordinator of Gono Samhati Andolon, said the national election should be the priority. "Reforms are necessary for elections, and elections are also necessary to make the reforms complete ... The upcoming election should be considered a crucial chapter in completing the reforms."

Bangladesh Jatiya Party Chairman Andaleev Rahman Partha said his party didn't want local government elections before the national election.

"No reforms should delay the national election," he added.

Mojibur Rahman Monju, member secretary of Amar Bangladesh Party, said if the next national election is held before making the reforms, then the election may end up being called into question

Abu Sayed's autopsy report

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may face arrest and trial.

Sayed's defiance and martyrdom inflamed students across the country and galvanised the protests, as people began to join in ever larger numbers. His sacrifice was one of the turning points in the anti-discrimination student movement that culminated into a people's uprising and went on to topple Sheikh Hasina's autocratic regime on August 5. His supreme sacrifice became a symbol as well as the spirit of the movement that rallied protesters and inspired them to challenge the regime.

The police had tried to manipulate the case even before it reached the pathologist's table at the Rangpur Medical College. According to the first information report (FIR) at the Tajhat Police Station, Sayed was not a victim of police firing. The police report accused 2,000-3,000 unidentified individuals, including BNP and Jamaat-Shibir protesters, of the murder. The police claimed that these protesters had fired weapons and showered brickbats, killing "an individual". The FIR stated that the police only found out later that it was one Abu Sayed, an undergrad at Begum Rokeya University. Sayed's classmates took him to Rangpur Medical College Hospital, where doctors pronounced him dead, the report added. In an attempt to further deflect the investigation, the police even went so far as to accuse a 16-year-old 11th grader in the case, who had himself been injured during the protests.

Abu Maruf Hossain, then a deputy commissioner of Rangpur Metropolitan Police, was the first to request Rajibul to review his autopsy report. The police officer had marked the report with a cross and asked the doctor to burn it and write another one. Rajibul complied. But Maruf was not happy. He crossed it out and asked for another review. This time, he ordered the doctor to tear up the report and write another one, according to the doctor's statement given to the ICT investigators.

Rajibul did not respond to a phone call for comment, but he had earlier told The Daily Star that he was under immense pressure to falsify the

autopsy report. He claimed he was coerced into modifying the report six times.

Maruf did not receive a call either.

"They ordered me to conclude that Sayed died from a head injury," said the doctor. Sayed had sustained the head injury earlier in the day during a clash with Chhatra League men.

This newspaper has obtained two copies of Sayed's autopsy report, both signed by Rajibul. One version explicitly states, "The cause of death was due to shock and haemorrhage as a result of firearm injuries (shotgun), which were antemortem and homicidal in nature."

Another version, which was ultimately submitted on July 30, mentioned external head injuries, marks of wounds, and blood clots in different parts of Sayed's body. "The cause of death was due to shock and haemorrhage as a result of above-mentioned injuries which is antemortem and homicidal in nature."

Investigators found a copy of the original report discarded in an abandoned location, with a cross mark on it.

A 12-member investigation team led by two ICT prosecutors recently interrogated Rajibul, who disclosed the names of those involved in the cover-up attempt. The investigators gathered digital evidence, tracking the movements of those who entered the office where the post-mortem report was tampered with.

On January 13, Sayed's elder brother Ramzan Ali lodged a complaint with the ICT's prosecution wing against Hasina and 23 others, accusing them of orchestrating Sayed's murder.

Ramzan had earlier filed a murder case with Tajhat Police Station in Rangpur on August 18 against 17 named individuals. They included Chowdhury Abdullah Al Mamun, former inspector general of police; Abdul Baten, former deputy inspector general of police at Rangpur Range; and Md Moniruzzaman, former commissioner of Rangpur Metropolitan Police. Some 130-135 unidentified others were also made accused.

DCs may push for greater control over police

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Such an evaluation would enhance the transparency, accountability, and public welfare orientation of the police force, he added.

According to sources from the Cabinet Division, it is not yet confirmed whether these proposals will be raised in the relevant session of the upcoming conference. However, several officials involved in the meeting indicated that even if these proposals are not included in the written agenda, DCs may still raise them verbally during open discussions with the chief adviser.

Among the 1,200-odd proposals submitted by DCs, 354 will be discussed in the three-day conference, which will cost about Tk 1.73 crore. The conference will be inaugurated by Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus at the Shapla Hall of the Chief Adviser's Office and the remaining sessions will take place at the Osmani Memorial Auditorium in the capital.

In the elections held under the Awami League government, the DCs were often blamed for irregularities, a former DC said.

"But in reality, it was the police who stuffed the ballot boxes following instructions from the ruling party – the DCs had little role in that process. If SPs and OCs are placed under the authority of DCs and UNOs, then holding DCs accountable for election-related misconduct would be justified," he added.

The Daily Star also spoke with at least four current and former DCs, all of whom agreed that SPs and OCs should be under the control of DCs and UNOs.

They believe the change would improve law and order at the district and upazila levels while reducing corruption.

Most of the killings during the July uprising occurred in metropolitan areas, said a former DC currently serving as a joint secretary.

"This is because, in these areas, the police do not require a magistrature approval to open fire – the police commissioner can authorise it himself. Since the current government emerged from the July uprising, they may consider this issue with significant attention," he added.

Another official said, as per standard protocol, those who wield

weapons should not be responsible for administrative decisions.

When conducting mobile courts in emergencies, the OCs often fail to provide police forces on time. As a result, the purpose of the mobile court operations is not effectively fulfilled, said another official currently serving as an assistant commissioner (AC) land.

Asked whether DCs should regain this power after more than four decades, AKM Abdul Awal Majumder, a former DC and secretary, said the government can review the overall situation and make a decision on this matter.

Meanwhile, Cabinet Secretary Sheikh Abdur Roshid yesterday held a press conference at the Secretariat providing details about the upcoming conference. This year's conference will include 30 working sessions with various ministries and departments, along with four special sessions.

The special sessions will feature open discussions with Yunus, a meeting with the chief justice and the Election Commission, and a conference of the Bangladesh Administrative Service Association.

New student body may also be launched

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However, to generate momentum and attract more public interest, the two platforms are discussing whether the advisers should join the political party after the announcement of an electoral roadmap.

Several leaders of Students Against Discrimination will join the new political party and its Convener Hasnat may even run in the national elections from his hometown of Cumilla, said the sources.

Its Chief Organiser Abdul Hannan Masud and Coordinator Mahin Sarkar are likely to join the party and Hannan might contest the polls from Hatia. The platform's spokesperson Umama Fatema may also join the party and even vie for a seat in parliament.

Talking to this newspaper, Akhter Hossen said, "We will lead the party with a centrist ideology – neither right-wing nor left-wing. Our ideological framework will be set from a middle ground."

CONVENING COMMITTEE

The initial convening committee of the party will comprise 60 to 72 members, while a fully-fledged leadership structure will be made through a council later. A roadmap outlining the process of forming the party has already been developed, they said.

Injured protesters from the 2024 movement will be included in the party in order to fulfil the aspirations of the families of the

victims of the Awami League's brutal response to the uprising, they added.

A 17-member special committee has already been formed to draft the party's charter by incorporating principles inspired by the movements of 1947, 1971, and 2024.

Constitutional experts, political

analysts, and diplomats also gave their opinions on the charter so that the global democratic norms are aligned.

In the charter, the aspirations of young people will be prioritised, alongside a commitment to economy, healthcare, education, gender equality, and religious tolerance.

Sources in the Jatiya Nagorik Committee said although the party's name has not been finalised yet, an extensive organisational groundwork is being done through the committees of these two platforms.

They are also examining the structure, operation and political practice of some youth-based parties in South Asia, including the Aam Aadmi Party and Lok Janshakti Party of India, Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf and the National People's Power of Sri Lanka.

The Jatiya Nagorik Committee formed committees in over 100 thanas and 235 upazilas, comprising students, young professionals, former bureaucrats, journalists, lawyers, business leaders, political figures, and civil society members.

Students Against Discrimination also established 50 committees at various levels, including districts and upazilas.

The two platforms on February 6 launched a nationwide campaign to know from people what they want from the party.

Under the slogan "Your Vision for a New Bangladesh", five key questions are being posed to the public: "Which three actions do you think would change the country?", "What personal issues do you expect the new party to address?", "What do you expect from the new party?",

"What should the party be named?", and "What should be the party's symbol?"

The platforms have so far collected opinions of two lakh people. They aim to gather opinions from more than half a million people by the end of the campaign.

The names proposed by the respondents of the campaign include the People's Revolution Party, People's Power Party, United Revolution Party, United People's Party, Equality and Development Party, Revolutionary People's Party, Democratic People's Party, July Spirit Party, and Civic Democratic Party.

Clarifying their stance, Akhter Hossen said, "Individuals involved in the Awami League, especially those engaged in murder, extortion, and the July massacre, will not be allowed to join the new party."

He, however, said that people from other political parties, including the BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, and leftist groups, are welcome to join.

NEW STUDENT BODY

The student organisation, which is likely to be announced alongside the party, will start its journey with a central convening committee. Another convening committee for Dhaka University is also expected to be announced.

The central committee is likely to comprise 171 or 201 members, while the Dhaka University unit will be slightly smaller.

Two key coordinators of Students Against Discrimination are likely to assume leadership roles in the student organisation. They are Abu Baker Majumdar, a fourth-year student of Geology Department at

Dhaka University, and Abdul Kader, a postgraduate student at the Institute of Social Welfare and Research at DU.

Other coordinators of the platform, Rashidul Islam Rifat, Hasib Al Islam, and Jahid Ahsan, may also join the new student body.

After the formation of the central and DU panels, committees will be formed in colleges, universities, and districts across the country.

The student leaders said while the new student body will align ideologically with the new political party, it will remain independent and autonomous.

There are plans to set a maximum age limit of 27-28 years for members, along with a rule that they would not be able to be in the student body after seven years since enrolment into undergraduate programmes.

"The new student organisation will uphold the aspirations of the July uprising and work inclusively with students of all backgrounds," Abdul Kader told this newspaper.

AN APOLOGY

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national interest and, on every occasion, stoutly defended our sovereignty, national integrity and just demands in all bilateral, regional and international fora.

Once again, we apologise for our lapse and appreciate and accept the criticism directed at us. We pledge to maintain the highest standards of ethical and objective journalism.

Thank you.

The Daily Star

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BDR massacre 'int'l conspiracy' to keep AL in power: AG

UNB, Dhaka

Attorney General Md Asaduzzaman yesterday said the Pilkhana massacre was part of an "international conspiracy" to keep Awami League in power.

"It wasn't a mutiny; it was rather a planned murder. In the Pilkhana massacre, we lost the nation's brave sons. Their loss was an attack on the sovereignty of Bangladesh," he said while speaking at a shadow parliament organised by Debate for Democracy at the FDC in the capital.

By killing 57 army officers, the then AL government created an atmosphere of anarchy in Bangladesh, he said, adding that many of the masterminds still at large.

Efforts are on to bring them to justice. He said the activists of Chhatra League and Jubo League, dressed in BDR uniforms, were allegedly involved in the massacre.

Hasan Ahmed Chowdhury Kiron, chairman of Debate for Democracy, said just two months after AL returned to power under Sheikh Hasina's leadership for a second term, the Pilkhana massacre occurred.

"It remains a dark chapter in our history. It was carried out to weaken the army and prevent any strong force like the BDR from existing," Kiron said.



Cleaning works going on at Dhaka Central Shaheed Minar, ahead of International Mother Language Day to be observed on February 21. On the day, the nation will pay tribute to the 1952 Language Movement martyrs.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

OPERATION DEVIL HUNT 986 more held in last two days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 986 people were arrested nationwide in the last two days (from Thursday afternoon to yesterday afternoon) as part of the ongoing Operation Devil Hunt.

Of them, joint forces arrested 477 people in the 24 hours from Friday afternoon to yesterday afternoon, according to the Police Headquarters.

Additionally, 870 others, who were either accused or wanted in previous cases, were arrested during the same period.

During the drive, law enforcers recovered a foreign pistol, two magazines, 20 rounds of bullets, three knives, two machetes, and three hammers.

On Friday, the joint forces arrested 509 people as part of the operation, according to the PHQ. A further 948 arrests were made on the day, which fell outside the purview of Operation Devil Hunt.

This brings the total number of arrests under the operation to 4,401 as of yesterday afternoon.

The government launched the operation on February 8 to restore law and order following the attack on "students and people" in Gazipur.

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JULY UPRISING State forces, AL perpetrated gender-based violence

Details UN report, also documents instances of revenge assaults on women post Aug 5



FILE PHOTO

ARAFAT RAHAMAN

The United Nations fact-finding report has exposed disturbing accounts of gender-based violence during the July uprising last year, with women protesters facing physical assaults, rape threats, and arbitrary detention.

Supporters of Awami League, Chhatra League, and state security forces carried out the violence, as per the report released by the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR) in Geneva.

It alleges these actions were aimed at silencing women's activism during the mass protests.

The report details how female protesters were subjected to assaults specifically designed to humiliate them based on gender.

"Assaults on female protesters often targeted specific body parts such as the face, chest, pelvis, and buttocks. The perpetrators sought not only to inflict pain but also to humiliate and degrade women specifically because of their gender," the report said.

These attacks were often accompanied by gender-based insults, with women being labelled as "whores," "sluts," and "prostitutes".

In one particularly shocking incident in early August in Dhaka, a group of men armed with bamboo sticks apprehended a woman, searched her belongings, and assaulted her after finding a Bangladeshi flag in her bag. They tore her hair, ripped her shirt, and groped her while hurling sexualised insults.

In another case in July, two Chhatra League supporters allegedly threatened to rape a female protester, her mother, and all the women in her family before assaulting her and making sexually explicit remarks.

The report documents multiple instances of violence against female protesters in Dhaka and other cities, including Cumilla, Savar, Sylhet, and Rangpur.

Female students at Dhaka University and Eden Mohila College were among the primary targets. On July 14, Chhatra League supporters poured hot water on female students at Eden Mohila College as they attempted to join protests at DU.

The following day, a group of around 50 BCL supporters, both male and female, attacked women from Eden College as they prepared to protest. One victim was severely beaten and later attacked again while receiving treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

On August 4, two female journalists, documenting protests in Shahbagh, were threatened with violence by AL supporters, highlighting the dangers faced by those reporting on the unrest.

The report also details the mistreatment of female detainees, particularly at the Detective Branch headquarters on Minto Road.

Five women arrested for attempting to join a protest were beaten with sticks at a police station in Dhaka, resulting in bleeding and severe bruising. One senior officer reportedly took pleasure in beating

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11 of a family burnt in gas cylinder blast

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 11 family members, including four children, suffered burn injuries in a gas cylinder explosion in Ashulia on Friday night.

The incident occurred around 9:30pm on the second floor of a two-storey building owned by Amjad Bepari in the Gomail area of Ashulia, Savar.

The victims are Zahura Begum, 70, Surjo Banu, 55, Md Monir Hossain, 43, Soheli, 38, Sumon Mia, 30, Shiuli Akhter, 25, Sharmin, 25, Chamin Mahmud, 12, Mahadi, 7, Swad, 4, and Suraya, 3.

Locals and eyewitnesses said garment worker Sumon lives in a rented flat on the second floor with his wife and two children. Relatives had gathered at Sumon's home on the occasion of Shab-e-Barat. While making rice cakes (pitha) on the occasion, a gas cylinder exploded, engulfing the entire flat in flames.

Injured Soheli said, "I went to visit my brother

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

It's time we set a new foreign policy: speakers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh should adopt a new foreign policy that reflects the country's evolving geopolitical realities following the fall of the Sheikh Hasina, said speakers at a seminar yesterday.

The seminar, titled "Geopolitical Challenges and Strategic Imperatives for Post-Hasina Bangladesh", was organised by the Bangladesh Institute of Policy Studies (BIPS) at the Jatiya Press Club in Dhaka.

Presiding over the discussion, BIPS Chairperson CAF Dowlah, a retired professor of economics and law in the US, emphasised the need to reduce Bangladesh's heavy reliance on India.

"Under Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh placed all its eggs in one basket, depending excessively on India for trade, connectivity, and national security. Going forward, the country must diversify its strategic partnerships," he said.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

Under Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh placed all its eggs in one basket, depending excessively on India for trade, connectivity, and national security. Going forward, the country must diversify its strategic partnerships.

CAF Dowlah
BIPS Chairperson

Siblings shot in Pallabi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A businessman and his sister were shot and injured by miscreants in front of the sister's house in Dhaka's Pallabi early yesterday.

The victims are Md Jasim Uddin, 44, and his sister Shahinur Begum, 32, said Assistant Sub-inspector Md Masud Alam of Dhaka Medical College Hospital police outpost.

The incident occurred around 3:30am at section-II of Mirpur, and both were taken to DMCH for treatment.

Jasim, who lives in Kashimpur, Gazipur, with his family and runs a furniture business, had been visiting his sister in Mirpur for the past week.

He claimed that five days ago, he had helped the police apprehend a local mugger named Sohag, and since then, Sohag's associates had been threatening him.

On the night of Shab-e-Barat, after his prayers, Jasim stepped outside his sister's house, where he got into an argument with

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

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It's time we set

FROM PAGE 3
Dowlah also highlighted the diplomatic challenges posed by China.

"If Bangladesh moves closer to India and the West, China may retaliate with economic pressure or reduced investments. Conversely, aligning with Beijing could provoke adverse reactions from India and its Western allies," he explained.

Regarding relations with the United States, Dowlah said Bangladesh must carefully navigate its diplomatic stance.

"The US prioritises human rights, democracy, and free elections. Bangladesh must align with Western interests while ensuring that trade relations, market access, and preferential trade benefits remain intact," he said.

BNP central organising secretary Shama Obaid alleged that Hasina's India-centric policy had harmed Bangladesh's national interests.

Former ambassador Humayun Kabir, in his keynote speech, said Bangladesh's foreign policy in the post-Hasina era should reflect the aspirations of the new generation, particularly those who sacrificed their lives in the July uprising.

He stressed the importance of integrating Bangladesh into Asia's rapidly growing economy, projected to reach \$100 trillion in the near future.

Jahangirnagar University Vice-Chancellor Prof Kamrul Ahsan said, "India has always pursued a foreign policy based on its national interests. Bangladesh must do the same, ensuring its policies prioritise the country's strategic goals."

Academic Aminul Karim called for a well-defined foreign policy approach concerning the Bay of Bengal, the Indo-Pacific region, and the South China Sea to safeguard Bangladesh's strategic interests.

7 hurt as local teens attack shop, temple

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pirojpur

At least seven people were injured, and five idols in a temple were vandalised in an attack by a group of local teens in Nazirpur upazila of Pirojpur on Friday night.

According to the victims, teenagers often gathered near the house and shop of Reboti Gayan in Samantogathi village to use his WiFi connection.

On Thursday night, an argument broke out between two youths at Reboti's shop. One of them was a neighbour of Reboti.

The following evening, around 30 people aged 15 to 20 attacked Reboti's shop, house, and neighbouring homes. A nearby temple was also vandalised, witnesses said.

Reboti filed a case against 14 named and four to five unnamed individuals, said Mahmud Al Farid, officer-in-charge of Nazirpur Police Station.

During a site visit, police found that several idols were damaged inside the temple, said the OC. "We have detained three suspects, and the rest are on the run. Efforts are ongoing to apprehend them," he added.

Meanwhile, locals said repairs to the temple and idols were underway under the supervision of the UP chairman.

Reboti could not be contacted for comments.

SAINT MARTIN'S ISLAND 930kg plastic waste collected in clean-up drive

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

A two-day cleaning drive has been conducted on Saint Martin's Island by the Department of Environment and Bangladesh Sustainable Alliance (BSA), collecting 930kg of plastic waste.

A nine-month ban on tourist movement is currently in effect on the country's only coral island.

During this period, a month-long cleaning programme is underway to improve the island's environment and ecosystem. Led by the environment ministry, the initiative is called the "Clean-Up Program," said Cox's Bazar DoE Deputy Director Zamir Uddin yesterday.

The two-day drive was conducted as part of the first phase of the project.



Pedestrians are forced to walk on the road as vendors have completely occupied the footpath along Clay Road at the Dakbanga intersection in Khulna. In many parts of the city, footpaths are being used for fruit stalls and grocery shops, creating constant inconvenience for people. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

JAMAL KHAN CANAL IN CTG

Dredging work adds to waterlogging woes

ARUN BIKASH DEY, CTG

After a nine-month hiatus, the dredging work of Jamal Khan Canal in Chattogram city resumed in the end of January.

The canal's excavation is crucial part of a mega project being implemented by the Chattogram Development Authority to mitigate the city's waterlogging woes.

However, resumption of the excavation work has brought immense sufferings to over a hundred families residing on Hem Sen Lane in the Jamal Khan area.

The locality has become waterlogged after an earthen dam was built within the canal, restricting its water flow, and thereby causing inundation in the adjacent areas.

The water could be drained out through large pipes under the dam

so that it does not accumulate and inundate adjacent areas, said Delwar Majumder, former president of Institute of Engineers, Bangladesh, Chattogram.

Farhana Akter, a resident, said, "Since February 5, we are being compelled to go through the filthy water every day."



Ali Akbar, another resident, said, "After the earth was piled up within the canal adjacent to our residences, water started accumulating and soon

overflowed the canal to submerge the adjacent areas."

A similar situation prevailed in some other areas, including Sholoshahar, Bakalia and Bahaddarhat.

The CDA launched the Tk 5,617 crore project in July 2017 to tackle the persistent waterlogging. Initially slated for completion by June 2020, the project faced significant delays.

The project is now expected to be completed by June 2026, while the revised budget ballooned to Tk 8,626.62 crore.

Contacted, Lt Col Ferdous Ahmed, the project director, said, "The work procedure involved water diversion to be carried out by the local contractors. However, something has gone wrong. The contractors have yet to identify the shortfall. We are investigating the matter."

986 more held in last State forces, AL perpetrated

FROM PAGE 3
Analysing reports from some districts, this newspaper found that the arrestees are mostly members of the Awami League and its associate bodies. Many are accused in cases filed after the fall of the Hasina-led government on August 5.

Law enforcement agencies yesterday detained 10 people from various upazilas in Rajshahi district

as part of the ongoing drive, said Rajshahi's Additional Superintendent of Police Rafiqul Alam. Most of the arrestees are leaders of the local Awami League, Jubo League and Krishak League.

In Sylhet, 13 people including leaders and activists of the AL and its affiliated organisations, were detained in the city as part of the special operation, reports UNB.

11 of a family burnt

FROM PAGE 3
Sumon's house with my family. While making pitha, the cylinder suddenly exploded, setting the house on fire. Our entire family suffered burns."

Harun Ur Rashid, manager of Women and Children's Hospital in

Ashulia, told The Daily Star, "Eleven burn patients arrived at our hospital around 10:30pm. Four of them are children. After receiving primary treatment, they were transferred to the burn unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital."

FROM PAGE 3
a woman and instructed others to do the same.

When another woman begged for mercy, a police officer allegedly threatened to kill her by putting a gun in her mouth before beating her.

During block raids, while the majority of those arrested were men, law enforcement began detaining women from July 23 onwards after many men had fled their areas fearing arrest.

AFTERMATH OF THE PROTESTS
After AL fell, the report highlights cases of revenge violence, including sexual assaults, against women from minority religious and indigenous communities.

In one documented case, a woman who supported the previous government was intercepted by two men who insulted her with sexual remarks, grabbed her dress, slapped her, and punched her chest.

A few days later, the same woman was encircled by attackers, who ripped her clothes, groped, and ultimately raped her.

She was later denied healthcare at a hospital due to her political affiliation.

The OHCHR states that the true scale of sexual and gender-based violence during the uprising is likely far greater than what could be documented.

It further notes that while women's formal participation in political decision-making has improved, they continue to face significant gender stereotyping and discrimination in public life.

The report calls for in-depth, gender-sensitive investigations to uncover the full scope of these violations and to provide victims with necessary support.

It also recommends that sexual and gender-

based violence be a particular focus of further inquiries.

Contacted, Fauzia Moslem, president of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, said, "The politics that prevails in our country are centred around strengthening political parties by any means. Whenever a party is in power, they engage in a cycle of revenge to consolidate their strength. This has perpetuated a culture of retaliatory politics."

"It [violence against women protesters] has been happening over the past 50 years because we have failed to break free from this culture. This is why we witnessed the same pattern of violence against women during the protests before August 5, and it continues even after August 5."

"To end this cycle, we must move away from this revenge-driven political culture," she added.

Siblings shot

FROM PAGE 3
several local men over the issue involving Sohag.

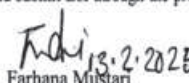
During the argument, Shahidul allegedly opened fire, injuring Jasim. When Shahinur rushed out to intervene, the attackers shot her too before fleeing.

Jasim suffered gunshot wounds below both knees, while Shahinur was shot in her right leg below the knee, said doctors.

Nazrul Islam, officer-in-charge of Pallabi Police Station, said they are looking into the incident.

Sohag could not be contacted for comments.

PRAYER TIMING					
FEBRUARY 16					
Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha	
AZAN 5:25	12:45	4:30	5:57	7:15	
JAMAAT 6:00	1:15	4:45	6:01	7:45	
SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION					

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh Department of Environment Implementing Ecosystem-based Management in Ecologically Critical Areas in Bangladesh 8 th Floor, Room: 903, Poribesh Bhaban E/16 Agargaon Administrative Area, Sher-E-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207 www.doc.gov.bd				
Request for Expression of Interest (EoI) for Selection of Individual Consultants (National)				
1.	Ministry/Division	:	Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change	
2.	Agency	:	Department of Environment (DoE)	
3.	Procuring Entity Name	:	Project Director	
4.	Procuring Entity District	:	Dhaka	
5.	Expression of Interest for selection of	:	Individual Consultant (National)	
6.	EoI Ref No.	:	22.02.0000.045.14.001.25.20	
7.	Date	:	16 February 2025	
Key Information				
8.	Procuring Method	:	Selection of Individual Consultant (SIC)	
Funding Information				
9.	Budget and Source of Funds	:	GEF through UNDP	
10.	Development Partners	:	UNDP	
Particular Information				
11.	Project Code	:	223053500	
12.	Project Name	:	Implementing Ecosystem-based Management in Ecologically Critical Areas in Bangladesh	
13.	EoI Closing Date and Time	:	05 March 2025, 02:00 pm	
Information for Applicants:				
Package No.	Name of Positions	Number of Positions	Duration	Terms of References (ToR)* including Educational Qualification*
SD-1	Project Manager	1 (One)	60 months	Minimum Masters in the disciplines of Environmental Science, Natural Resources Management or related subjects.
SD-2	Project Admin and Finance Consultant	1 (One)	60 months	MBA/Master's degree in accounting/finance and technical expertise in financial management/accounting.
Procuring Entity Details				
14.	Name of Official Inviting EoI	:	Farhana Mustari	
15.	Designation of Official Inviting EoI	:	Project Director, Implementing Ecosystem-based Management in Ecologically Critical Areas in Bangladesh	
16.	Address of Official Inviting EoI	:	Department of Environment 8 th Floor, Room: 903, Poribesh Bhaba E/16 Agargaon Administrative Area Sher-E-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207	
17.	Contact details of Official Inviting EoI	:	Phone: +880-2222218305, Email: fmmunni@yahoo.com	
18.	Place of submission of EoI	:	Project Director, Implementing Ecosystem-based Management in Ecologically Critical Areas in Bangladesh 8 th Floor, Room: 903, Poribesh Bhaba E/16 Agargaon Administrative Area Sher-E-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207	
19.	The Procuring Entity reserves the right to accept or reject all EoIs.			
The Department of Environment (DoE) is implementing a project titled "Implementing Ecosystem-based Management in Ecologically Critical Areas in Bangladesh". The project objective is to apply an ecosystem-based framework for managing Morjat Baor Ecologically Critical Areas (ECAs) in Jhenaidah and proposed Biodiversity Heritage Haiba river in Chittagong in Bangladesh to enhance the conservation of globally significant biodiversity and support local livelihoods.				
The Project period is July 2024 to June 2029. Project Director of the Implementing Ecosystem-based Management in Ecologically Critical Areas in Bangladesh invites eligible applicants to express their interest in providing the services. Applicants are advised to provide information indicating that they are qualified to perform the services in completed Curriculum Vitae (CV) and proven documents with a cover letter. Request for Application Form with detailed Terms of References (ToR) are available in the website of the Department of Environment (www.doc.gov.bd).				
One original and two copies of EoI must be submitted in the Project office on or before 05 March 2025, 02:00 pm in sealed envelope and be clearly marked the position for Expression of Interest.				
The Procuring Entity reserves the right to accept or reject any/all EoI. Persons who are in service should submit EoI through the proper channel, otherwise EoI will be rejected.				
<div style="text-align: right;">  Farhana Mustari Project Director Email: fmmunni@yahoo.com </div>				

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e-GP Tender Notice (Goods)

PKSF invites e-Tender in the National e-GP System Portal ([http:// www.eprocure.gov.bd](http://www.eprocure.gov.bd)) for the procurement of following goods:

Tender ID No	Description	Tender Publication Date & Time	Tender Closing/ Opening Date & Time
1074690	Procurement of Server (2 Nos.) for Accounting Software & Crowdfunding Platform under RMTP of PKSF. (Package no: PKSF/RMTP/2024-2025/GD-10)	13-02-2025 & 17:00 PM	04-03-2025 & 14:00 PM

This is an online Tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP System Portal and no offline/hard copy will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the national e-GP portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP helpdesk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

A. T. M. Hemayet-Ur-Rahman
Deputy General Manager (G.S)

BSF regrets assault on five farmers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Five Bangladeshi farmers were beaten by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) at the Phulbari border in Kurigram on Friday noon.

Five BSF members entered Bangladeshi territory in Naodanga union, Phulbari, and assaulted the farmers. In response, locals protested, prompting the BSF members to retreat. Later, Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) personnel arrived at the scene and pacified the locals.

Lalmonirhat 15 BGB Battalion's Commanding Officer, Lt Col Shakil Alam, told journalists that a flag meeting was held near sub-pillar 4 at Naodanga from 1:40pm to 2:35pm on Friday.

During the meeting, BGB strongly protested the attack. In response, BSF expressed regret for the incident and assured that action would be taken against the BSF personnel.

Man, wife die from electrocution

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

A school headteacher and his wife died from electrocution in Gazipur on Friday.

The deceased are Mohammad Shahidullah Bhuiyan, 55, and his wife Ferdousi Akhter, 40, of Barishab union in Kapasia.

Shahidullah was the headteacher of Kapasia Kirtania High School. He got electrocuted when he tried to turn on an electric motor, said Sub-inspector Abdul Halim of Kapasia Police Station yesterday.

As Ferdousi tried to save him, she too got electrocuted. Both of them died on the way to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. As per the request from the family members, the bodies were handed over to them without autopsy, he said.



Narendranath Roy, 50, and his wife Dipti Roy, 35, from Dakkhin Bathina village in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila, planting kachu (a variety of arum) beside their potato field. The couple relies on their 5.30-bigha farmland to support their five-member family.

PHOTO: MD QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT

NARSINGDI PRISON BREAK

Six months on, 184 fugitives still at large

JAHIDUL ISLAM, Narsingdi

The escape of 184 prisoners from Narsingdi District Jail has left the public in a state of fear and insecurity. Despite continuous operations by law enforcement agencies, neither the fugitives nor the looted weapons and ammunition have been fully recovered.

On July 19, during an ongoing movement against the quota in government jobs, a group of attackers stormed the jail, breaking security

barriers and igniting a massive fire. In the chaos, 826 prisoners escaped, while the assailants looted 85 firearms and over 7,000 rounds of ammunition from the facility.

In the following days, security forces launched extensive operations, capturing a significant number of escapees and compelling some to surrender. However, 184 fugitives remain at large.

While 56 of the looted weapons have been recovered, 29 firearms and more

SEE PAGE 4 COL 8

In the chaos, 826 prisoners escaped, while the assailants looted 85 firearms and over 7,000 rounds of ammunition from the facility.

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তারিখ: ০৩ ফাল্গুন ১৪৩১

১৬ ফেব্রুয়ারি ২০২৫

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১	২	৩	৪	৫
১।	অফিস সুপারিনটেনডেন্ট (Office Superintendent) ১২৫০০-৩০২৩০ (১১তম গ্রেড)	৩টি	১৮ হতে ৩২ বৎসর।	কোন স্বীকৃত বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় বা বোর্ড হতে ২য় বিভাগে স্নাতক বা সমমানের ডিগ্রী; এবং কম্পিউটার পরিচালনায় বাস্তব অভিজ্ঞতাসহ ৩ (তিন) বৎসরের চাকুরী।
২।	উপ সহকারী কেমিস্ট (Sub Assistant Chemist) ১২৫০০-৩০২৩০ (১১তম গ্রেড)	১টি	ঐ	কোন স্বীকৃত বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় হতে রসায়নসহ ২য় বিভাগ বা সমমানের ডিগ্রী।
৩।	সিনিয়র সহকারী (Senior Assistant) ১০২০০-২৪৬৮০ (১৪তম গ্রেড)	২টি	ঐ	ক। কোন স্বীকৃত বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় বা বোর্ড হতে ২য় বিভাগে স্নাতক। খ। বিধি অনুসারে কম্পিউটার ব্যবহারে দক্ষতাসহ প্রতি মিনিটে কম্পিউটারে টাইপিং-এ সর্বনিম্ন গতি বাংলায় ২৫ শব্দ এবং ইংরেজীতে ৩০ শব্দ। গ। কম্পিউটারে ব্যবহারিক জ্ঞান সম্পন্ন প্রার্থীকে অগ্রাধিকার প্রদান করা হবে।
৪।	সুপারভাইজার (Supervisor) ১০২০০-২৪৬৮০ (১৪তম গ্রেড)	২টি	ঐ	কোন স্বীকৃত বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় বা স্বীকৃত বোর্ড হতে ২য় বিভাগে স্নাতক বা সমমানের পরীক্ষায় উত্তীর্ণ।
৫।	সিনিয়র টেকনিশিয়ান (Senior Technician) ১০২০০-২৪৬৮০ (১৪তম গ্রেড)	৬টি	ঐ	কোন স্বীকৃত বোর্ড বা ইনস্টিটিউট হতে উচ্চ মাধ্যমিক সার্টিফিকেট বা সমমানের পরীক্ষায় উত্তীর্ণসহ স্বীকৃত কোন কারিগরি প্রতিষ্ঠানে সংশ্লিষ্ট ট্রেডে ১০ (দশ) বৎসরের চাকুরীর অভিজ্ঞতা থাকতে হবে।
৬।	গেট ইন্সপেক্টর (Gate Inspector) ১০২০০-২৪৬৮০ (১৪তম গ্রেড)	৩টি	১৮ হতে ৩২ বৎসর।	ক। কোন স্বীকৃত বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় বা বোর্ড হতে স্নাতক বা সমমানের পরীক্ষায় উত্তীর্ণ; অথবা খ। অবসরপ্রাপ্ত জেসিওদের ক্ষেত্রে কোন স্বীকৃত বোর্ড বা ইন্সটিটিউট হতে মাধ্যমিক স্কুল সার্টিফিকেট পরীক্ষায় উত্তীর্ণ।
৭।	অফিস সহকারী কাম কম্পিউটার মুদ্রাক্ষরিক (Office Assistant Cum Computer Typist) ৯৩০০-২২৪৯০ (১৬তম গ্রেড)	২৩টি	১৮ হতে ৩২ বৎসর।	ক। কোন স্বীকৃত বোর্ড হতে অনূন্য দ্বিতীয় বিভাগ বা সমমানের জিপিএতে উচ্চ মাধ্যমিক সার্টিফিকেট বা সমমানের পরীক্ষায় উত্তীর্ণ। খ। বিধি অনুসারে কম্পিউটার ব্যবহারে দক্ষতাসহ প্রতি মিনিটে কম্পিউটারে টাইপিং-এ সর্বনিম্ন গতি বাংলায় ২০ শব্দ এবং ইংরেজীতে ২০ শব্দ।
৮।	ম্যাটল্যাব এ্যাসিস্ট্যান্ট (Mat lab Assistant) ৯৩০০-২২৪৯০ (১৬তম গ্রেড)	৪টি	ঐ	কোন স্বীকৃত বোর্ড বা ইনস্টিটিউট হতে রসায়ন ও পদার্থবিদ্যাসহ দ্বিতীয় বিভাগে উচ্চ মাধ্যমিক সার্টিফিকেট বা সমমানের পরীক্ষায় উত্তীর্ণ।
৯।	গোডাউন কিপার (Godown Keeper) ৯৩০০-২২৪৯০ (১৬তম গ্রেড)	৬টি	ঐ	কোন স্বীকৃত বোর্ড বা ইনস্টিটিউট হতে উচ্চ মাধ্যমিক স্কুল সার্টিফিকেট বা সমমানের পরীক্ষায় দ্বিতীয় বিভাগে উত্তীর্ণ।
১০।	ড্রাইভার (Driver) ৯৩০০-২২৪৯০ (১৬তম গ্রেড)	৩টি	১৮ হতে ৩২ বৎসর।	ক। কোন স্বীকৃত বোর্ড বা ইনস্টিটিউট হতে মাধ্যমিক স্কুল সার্টিফিকেট বা সমমানের পরীক্ষায় উত্তীর্ণ। খ। ভারী যানবাহন চালানার লাইসেন্সপ্রাপ্ত হতে হবে। গ। সামরিক বাহিনীর অবসরপ্রাপ্ত প্রার্থীকে অগ্রাধিকার দেয়া হবে।
১১।	স্কিল্ড টেকনিশিয়ান (Skilled Technician) ৯০০০-২১৮০০ (১৭তম গ্রেড)	৭টি	১৮ হতে ৩২ বৎসর।	কোন স্বীকৃত বোর্ড বা ইনস্টিটিউট হতে মাধ্যমিক স্কুল সার্টিফিকেট বা সমমানের পরীক্ষায় উত্তীর্ণসহ কোন স্বীকৃত কোন কারিগরি প্রতিষ্ঠানে সংশ্লিষ্ট ট্রেডে ০৮ (আট) বৎসরের চাকুরীর অভিজ্ঞতা থাকতে হবে।
১২।	টেকনিশিয়ান (Technician) ৮৮০০-২১৩১০ (১৮তম গ্রেড)	৪টি	ঐ	কোন স্বীকৃত বোর্ড বা ইনস্টিটিউট হতে মাধ্যমিক স্কুল সার্টিফিকেট বা সমমানের পরীক্ষায় উত্তীর্ণসহ স্বীকৃত কোন কারিগরি প্রতিষ্ঠানে সংশ্লিষ্ট ট্রেডে কমপক্ষে ০৬ (ছয়) বৎসরের চাকুরীর অভিজ্ঞতা থাকতে হবে।
১৩।	মেডিক্যাল এ্যাসিস্টেন্ট (Medical Assistant) ৮৫০০-২০৫৭০ (১৯তম গ্রেড)	৩টি	ঐ	ক। কোন স্বীকৃত বোর্ড বা ইনস্টিটিউট হতে মাধ্যমিক স্কুল সার্টিফিকেট বা সমমানের পরীক্ষায় উত্তীর্ণ। খ। পেশাগত (ফার্স্ট এইড) জ্ঞান সম্পন্ন প্রার্থীকে অগ্রাধিকার প্রদান করা হবে।
১৪।	জুনিয়র টেকনিশিয়ান (Junior Technician) ৮৫০০-২০৫৭০ (১৯তম গ্রেড)	৬৪টি	ঐ	কোন স্বীকৃত বোর্ড বা ইনস্টিটিউট হতে মাধ্যমিক স্কুল সার্টিফিকেট বা সমমানের পরীক্ষায় উত্তীর্ণসহ স্বীকৃত কোন ইনস্টিটিউট হতে কোন কারিগরি বিষয়ে সার্টিফিকেট প্রাপ্ত।
১৫।	ফায়ারম্যান (Fireman) ৮৫০০-২০৫৭০ (১৯তম গ্রেড)	৪টি	ঐ	ক। কোন স্বীকৃত বোর্ড বা ইনস্টিটিউট হতে মাধ্যমিক স্কুল সার্টিফিকেট বা সমমানের পরীক্ষায় উত্তীর্ণ। খ। উচ্চতা ১.৬৭৬ মিটার (৫'-৬")। গ। অগ্নি নির্বাপন অথবা বেসামরিক প্রতিরক্ষা কাজে অভিজ্ঞতা সম্পন্ন প্রার্থীকে অগ্রাধিকার প্রদান করা হবে।
১৬।	টেকনিক্যাল হেল্পার (Technical Helper) ৮২৫০-২০০১০ (২০তম গ্রেড)	৬৬টি	ঐ	ক। কোন স্বীকৃত বোর্ড বা ইনস্টিটিউট হতে মাধ্যমিক স্কুল সার্টিফিকেট বা সমমানের পরীক্ষায় উত্তীর্ণ। খ। কোন স্বীকৃত ইনস্টিটিউট হতে কারিগরি বিষয়ক সার্টিফিকেটপ্রাপ্ত প্রার্থীকে অগ্রাধিকার প্রদান করা হবে।
১৭।	অর্ডারলী (Orderly) ৮২৫০-২০০১০ (২০তম গ্রেড)	১টি	১৮ হতে ৩২ বৎসর।	কোন স্বীকৃত বোর্ড বা ইনস্টিটিউট হতে মাধ্যমিক স্কুল সার্টিফিকেট বা সমমানের পরীক্ষায় উত্তীর্ণ।
১৮।	নিরাপত্তা প্রহরী (Security Guard) ৮২৫০-২০০১০ (২০তম গ্রেড)	৪টি	১৮ হতে ৩২ বৎসর।	ক। কোন স্বীকৃত বোর্ড বা ইনস্টিটিউট হতে মাধ্যমিক স্কুল সার্টিফিকেট বা সমমানের পরীক্ষায় উত্তীর্ণ। খ। উচ্চতা ১.৬৭৬ মিটার (৫'-৬")। গ। অবসরপ্রাপ্ত সামরিক/আধাসামরিক বাহিনীর প্রার্থীকে অগ্রাধিকার প্রদান করা হবে।
১৯।	লেবোর (Labour) ৮২৫০-২০০১০ (২০তম গ্রেড)	১০টি	১৮ হতে ৩২ বৎসর।	অষ্টম শ্রেণী উত্তীর্ণ।

ক্রমিক	পদের নাম, বেতন স্কেল (২০১৫) ও ট্রাড	শূন্য পদের সংখ্যা	বয়সসীমা (১৭ মার্চ ২০২৫ তারিখ অনুযায়ী)	শিক্ষাগত যোগ্যতা, অভিজ্ঞতা ও অন্যান্য শর্তাবলী (মূলতম)
১	২	৩	৪	৫
২০।	পরিচ্ছন্নতা কর্মী (Cleaner) ৮২৫০-২০০১০ (২০তম গ্রেড)	৪টি	ঐ	অষ্টম শ্রেণী উত্তীর্ণ

শর্তাবলী :

- ১। ১৭ মার্চ ২০২৫ তারিখে প্রার্থীর বয়সসীমা ৪নং কলামের বর্ণনা অনুযায়ী হতে হবে।
- ২। 'বিভাগীয় প্রার্থী' অর্থ ঐ সকল কর্মচারী যারা একই প্রতিষ্ঠানের চাকরিতে অনূন্য ২ (দুই) বৎসর স্থায়ীভাবে নিয়োজিত রয়েছেন এবং বিজ্ঞাপিত পদে সরাসরি নিয়োগের জন্য যোগ্য।
- ৩। চাকরিতে প্রার্থীগণকে অবশ্যই যথাযথ কর্তৃপক্ষের অনুমতিক্রমে আবেদন করতে হবে এবং মৌখিক পরীক্ষার সময় অনুমতিপত্র দাখিল করতে হবে।
- ৪। নিয়োগের ক্ষেত্রে সর্বশেষ জারীকৃত সরকারী বিধি-বিধান অনুযায়ী কোটা পদ্ধতি অনুসরণ করা হবে। এছাড়াও বিদ্যমান বিধি-বিধানের সরকার কর্তৃক কোন সংশোধনী জারী করা হলে তা যথাযথভাবে অনুসরণ করা হবে।
- ৫। মৌখিক পরীক্ষার সময় শিক্ষাগত যোগ্যতার সকল মূল সনদপত্র, অভিজ্ঞতার মূল সনদপত্র, জাতীয় পরিচয়পত্র/জন্মনিবন্ধন সনদ, সংশ্লিষ্ট সিটি কর্পোরেশনের মেয়র/সিটি কর্পোরেশনের ওয়ার্ড কাউন্সিলর/পৌরসভার মেয়র/পৌরসভার ওয়ার্ড কাউন্সিলর/ইউনিয়ন পরিষদের চেয়ারম্যান কর্তৃক প্রদত্ত নাগরিকত্ব সনদ ও চারিত্রিক সনদপত্র; মুক্তিযোদ্ধা, শহিদ মুক্তিযোদ্ধা ও বীরাদ্বন্দ্বার সন্তানদের প্রমাণক হিসেবে সরকারের সর্বশেষ নির্দেশনা মোতাবেক উপযুক্ত কর্তৃপক্ষ কর্তৃক প্রদত্ত মূল সনদ, মুক্তিযোদ্ধা, শহিদ মুক্তিযোদ্ধা ও বীরাদ্বন্দ্বার সন্তানদের ক্ষেত্রে উপযুক্ত প্রমাণক হিসেবে সংশ্লিষ্ট সিটি কর্পোরেশনের মেয়র/সিটি কর্পোরেশনের ওয়ার্ড কাউন্সিলর/পৌরসভার মেয়র/পৌরসভার ওয়ার্ড কাউন্সিলর/ইউনিয়ন পরিষদের চেয়ারম্যান কর্তৃক প্রার্থীর সঙ্গে মুক্তিযোদ্ধার সম্পর্ক সংক্রান্ত মূল প্রত্যয়নপত্র, ক্ষুদ্র নৃ-গোষ্ঠী, শারীরিক প্রতিবন্ধী ও তৃতীয় লিঙ্গের কোটায় আবেদনকারীদের ক্ষেত্রে উপযুক্ত কর্তৃপক্ষ কর্তৃক প্রদত্ত মূল সনদপত্র প্রদর্শন করতে হবে এবং পূরণকৃত Application Form ও Admit Card সহ সকল কাগজপত্রের ১ম শ্রেণির গেজেটেড কর্মকর্তা কর্তৃক সত্যায়িত ০১ (এক) সেট ফটোকপি এবং ০৩ (তিন) কপি পাসপোর্ট সাইজের সত্যায়িত ছবি দাখিল করতে হবে।
- ৬। সকল পদের জন্য লিখিত ও মৌখিক পরীক্ষা গ্রহণ করা হবে। তবে ১, ৩, ৭, ১০ নং ক্রমিকে বর্ণিত পদের ক্ষেত্রে ব্যবহারিক পরীক্ষায় উত্তীর্ণ প্রার্থীরাই শুধুমাত্র মৌখিক পরীক্ষার জন্য যোগ্য বিবেচিত হবেন।
- ৭। কোন কারণ দর্শানো ব্যতিরেকে কর্তৃপক্ষ পদের সংখ্যা/হ্রাস/বৃদ্ধি এবং বিজ্ঞপ্তি সংশোধন/বাতিল করার ক্ষমতা সংরক্ষণ করেন।
- ৮। এ নিয়োগ বিজ্ঞপ্তি প্রচারের কারণে কর্তৃপক্ষ নিয়োগ প্রদান করতে কিংবা ইন্টারভিউ কার্ড ইস্যু করতে বাধ্য থাকবেন না।
- ৯। প্রত্যেক প্রার্থীকে অবশ্যই বিজ্ঞপ্তি প্রকাশের তারিখ পর্যন্ত অর্জিত সর্বোচ্চ শিক্ষাগত যোগ্যতা Online Application Form এ উল্লেখ করতে হবে। অর্জিত শিক্ষাগত যোগ্যতা গোপন রেখে পরবর্তীতে তা প্রকাশ করে পদোন্নতি বা অন্য কোন বৈধ সুযোগ দাবী করলে তা গ্রহণযোগ্য হবে না।
- ১০। আবেদনপত্র পূরণ সংক্রান্ত শর্তাবলি:
 - ক। পরীক্ষায় অংশগ্রহণে ইচ্ছুক ব্যক্তি <http://bof.teletalk.com.bd> ওয়েবসাইটে আবেদনপত্র পূরণ করতে পারবেন। আবেদনের সময়সীমা নিম্নরূপ:
 - (১) Online -এ আবেদনপত্র পূরণ ও পরীক্ষার ফি জমাদান শুরু তারিখ ও সময়: ১৬ ফেব্রুয়ারি ২০২৫ তারিখ সকাল ১০:০০টা।
 - (২) Online -এ আবেদনপত্র জমাদানের শেষ তারিখ ও সময়: ১৭ মার্চ ২০২৫ তারিখ বিকাল ০৫:০০ টা।
 - খ। উক্ত সময়সীমার মধ্যে User ID প্রাপ্ত প্রার্থীগণ Online- এ আবেদনপত্র Submit-এর সময় থেকে পরবর্তী ৭২ (বাহাত্তর) ঘণ্টার মধ্যে যে কোন Teletalk Pre-Paid Mobile নম্বর থেকে এসএমএস এর মাধ্যমে পরীক্ষার ফি জমা দিতে পারবেন।
 - গ। আবেদনপত্রে প্রার্থী তার স্বাক্ষর (দৈর্ঘ্য ৩০০ pixel×প্রস্থ ৮০ pixel) এবং রসিদ ছবি (দৈর্ঘ্য ৩০০ pixel×প্রস্থ ৩০০ pixel) স্ক্যান করে নির্ধারিত স্থানে Upload করবেন। ছবির সাইজ সর্বোচ্চ 100KB ও স্বাক্ষরের সাইজ সর্বোচ্চ 60KB হতে হবে।

- প। যেহেতু Online আবেদনপত্রে পূরণকৃত তথ্যই পরবর্তী সকল কার্যক্রমে ব্যবহৃত হবে, সেহেতু Online-এ আবেদনপত্র Submit করার পূর্বেই পূরণকৃত সকল তথ্যের সঠিকতা সম্পর্কে প্রার্থী নিজে শতভাগ নিশ্চিত হবেন। আবেদনকারী যদি কোন ভুল বা অসত্য তথ্য দাখিল করে বা তথ্য গোপন করে এবং পরবর্তীতে তা সনাক্ত হয় সেক্ষেত্রে আইনানুযায়ী ব্যবস্থা গ্রহণ করা হবে এবং তার নিয়োগাদেশ বাতিল করা হবে।
- ঘ। প্রার্থী কর্তৃক Online-এ পূরণকৃত আবেদনপত্রের একটি রসিদ প্রিন্ট কপি পরীক্ষা সংক্রান্ত যে কোন প্রয়োজনে সহায়ক হিসেবে সংরক্ষণ করতে হবে।
- ঙ। SMS প্রেরণ এবং পরীক্ষার ফি প্রদানের নিয়মাবলি : Online আবেদনপত্র (Application Form) যথাযথভাবে পূরণ করে নির্দেশনা মোতাবেক ছবি এবং স্বাক্ষর Upload করতঃ আবেদনপত্র Submit করা সম্পন্ন হলে কম্পিউটারে ছবিসহ Application Preview দেখা যাবে। নির্ভুলভাবে আবেদনপত্র Submit করা সম্পন্ন প্রার্থী একটি User ID, ছবি এবং স্বাক্ষরযুক্ত একটি Applicant's copy পাবেন। উক্ত Applicant's copy প্রার্থী download পূর্বক রসিদ প্রিন্ট করে সংরক্ষণ করবেন। Applicant's কপিতে একটি User ID নম্বর দেয়া থাকবে এবং User ID নম্বর ব্যবহার করে প্রার্থী নিম্নোক্ত পদ্ধতিতে যে কোন Teletalk pre-paid mobile নম্বরের মাধ্যমে ০২ (দুই) টি SMS করে পরীক্ষার ফি বাবদ ক্রমিক নং ১ ও ২-এ বর্ণিত পদসমূহের জন্য ১৬৮/- টাকা, ৩, ৪, ৫, ৬, ৭, ৮, ৯ ও ১০ -এ বর্ণিত পদসমূহের জন্য ১১২/- টাকা, ক্রমিক নং ১১, ১২, ১৩, ১৪, ১৫, ১৬, ১৭, ১৮, ১৯ ও ২০ -এ বর্ণিত পদের জন্য ৫৬/- টাকা এবং সকল পদের জন্য (অন্যসহ নাগরিক) ৫৬/- টাকা অধিক ৭২ (বাহাত্তর) ঘণ্টার মধ্যে জমা দিবেন। এখানে বিশেষভাবে উল্লেখ্য যে, "Online -এ আবেদনপত্রের সকল অংশ পূরণ করে submit করা হলেও পরীক্ষার ফি জমা না দেয়া পর্যন্ত Online আবেদনপত্র কোন অবস্থাতেই গৃহীত হবে না"।
- প্রথম SMS: BOF<space> USER ID লিখে send করতে হবে 16222 নম্বরে।

Example: BOF ABCDEF

Reply: Applicant's Name, Tk..... will be charged as application fee. Your PIN is 12345678. To pay fee Type BOF< space > YES < space> PIN and send to 16222.

দ্বিতীয় SMS: BOF< space >YES< space>PIN লিখে send করতে হবে 16222 নম্বরে।

Example: BOF YES 12345678

Reply: Congratulations Applicant's Name, payment completed successfully for BOF Application for post xxxxxxxx User ID is (ABCDEF) and password (xxxxxxx).

খ। প্রবেশপত্র প্রাপ্তির বিষয়টি <http://bof.teletalk.com.bd> ওয়েবসাইটে এবং প্রার্থীর মোবাইল ফোনে SMS এর মাধ্যমে (শুধুমাত্র যোগ্য প্রার্থীদেরকে) যথাসময়ে জানানো হবে।

চ। প্রবেশপত্র প্রাপ্তির বিষয়টি <http://bof.teletalk.com.bd> ওয়েবসাইটে এবং প্রার্থীর মোবাইল ফোনে SMS এর মাধ্যমে (শুধুমাত্র যোগ্য প্রার্থীদেরকে) যথাসময়ে জানানো হবে।

ছ। SMS এ প্রেরিত User ID এবং Password ব্যবহার করে পরবর্তীতে রোল নম্বর, পদের নাম, ছবি, পরীক্ষার তারিখ, সময় ও স্থান/কেন্দ্রের নাম ইত্যাদি তথ্য সংবলিত প্রবেশপত্র প্রার্থী Download পূর্বক রসিদ প্রিন্ট করে নিতে হবে। প্রার্থী প্রবেশপত্রে লিখিত পরীক্ষার অংশগ্রহণের সময়ে এবং উত্তীর্ণ হলে ব্যবহারিক ও মৌখিক পরীক্ষার সময় অবশ্যই প্রদর্শন করবেন।

জ। শুধুমাত্র টেলিটক প্রি-পেইড মোবাইল ফোন থেকে প্রার্থীগণ নিম্নবর্ণিত SMS পদ্ধতি অনুসরণ করে নিজ নিজ User ID এবং Password পুনরুদ্ধার করতে পারবেন।

- (১) User ID জানা থাকলে BOF< space >Help< space>User< space>User ID & Send to 16222.
Example: BOF Help User ABCDEF & send to 16222
- (২) PIN Number জানা থাকলে BOF< space >Help< space>PIN< space>PIN No & Send to 16222.
Example: BOF Help PIN 12345678 & send to 16222.

- ১১। Online -এ আবেদন করতে কোন সমস্যা হলে যে কোন টেলিটক নম্বর হতে ১২১ এ অথবা নিকট টেলিটক কাউন্টার কেয়ার এ যোগাযোগ করতে হবে।
- ১২। বাংলাদেশ সরকার কারখানার ওয়েবসাইটে (www.bof.gov.bd) এ নিয়োগ বিজ্ঞপ্তি পাওয়া যাবে এবং নিয়োগের ফলাফলসহ যাবতীয় তথ্যাদি সময়ে সময়ে হালনাগাদ করা হবে।
- ১৩। লিখিত/ব্যবহারিক/মৌখিক পরীক্ষায় উপস্থিত হওয়ার জন্য কোন প্রকার টিএ/ডিএ প্রদান করা হবে না।
- ১৪। নিয়োগ সংক্রান্ত বিষয়ে নিয়োগকারী কর্তৃপক্ষের সিদ্ধান্তই চূড়ান্ত বলে গণ্য হবে।

তারপ্রাপ্ত উপপরিচালক প্রশাসন
পক্ষে কমান্ড্যান্ট

Farida Parveen recovers, returns home after 13 days

Esteemed Lalon singer Farida Parveen has returned home after recovering from severe health complications. She was hospitalised on February 1 due to respiratory distress, diabetes, high blood pressure, and thyroid issues.

After spending 13 days in the ICU, she improved and was discharged under medical supervision.

Her doctor informed local media, "Her condition was critical initially, but she recovered well. At one point, there was a possibility that she might have needed dialysis, but fortunately, it was not required."

Farida Parveen began her musical journey in 1968 and gained fame for Lalon Sangeet in the 1970s. She received the Ekushey Padak (1987), National Film Award (1993), and Fukuoka Asian Culture Prize (2008).



'Bridgerton' stars hint at Benedict's love story in season four

Fans of the popular Netflix series *Bridgerton* were given a sneak peek of season four last Friday. The released photos feature a romance between Benedict, the second son of the noble family, and a servant.



The Regency-era series, based on Julia Quinn's books of the same name, shifted focus in Season 3 from Benedict to Colin and Penelope. Benedict's story will take centre stage in the upcoming season.

The ensemble cast of the upcoming season, including leading actors Luke Thompson and Yerin Ha, alongside showrunner Jess Brownell, shared a sneak peek video during an event in London. All released teasers hint at the developing relationship between the characters, Benedict Bridgerton and the maid Sophie Baek.

Season 4, currently in production, will focus on Benedict, who, once reluctant to commit to marriage, becomes entranced by a mysterious "lady in silver" at his mother's masquerade ball.

DECENTRALISING FILMMAKING 'Monsoon Revolution Film Production Workshop' hosts Dhaka event



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

MAISHA TASNIM SRESITHA

With the vision of decentralising the filmmaking industry and nurturing new talent from across the country, the 'Monsoon Revolution Film Production Workshop' has been launched under the initiative of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. The workshop aims to create opportunities for aspiring filmmakers beyond Dhaka, empowering them with hands-on training in storytelling, cinematography, production, editing, and the application of technology in filmmaking.

Dhaka division's session commenced yesterday (February 15), with notable figures in attendance, including Cultural Adviser Mostofa Sarwar Farooki, Professor Dr Sumon Rahman, filmmaker Tanim Noor and prodigal filmmaker Nuhash Humayun at the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, marking the beginning of a five-day intensive programme.

Speaking about the workshop's significance, Nuhash Humayun shared, "Through film, we can bring change. A nation's culture, its films, and OTT web-series alike are its creative superpowers. The stronger the storytelling, the more impactful the message. Film allows us to present our perspectives without restrictions."

As part of the project, eight selected filmmakers will produce eight medium-length films in collaboration with novice and trained film workers. A search committee, formed last December, selected these filmmakers to conduct workshops and create films in 2025.

The selected directors are - Anam Biswas, Humaira Bilkis, Nuhash Humayun, Shankha Dasgupta, Shaheen Dill Riaz, Robiul Alam Robi, Tasmiah Afrin Mou, and Mohammad Touqir Islam.

The event was graced by Mostofa Sarwar Farooki, Adviser to the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, who highlighted the overwhelming response from aspiring filmmakers. "In this innovative workshop led by Nuhash Humayun, over 500 participants have submitted their writings, which is a promising sign that we are heading in the right direction," he stated.

As part of a nationwide initiative, the "Monsoon Revolution Film Production Workshop" will be conducted across all eight divisions of Bangladesh, each facilitated by accomplished young filmmakers. By decentralising access to filmmaking education and mentorship, this initiative is expected to encourage a new generation of storytellers.

Parambrata and Piya expecting first child



Parambrata Chattopadhyay and Piya Chakraborty took to social media to share their excitement about expecting their first child. The couple expressed their joy over expanding their family, which already includes their beloved

pets, Nina the cat and Bagha the dog.

In an interview with Anandabazar Online, Piya revealed that she is currently five months pregnant. She shared that the doctors have confirmed that, if everything goes smoothly, they expect to welcome their baby by June.

In the midst of the joyous news, Parambrata's latest film, *Ei Raat Tomar Amar*, which he both directed and starred in, was recently released.

While promoting the film, Parambrata has also been dedicating time and attention to the soon-to-be mother, as Piya lovingly shared.

Apurba-Tasnia Farin starrer 'How Sweet' to release this Eid



Filmmaker Kajal Arefin Ome, known for popular productions like *Bachelor Point* and OTT projects *Hotel Relax*, *Oshomoy*, and *Female 4*, has announced his new web-film *How Sweet*, starring Ziaul Faruq Apurba and Tasnia Farin.

Initially, the web-film was supposed to premiere on the OTT platform Bongo for Valentine's Day. However, the director recently revealed that *How Sweet* will instead be released during Eid-ul-Fitr.

Ome shared the update on Facebook, saying, "We are releasing *How Sweet* this Eid-ul-Fitr to provide everyone with an amazing web-film to enjoy. The post-production process is taking longer than expected as we haven't been able to finish it yet."

NEWS

Khulna becomes city of rallies

FROM PAGE 14

Though it was chaired by Muslim League leader Abdul Hamid, the speakers at the meeting voiced their support for Bangla as the state language.

That year, the Language Movement in Khulna was organised by the progressive faction of the Muslim Chhatra League (Shahid Hashem group, Chhatra Federation, and the forward bloc of the Chhatra congress). The Communist Party too significantly influenced the movement in the district.

Key figures in shaping the movement there included Swades Basu, Dhananjay Das, Santosh Dasgupta, Anwar Hossain, Tahmid Uddin and Zillur Rahman, among others.

On March 10, in a bid to quell the movement, police arrested several leaders, including Sailesh Ghosh, Swadesh Roy, and Tahmid Uddin. Despite this, the movement went on.

Like in other districts, a large-scale campaign, led by the Chhatra Federation, was carried out across Khulna on March 11, in line with the central programme.

Students from various educational institutions, including BL College, Daulatpur College, and District School, marched through the city. Posters were put up all around, while slogans were chanted demanding Bangla as the state language.

The demonstrators gathered at Gandhi Park (now Shaheed Hadis Park), where a meeting was held to demand



Khulna Central Shaheed Minar

the recognition of Bangla as the state language.

From that afternoon, police began arresting activists, including student leader Anwar Hossain. He was later transferred to the Rajshahi prison.

In 1950, Anwar Hossain was martyred during the Khapra Ward massacre.

After Khwaja Nazimuddin's announcement of Urdu as the state language on January 27, 1952, the students and locals of Khulna took to the streets.

On the night of February 18, students met at the Azad Library and decided to launch a campaign, making February 21 the movement's main day.

On February 21, a full-scale hartal was observed, while leaders and activists marched throughout the city. Students at several educational institutions also observed strikes and boycotted classes and a student rally was organised at Daulatpur College.

The same day, Khulna received

news of police killing students in Dhaka. Within moments, protesters swarmed the streets. Slogans such as "Rashtrobhasha Bangla chai!" (We want Bangla as the state language!) and "Nurul Amin er kolla chai!" (We want the head of Nurul Amin!) reverberated.

From February 22 onwards, Khulna city effectively became a city of rallies.

That day, students from various educational institutions were joined by people from all walks of life for a mass procession.

When the girls of Khulna's Coronation School decided to wear black badges for their procession, they could not find any fabric to make them with. However, a student, Laily, came to school wearing a black saree. She changed into a different one and allowed the students to cut pieces of cloths from her saree to make the badges so that the mourning procession could be held in a befitting manner.

On February 23, a hartal was observed, while the slogans were still chanted by students and locals on the streets. Female students in large numbers joined in. Some of the women leaders included Majeda Ali, Anwara Khatun and Rokeya Khatun Shirir, among others.

In the afternoon, a public meeting, chaired by student leader MA Gofur, was held at the Municipal Park. Speakers included Abu Mohammad Ferdous, Altaf Khan and others.

Negotiations on a second phase of the ceasefire, meant to lay out steps towards a more permanent end to the war, are expected to begin next week.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, whose country is Israel's top backer and one of the truce mediators, is due to arrive in Israel late Saturday ahead of expected talks with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on the truce.

Hazem Qassem, a spokesman for Hamas, said in a statement after Saturday's hostage release that the United States "must compel" Israel to adhere to the truce deal "if it truly cares about the prisoners' (hostages) lives".

Israel's military chief, Lieutenant-General Herzi Halevi, said that even though efforts continue to bring home the remaining captives, the military is "simultaneously preparing offensive plans".

An Israeli campaign group, the Hostages and Missing Families Forum, warned in a statement against the deal's "collapse".

Form separate body for constituency

FROM PAGE 14

controversy regarding the demarcation process, there is also the risk of political interference. We're proposing a system that would protect the Election Commission from such interference.... The best solution would be for a separate commission to handle this task, ensuring that the EC doesn't bear unnecessary responsibilities or face unfounded accusations."

According to the Delimitation of Constituencies Law, the boundaries of Jatiya Sangsad constituencies should be redrawn based on the population distribution from the latest census, while keeping administrative units intact for convenience.

The EC publishes a preliminary list of redrawn constituencies, and voters are given the chance to file appeals against the proposed boundaries. The EC may finalise the demarcation only after resolving these objections.

EC officials emphasised that the demarcation of parliamentary seats is a complex and technical task, often leading to controversy.

During the process, some constituencies become larger, while others shrink. This results in some parliamentary candidates needing to appeal to new voters, while others lose voters.

The last EC, led by Kazi Habibur Awai, re-demarcated 10 constituencies ahead of the 12th national elections. Prior to that, the KM Nurul Huda-led commission altered the boundaries of 25 constituencies in 2018. The commission under Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad redrew the boundaries of 87 constituencies in 2013, ahead of the 10th general election, while the ATM Shamsul Huda-led commission

made significant changes to 133 constituencies in 2008.

However, following the fall of the Sheikh Hasina-led government, the EC has received objections regarding the 2008 and 2024 demarcation processes. An EC official revealed that while no official initiative has been taken, 240 objections have already been filed against 40 constituencies.

Transparency International Bangladesh, in a report published last May, stated that 198 constituencies had been re-demarcated in recent national elections, which caused political controversy, lawsuits, and legal complications from local residents.

Internationally recognised guidelines suggest that electoral boundaries should be demarcated with an average population difference of no more than five percent.

However, in Bangladesh, the population deviation ranges between 26 and 88 percent. As a result, some constituencies have MPs representing large populations (over 800,000), while others, even in the same district, represent smaller populations (around 300,000), according to the TIB report.

The report also noted that this population gap creates complications in electoral expenditure and other activities on a constituency-by-constituency basis.

The reform commission's draft law proposes that a committee, led by the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) or another EC official, demarcate constituencies. Other members of the committee should include geographers, statisticians, demographers, urban planners, and EC officials.

During the demarcation, the

boundaries of a union parishad or a ward in a city corporation should remain intact.

Abdul Alim further explained that internationally recognised bodies, such as the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Venice Commission, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, and others, follow widely accepted guidelines.

The reform commission's report highlighted "impartiality" as a key principle, meaning the delimitation process should be managed by an independent and impartial professional body with the relevant expertise.

It also emphasised "representativeness," which ensures that electoral boundaries are drawn to allow constituents to elect candidates who truly represent them.

Furthermore, "equality of voting strength" is another fundamental principle, ensuring that populations in constituencies are as equal as possible, providing voters with an equal voting strength.

The report also mentioned that countries such as India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, Australia, and New Zealand have separate authorities responsible for demarcating constituencies.

In the UK, with the exception of a few constituencies, each seat has a voter count ranging from 73,000 to 74,000, resulting in a voter deviation of no more than five percent. On average, each constituency in the UK covers approximately 13,000 square kilometres.

Alim noted that India follows a ±10 percent population variation rule when delimiting constituencies.

Time for new European army

FROM PAGE 14

on issues that threaten it," Zelensky said. "I really believe that time has come. The Armed Forces of Europe must be created."

The push for a joint continental force has been mooted for years without gaining traction and Zelensky's intervention seems unlikely to shift the balance.

In the short-term, the priority for Kyiv remains ensuring its voice is heard at any peace talks involving Russia and that it doesn't get a bad deal.

"Ukraine will never accept deals made behind our backs without our

involvement," Zelensky said in a speech.

"No decisions about Ukraine without Ukraine. No decisions about Europe without Europe."

Zelensky cautioned Putin would seek to use Trump as a "prop in his own performance", possibly by trying to get him to Moscow for Russia's WWII victory parade in May.

Zelensky is pushing for "security guarantees" from both the United States and Europe to ensure that any peace deal does not allow Moscow just to restart the war later.

"Putin cannot offer real security guarantees, not just because he is a liar

but because Russia in its current state needs war to hold power together," he said.

The Ukrainian leader said forceful sanctions on Russia and building up Ukraine's military could help secure peace, and said he was "open" to eventually having European peacekeepers.

European leaders backed up Zelensky's call to action and for their continent to play a key role.

"There will only be peace if Ukraine's sovereignty is secured," German Chancellor Olaf Scholz told the Munich Security Conference.

25 held after attack on UN peacekeepers Says Lebanon

AFP, Beirut

Lebanese authorities yesterday said that more than 25 people have been arrested following an attack on a United Nations convoy that wounded two peacekeepers, including the force's outgoing deputy commander.

UN and Lebanese officials have condemned Friday's attack, which came as Hezbollah supporters blocked the road to the country's only international airport for a second night over a decision to bar two Iranian flights from landing.

The UN Interim Force in Lebanon has demanded a "full and immediate investigation" after one of its vehicles was set on fire in the attack, which wounded outgoing deputy force commander Chok Bahadur Dhakal, who was heading home to Nepal after completing his mission.



Former Palestinian prisoners, released as part of the sixth hostage-prisoner exchange, are welcomed by friends and relatives upon arriving at the European Hospital in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

ROHINGYA 'GENOCIDE' Argentine court issues warrants for Myanmar officials

AFP, Buenos Aires

An Argentine court has issued arrest warrants for the head of Myanmar's military junta and former officials including Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi over alleged "genocide and crimes against humanity" targeting the Rohingya minority group.

The court ruling, seen by AFP on Friday, was issued in response to a complaint filed in Argentina by a Rohingya advocacy group.

It was filed under the principle of "universal jurisdiction" by which countries can prosecute crimes regardless of where they occurred if, like genocide or war crimes, they are considered sufficiently serious.

Warrants were issued for military and civilian officials including current junta leader Min Aung Hlaing, ex-president Htin Kyaw, and former elected civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi in her capacity as "state counsellor" from 2016 to 2021, when she was ousted in a coup.

In that time, she has been accused by detractors of doing little to stop the abuse of Rohingya.

Hlaing is also under investigation by the International Criminal Court, while the International Court of Justice – the UN's highest tribunal – is examining a complaint of "genocide" against Myanmar.

The Rohingyas, mainly Muslims, are originally from Buddhist-majority Myanmar where, according to Amnesty International, they have been subjected to a regime akin to apartheid.

Beginning in 2017, many have been forced to flee persecution and violence to richer and predominantly Muslim Malaysia, or to refugee camps in Bangladesh, where about a million of them live.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the 2021 coup that sparked renewed clashes with ethnic rebels and saw the formation of dozens of "People's Defense Forces" now battling the junta.

In her ruling issued Thursday, Judge Maria Servini said the allegations listed in the complaint "constitute crimes that violate human rights recognized in various international criminal law instruments, subscribed to by most countries in the world."

They included "internationally known crimes such as genocide and crimes against humanity, committed by the political and military authorities in power in that country," she added.



Defying truce, Israel still destroying Gaza homes

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

Israel has destroyed dozens of homes in Rafah, southern Gaza, despite the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, satellite imagery analysis conducted by Al Jazeera's fact-checking agency, Sanad, has revealed.

The crossing between Egypt and Gaza at Rafah, which has served as a critical lifeline into the enclave for decades, was closed by Israel in May 2024.

Since seizing control of the border area, in breach of its 1979 peace agreement with Egypt, Israel has been digging in in the Philadelphi Corridor, a 14-km (8.7-mile) strip of land along the boundary between Egypt and Gaza.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has emphasised the importance of remaining in the corridor, despite the illegality.

According to Sanad, the images, taken between January 19 and 21, show the Israeli army to have built sand fortifications across the Rafah crossing.

Additionally, the agency said, a new military outpost has been established just to the north of the crossing.

The army has also constructed a 1.7 km (1.1-mile) road surrounding the crossing, running parallel to the sand fortifications.

Israeli forces have also kept thousands of Rafah residents from their homes, Israeli vehicles shooting at dozens of people trying to go home, injuring and killing them.

Israel, in essence, is constructing "a buffer zone that allows you to push any kind of fighters or, in technical terms, any hostile within an otherwise friendly environment away from you", Palestinian defence analyst Hamze Attar said.

As part of the ceasefire, which began on January 19, Israel agreed to reduce its forces in the area before completely withdrawing its troops by the 50th day of the agreement.

However, analysis carried out

on satellite images taken between January 19 and February 1 shows the Israeli army has continued construction in the area, demolishing and bulldozing 64 buildings within the city of Rafah, specifically in the as Salam, Idari, and Tel Zaarab neighbourhoods.

The demolitions occurred only 700 metres from the Egyptian border. At the same time, Sanad also

200,000 people sheltering in the al-Mawasi Khan Younis area and other locations across Gaza, unable to come home.

According to him, initial estimates indicate that 90 per cent of Rafah's homes have been damaged, with approximately 52,000 units suffering various degrees of destruction.

Meanwhile, Hamas expects



identified at least six homes razed in Tal as Sultan, west of Rafah, a little more than 750 metres (820 yards) from the Egyptian border.

"This is a war crime because they are destroying residential houses," Attar said, referring to the fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits the destruction of private property.

Meanwhile, Munir al-Bursh, director-general of the Ministry of Health in Gaza, said on Tuesday that Israeli attacks, unexploded ordnance, or fatal injuries sustained earlier have killed 118 people since the ceasefire agreement took effect.

In addition to military breaches of the ceasefire, Israel has not allowed in sufficient amounts of essential humanitarian aid, such as food, fuel, tents, and emergency shelters.

Rafah Mayor Ahmed al-Sufi said most of the city's residents remain displaced, with an estimated

indirect negotiations with Israel for the second phase of an ongoing truce in Gaza to begin "early next week", an official of the Palestinian militant group said Friday.

"We expect the second phase of the ceasefire negotiations to begin early next week," Hamas official Taher al-Nunu said.

Another source familiar with the talks told AFP that "mediators informed Hamas that they hope to start the second phase of negotiations next week in Doha".

Under the terms of the first phase of the ceasefire agreement brokered by Qatar, Egypt and the United States – which came into effect on January 19 – negotiations for the second phase were due to start on February 3.

The 42-day phase one revolves around the release of 33 Israeli hostages in exchange for around 1,900 prisoners, most of them Palestinian, being held in Israeli jails.

Falgun festivities obstructed

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CRB ground, along with police went to the site to stop the programme, leaving attendees and participants frustrated.

Visiting the area around 3:30pm, our correspondent saw sound technicians loading their equipment back onto vehicles, while decorators were packing up chairs and tables.

Ariful Alam Khandakar, who had come to enjoy the festival, said, "I came here for the afternoon cultural programme. To my surprise, I found the event had been called off without any explanation."

Contacted, Sheikh Farid, an officer of the BR Kalyan Trust, said he was unaware of the situation. "We gave permission for the day-long programme. But we have no information on today's [yesterday's] incident. Perhaps GM sir [the general manager of BR's eastern zone] is handling the matter."

GM Md Sabuktagin could not be reached for comments despite several attempts.

Shakila Soltana, deputy commissioner (South) of Chattogram Metropolitan Police, told The Daily Star that a police team accompanied the BR officials visiting the spot to observe the situation.

"Bangladesh Railway is the approval authority. They cancelled the approval. The police went there to prevent any untoward situation."

Meanwhile, another

Basanta Baron celebration, which included a kite-flying programme, in Tangail's Gopalpur upazila, was also cancelled after backlash from certain groups yesterday.

A collective of local platforms, including a Facebook group called "Amra Gopalpurbashi [We Are Residents of Gopalpur]", had been organising the event for the past few years.

Anju Anowara Moyna, one of the organisers and an admin of the Facebook group, told our correspondent they cancelled the event after leaflets were distributed from a local mosque claiming it was "unIslamic and immoral."

On Friday, a crowd vandalised a gift shop and shut down a fast-food joint on College Road in the district's Bhuapur upazila.

Alam, owner of the shop Mama Gift Corner, confirmed to our

correspondent that his shop was attacked for selling flowers.

According to witnesses, protesters moved to the fast-food shop Niribili Food Corners and chanted through loudspeakers "Valentine's Day spreads promiscuity and immoral behaviour". Videos of the incident went viral on social media.

Rezaul Karim, officer-in-charge of Bhuapur Police Station, told The Daily Star he heard about the incident but had not yet received any complaints.

Natya Utsab postponed amid 'security concerns'

FROM PAGE 14

we met him at his office and briefed him in detail about the festival," he said. "They were cordial enough, and suggested a few changes to the lineup of the plays."

According to Thandu, following discussions at the police station, the authorities assured them of security, prompting the organisers to submit a formal request for police assistance.

"Upon hearing about this meeting, a group of 7-8 youths arrived at the police station and started causing a fuss," he said.

Later that night, an unidentified group vandalised the venue. "There is no way could we go ahead with the programme after that," Thandu added.

Connected, Ramna Police Station OC Golam Faruk said, "We received some phone calls complaining about this festival, but that's all we can say."

Deputy Commissioner (Media) of DMP Muhammad Talebur Rahman said he was not aware of any threats and added that enough security measures were in place for

the event.

In a statement signed by Talebur, DMP said it had issued no directives to halt the cultural programme. "We always encourage creative and artistic endeavours. We do not understand why the festival was halted. DMP remains alert to make sure that no untoward incident takes place surrounding the festival," the statement added.

BNP's cultural wing Jasas, however, sent a statement claiming that "collaborators of fascists" were trying to regroup using the cultural programme.

"When the instigators of [the July] massacre tried to rehabilitate themselves on the stages of Dhaka under the banner of Natya Utsab, we informed the Mohila Samity that the people will not tolerate any attempts to accommodate the fascist's collaborators," said a statement signed by Md Mizanur Rahman, central committee member of the Jasas.

The Mohila Samity accepted Jasas's "just and fair" demand and cancelled the booking, the statement added.



Lebanese Army riot-control forces attempt to disperse protesters during a Hezbollah-organised rally to block the road to Beirut International Airport over a decision to bar two Iranian flights from landing there. The photo was taken in Beirut yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP



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Election by the year-end is most logical

Political parties must agree on election timing and reforms

At a time when the nation is heading towards the national election by the end of this year, Jamaat's demand that the election should be held only after completing reforms to state institutions relevant to the electoral process has come as a surprise. While it is undeniable that our vital institutions urgently need fundamental reforms, the necessity and significance of holding the 13th national election as soon as possible cannot be overstated, especially since voters have been deprived of their right to vote in the last three elections. And as we have previously stated, it should be possible to both hold the election and implement crucial reforms by the end of the year.

The six reform commissions have already submitted their reports with recommendations, which have been made available to the public. Yesterday, the first meeting of the National Consensus Commission was held with political parties to review these recommendations and build consensus ahead of the election. We still have around 9 to 10 months before the election to reach an agreement on the major reforms that should be completed prior to the election. Therefore, Jamaat's stance regarding the timing of the polls is not a judicious one and largely reflects its own partisan interests.

Besides demanding reforms before elections, the party has also called for a proportional representation system and local government elections prior to the national election. These demands stand in stark contrast to those of the BNP, which was its long-time ally.

We believe Jamaat's demand for a proportional representation system has some merit, as it would prevent a sweeping majority from stultifying the parliament, as we have experienced in the past. Furthermore, there is no doubt that a proportional representation system better reflects public opinion compared to the first-past-the-post system. However, there is reportedly strong disagreement among political parties regarding this system. Also, given its unfamiliarity to the public, we think it should be planned for the election after the next. By that time, people should be made aware of the system and how it works. We are also in favour of holding local government elections before the national election, but only if it does not delay the national election. At a time when the country is going through a difficult phase without an elected government in place, the national election is far more crucial than local elections. We believe that an elected government can bring more stability to the country and improve overall governance.

Therefore, we hope all political parties will reach a consensus on the necessary reforms before the election. We urge both Jamaat and BNP, as well as other political parties, to rise above their partisan interests and prioritise national interests. This would best be achieved by holding the national election by the end of the year.

Take measures to boost investment

Economic growth and job creation will continue to suffer otherwise

The worrisome trend of declining investment in the country over the last few years sadly paints a gloomy picture for job creation and economic growth in the near future. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, the investment-to-GDP ratio—which has been struggling to pick up since the Covid pandemic—dropped from 32.25 percent in FY2022 to 30.95 percent in FY2023 and then further declined by 0.25 percentage points in FY2024. If this trend continues, the country risks falling further behind its regional competitors in attracting both domestic and foreign investment.

Global phenomena such as the pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war are partly responsible for the drop. But at the local level, high inflation, an unreliable energy supply, and the fast depletion of our foreign currency reserves—depreciating the taka against the dollar—have also deterred fresh investments. Moreover, with the cost of doing business increasing due to the dollar becoming more expensive, many foreign businesses have closed their operations and left. Corruption, inconsistent policies, the fragile banking system, and political unrest and instability have added to these troubles, dampening the confidence of the local business community. The growing perception that policies favour a select few rather than fostering a level playing field has further discouraged new ventures and innovation. And even though economic data had been inflated during the past regime to create a rosy picture, casting doubt on the exact investment-to-GDP ratio, the investment atmosphere has undoubtedly hit a snag.

With unemployment already on the rise, especially among graduates, a decrease in investment means fewer jobs will be created in the country, which could exacerbate the ongoing economic struggles and lead to further frustration and discontent among the populace—especially among young people. The lack of well-paying jobs has already pushed many skilled professionals to seek opportunities abroad, intensifying the brain drain issue. Therefore, it is high time for the authorities to focus on boosting investment to achieve long-term economic stability.

The interim government must focus on creating an investment-friendly environment in the country by removing bureaucratic red tape and inefficiencies, curbing corruption, and strengthening the banking sector. Policies for economic diversification, reassessment of the investment structure, protection of small businesses and low-income groups, and reformation of tax incentives should be implemented to restore business confidence. On the global front, proactive diplomatic measures should be taken to tackle uncertainties. In parallel with drawing up policies to restore macroeconomic stability, the accuracy of economic data must also be ensured.

Appoint missing commissioners to keep RTI Act alive

Shamsul Bari and Ruhi Naz
are chairman and assistant director (RTI),
respectively, of Research Initiatives, Bangladesh,
RIB. Email: rib@ciitech-bd.com.

SHAMSUL BARI
and RUHI NAZ

Soon after the interim government assumed power six months ago, the three Information Commissioner posts in Bangladesh became vacant. Without the commissioners, the Information Commission itself—the pivot of the Right to Information (RTI) regime—becomes dysfunctional. Citizens seeking information and the authorities providing it find themselves in limbo. In the absence of the Information Commission monitoring their work, government officials feel less inclined to respond to citizens' information requests, who, in turn, question whether it is worth pursuing a request. As a result, the entire RTI Act withers, along with the concept of citizens' right to monitor the government's work to improve governance. This development contradicts the aspirations of the country's youth, who helped bring the interim government to power.

To obtain a clearer picture of the ground realities, we consulted different groups in the country engaged in promoting and using the RTI Act. Though not a scientific method, the process confirmed our fears. The following are some of our findings, albeit anecdotal.

There appears to be a shift in the attitude of many public authorities towards the RTI Act and a perceptible tendency among them not to respond to RTI applications, even after an appeal. The slow but steady progress made in recent years in implementing the RTI Act and the acceptance, however grudgingly, by public authorities of their responsibilities under the law appears to be dwindling. According to one source, there is a "damn care attitude" among them. Initially, the overthrow of the

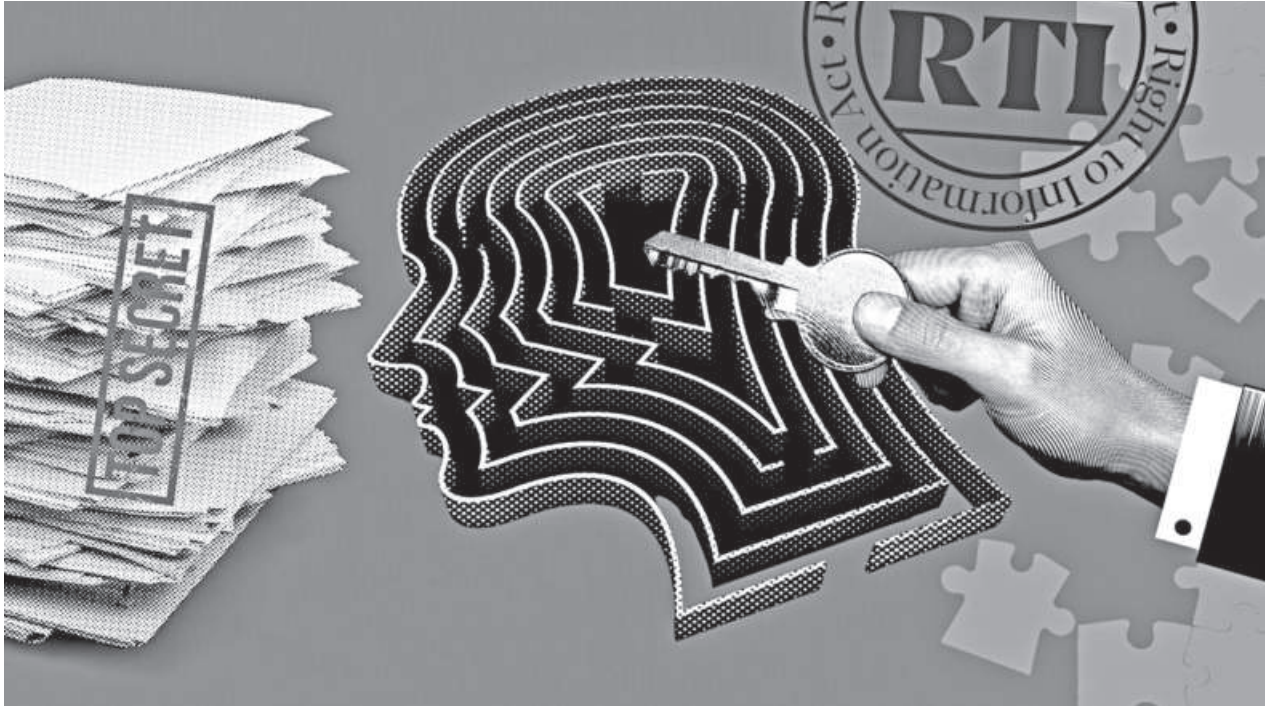
previous regime through a people's uprising appeared to serve as a booster for potential users of the RTI Act. However, the absence of Information Commissioners and the perceptible non-cooperation of government officials soon dampened spirits. Many claimed to have been subjected to harassment, such as being questioned about why they made the requests, apparently to determine if there were ulterior motives behind them. Many have been asked to provide copies of their NIDs, which is not required under the law.

even refuse to accept information requests, claiming that the RTI Act has been abolished and is no longer operational. In some places, district officials have cited interference from political forces forbidding them from disclosing certain information.

Amid such uncertainty, the prolonged absence of the Information Commissioners has given rise to general indifference among public authorities and hopelessness among complainants. Government officials, who are usually reluctant to disclose information, have found regime

there was a glimmer of hope that the objectives of the law—bringing transparency and accountability to governance—were achievable. There was a general expectation that the advent of a popular government would lead to more robust use of the RTI Act. This has been proven true in the last six months, as more youth have been drawn to the law. They saw its potential to make public administration people-friendly and committed to the rule of law.

While it is understandable that the interim government has other



FILE VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

The political instability following the July-August uprising appears to have contributed to a lack of trust in government bodies. New political players have entered the fray to advance personal or group agendas. In such an atmosphere, people hesitate to engage with the RTI process for fear of retaliation or political backlash. Some designated officials of government offices reportedly

change to be a new pretext for digging in.

In this atmosphere, promoters and supporters of the RTI Act are genuinely disillusioned. Is there a danger of the RTI Act sliding backward or slipping into disuse? Such fears must be nipped in the bud. It took 15 years for different stakeholders of the RTI Act to promote the law and bring it to a state where

important priorities to attend to at this critical juncture for our nation, putting the RTI Act back on track should, we believe, be considered an essential priority because of its immense potential to contribute to better governance. It is one law that helps the people and government unite for the good of the nation. Appointing Information Commissioners is a step towards keeping that potential alive.

Life after LDC graduation

Are we prepared to seize the new global opportunities?

Muhammad Omar Faruque
is a researcher in law. He can be reached at:
omarfaruquefahim@gmail.com.

Mohammed Abu Saleh
is an international trade lawyer, who
formerly worked with the WTO Secretariat in
Geneva, Switzerland. He can be reached at:
mohammedabusaleh.mas@gmail.com.

MUHAMMAD OMAR FARUQUE
and MOHAMMED ABU SALEH

As Bangladesh prepares to graduate from the Least Developed Country (LDC) category in November 2026, a pressing question looms: should the new government reconsider its strategy for this monumental transition?

It is important to recognise that this graduation is a collective leap forward for its people and businesses, who will be at the forefront of both the challenges and opportunities that come with this transition.

Bangladesh presents a *sui generis* case for two primary reasons. First, it is the largest LDC to graduate, with a population of 171 million. Second, according to a WTO study on the "Trade Impacts of LDC Graduation," 90 percent of the graduation-related trade losses would be incurred by Bangladesh alone. It is estimated that graduation will result in a 14.28 percent decline in Bangladesh's exports.

Bangladesh is set to graduate at a pivotal moment marked by unprecedented global and domestic instabilities. Serious questions are now being raised about the veracity of the development narrative upheld by the past regime of nearly two decades, which relied on questionable public statistics.

As critics argue that the decision to pursue LDC graduation was, to a large extent, politically motivated, and as part of the business community voices its resistance to this move, it is critical to qualitatively assess Bangladesh's preparedness for sustainable LDC graduation. It must be taken into account that, for countless entrepreneurs, this is not merely a policy shift but a direct threat to the survival of their businesses, livelihoods, and the health of their communities.

Bangladesh should urgently establish a structured consultative mechanism to engage all key

stakeholders—businesses, civil society, and experts—in deliberating the best course of action: whether to delay LDC graduation by a few more years after 2026 or to embrace it now.

If the consultative mechanism determines that Bangladesh should proceed with graduation, as generating "real" statistics within the stipulated time is practically challenging, the existing transition strategy, which began nearly a decade ago, can be revisited. A National Committee was formed in 2021 to assess the impacts and draft an action plan. The committee's recommendations are currently under government review for final approval.

The recommendations of that committee should be highlighted, as they rightly suggest strategically navigating Bangladesh's evolving status to capitalise on current and future opportunities. The approach is threefold. First, as an LDC, Bangladesh should actively advocate for the implementation of existing LDC-specific policy flexibilities. Second, Bangladesh must proactively push for the creation of multilateral rules to support sustainable graduation. Third, assuming its new status as a developing country, Bangladesh must prepare and act upon forward-looking strategies to seize emerging global opportunities.

By now, Bangladesh has made significant progress on the first two counts. Notably, it has played a leading role at the WTO, representing the LDC Group and ensuring that concerns surrounding LDC graduation receive due attention. In 2020, the LDC Group tabled a proposal requesting a 12-year extension of all LDC-specific trade support measures after graduation.

After intense discussions, WTO members partially adopted a few elements of this proposal by: i) encouraging preference-granting countries to provide "a smooth and sustainable transition period" for the withdrawal of preferences; ii) extending LDC-specific technical assistance for three years after graduation; and iii) maintaining the peace clause for dispute settlement for three years after graduation.

While these developments are steps in the right direction, they fall

short of the original 12-year request, reflecting the systemic reluctance of some developed countries, particularly the US, to prolong LDC-specific flexibilities. As a result, Bangladesh must prepare for the reality of losing access to LDC-related benefits.

Bangladesh's priority must now be building domestic institutions, strengthening negotiation capacity, and leveraging new economic opportunities. LDC graduation presents a chance for Bangladesh to rethink its development model and position itself as a competitive, sustainable, and digitally driven economy.

Trade will remain the cornerstone

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of Bangladesh's integration into the global economy. To translate these opportunities into tangible benefits, Bangladesh must immediately implement a set of strategic action plans.

First, LDC graduation could make Bangladesh more attractive to foreign investors. However, this requires significant domestic legal and regulatory reforms. Outdated regulations, infrastructure gaps, and bureaucratic inefficiencies must be addressed to create a conducive investment climate. The demand for dedicated commercial courts continues to grow. The government must not only establish these courts

in Dhaka and Chattogram as initially planned but also prioritise their creation in at least six divisional headquarters, followed by an expansion into every district.

Second, Bangladesh's strategic location in the Asia-Pacific region offers immense potential for regional integration and connectivity. This region is growing rapidly and is home to over 200 regional and free trade agreements (FTA). Deeper economic integration with regional economies can diversify Bangladesh's exports and enhance economic resilience. Bangladesh should actively pursue FTAs with key trading partners.

Third, LDC graduation should be viewed as an opportunity to embrace sustainable industrialisation. Bangladesh should capitalise on its comparative green advantages, such as eco-friendly jute products and renewable energy. A roadmap for green economic transformation must be developed to align with global sustainability goals and standards.

Fourth, Bangladesh holds immense potential in digital trade, particularly in digitally delivered services. The country has already emerged as a leader in freelance digital services. To scale up, Bangladesh must develop a regulatory framework that enables and facilitates cross-border e-commerce. To pursue this, the domestic e-commerce sector must be strengthened by developing a trust-based business model that follows global best practices.

Fifth, SMEs are vital contributors to GDP and employment. To mitigate the negative impacts of graduation, particularly in cross-border trade, targeted policies must be developed. These should include granting SMEs greater access to Export Processing Zones (EPZs), thereby facilitating their smoother integration into global supply chains and boosting their competitiveness on the international stage.

It is crucial to assess whether the existing reform commissions have adequately addressed these priorities. The proposed consultative mechanism should design and implement targeted measures to fully capitalise on the opportunities presented by LDC graduation.

Can we bridge the generational gap and reform our democracy?



Dr Manzoor Ahmed
is professor emeritus at Brac University, chair of the Bangladesh ECD Network (BEN), and adviser to Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE). Views expressed in this article are his own.

MANZOOR AHMED

Are we witnessing a clash between the worldview and values of Gen-Z and the pre-millennial generations in our journey towards democracy? If so, what are the implications as the interim government completes six months of its tenure and begins consultations on the various reform commissions’ recommendations? How will the aim of building a broad consensus on reforms and charting the roadmap for the next phase of the journey work out?

Political parties of different stripes, in slightly varying tones, have been impatiently clamouring for a parliamentary election as early as possible after “essential reforms” so that the winners can take control of the government. The mention of “essential reforms” appears to be a nod to public demand for reform in public institutions and services. Noticeably, the political class is not asking for nationwide local government elections that could restore many essential local government services

the unprecedented brutality of the regime in repressing the protesters. Success has many claimants to paternity, while failure is an orphan. The political parties claim that they had prepared the ground over the years and that the student movement was merely the spark that ignited the fire. There is truth in this narrative, but the fact remains that the students were the vanguard at the critical stage. The political parties are reluctant to admit that their earlier efforts did not bring success. For that matter, they have not shown any contrition for their collective responsibility, beyond that of the Awami League, for the faltering democratic journey of the country since liberation.

Now, the youngsters have embarked on a campaign to reach out to the people in preparation for forming a new political party. They aim to change the political culture of intolerance, division, polarisation, and the absence of accountability that has dominated the political scene since the birth of Bangladesh. This

in the government, a new party of young people would be a “king’s party” that would compromise the interim government’s neutrality vis-à-vis the national election.

The generational divide is evident in the public dialogue on political transition, the performance of the interim government, and what should happen next. The known faces in the

of political and institutional reforms and forging a broadly unified vision for the journey towards democracy. The other side, with minor variations, argues that the reform agenda can and should be handled by a “political” government (meaning themselves). They also assert that the interim government has been inept in addressing immediate day-

Prof Muhammad Yunus has always upheld the role of young people in his vision for development and his expectations for the future of Bangladesh. He described the students as his “employer” because they invited and persuaded him to take on the task of heading the interim government. Introducing Mahfuj Alam, one of the three youth

for being partial to the presumptive new party and questioned the interim government’s ability to run a national election impartially. They ignore the work underway to empower the election commission to conduct elections independently, without government interference.

All stakeholders—Gen-Z and the rest—talk about the need for unity to move forward in our democratic journey. All seem to agree that a unified vision of basic goals and the steps to be taken is necessary. But with the divergent views of the young and the old regarding priorities and processes, how can these differences be reconciled? A realistic aim may be to forge a common understanding of the rules of the game regarding dialogue and, as much as possible, to reconcile the diverging visions by agreeing on a minimum common agenda of reforms that the interim government could initiate and that a future elected government could continue.

As discussions on the various reform commissions begin, the focus may be on the rules of engagement for all stakeholders—political parties, civil society, Gen-Z, and anti-discrimination activists—and the minimum common agenda for reforms. A part of this process would be the preparation of the July proclamation. The interim government seems eager to be involved, presumably to help minimise the generational divide, in formulating the July proclamation as a testament to the July-August uprising.



VISUAL: MAHIYA TABASSUM

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and let citizens engage in a political process. Nor do they ask for the election of a constituent assembly to settle constitutional and governance structure issues.

What appears to have exasperated the old-line political class is that young students succeeded where they had failed. The student-led uprising toppled the authoritarian regime, which had appeared to be invincible and set to continue indefinitely. The political parties’ 15-year struggle to unseat it had not brought the masses behind them as the students’ movement did—no doubt helped by

initiative has provoked ambivalent, if not outright negative reactions from some political parties.

Political old-timers say they have no objection to a new party of the young, but many betray their nervousness by denigrating this effort, sometimes offering contradictory reasoning. Three lines of argument are deployed by them: students must remain students, they are too inexperienced to handle politics, and a king’s party is not acceptable. How can immature youngsters make policies and run the country? Since three of the “student coordinators” of the movement are

talk-show circuit in electronic media and columnists and commentators in print media—mostly pre-millennials and millennials—betray their generational bias.

The talking heads on television are often the protagonists of one or another existing political party, along with some familiar faces from the media and civil society. Largely outnumbered by their older counterparts, the young representatives of the July-August movement, when invited to participate, are usually articulate in their arguments and clear in expressing their goals and plans. Often, the effort in the shows to offer diversity of views ends up being an argument between the young and the rest.

The young speakers generally take the position that the sacrifice of July-August was not just to have an election and hand over the government to the winning political party/parties without at least beginning a process

to-day problems, such as improving law and order and controlling prices. They claim that the people want an early parliamentary election (but presumably not a local government election). They insist that political parties are in touch with the people and speak for them. It is evident that they are not in touch with the Gen-Z population, which makes up at least a third of the country’s voters.

The anchors of talk shows are reluctant to challenge the often vacuous and self-serving assertions of political parties and older-generation pundits. The anchors themselves often appear sympathetic to the positions taken by the elders. Columnists, editorial writers in print media, and op-ed article writers, beyond rhetorical words about harnessing the energy and idealism of youth in nation-building, are at best ambivalent about the position presented by the young and the role they may play in shaping the country’s future.

representatives in the advisory council, to former US President Bill Clinton at an event in New York, Yunus described Mahfuj as the “mastermind” of the movement. I doubt that anyone in the audience took it literally to mean that Mahfuj singlehandedly orchestrated the fall of the Hasina regime. Yunus, in his usual effusive and generous way, had used a rhetorical expression. Talk shows and social media in Bangladesh were abuzz with discussions about Yunus being too deferential and submissive to students.

In an interview with *The Financial Times* at the World Economic Forum in Davos, speaking about events in Bangladesh, Yunus spoke of young participants in the anti-discrimination movement reaching out to the masses, preparing to form a political party of their own. He thought this might help bring about a much-needed change in the political culture of Bangladesh. Old-school politicians pounced on Yunus

Nationwide local government elections at the union and upazila levels would allow citizens to engage in the political process and improve local services, which have become nonfunctional since the disbanding of local councils.

An agreement to hold an election for a constituent assembly within three months would start the process of settling constitutional and state structure questions with citizen participation. The adoption of a constitution would then pave the way for parliamentary elections, with its structure and character (bicameral, proportional representation, women’s representation, etc) determined as prescribed in the newly adopted constitution. This step-by-step process would allow the necessary time and deliberation for the far-reaching reforms envisioned, helping to bridge the generational divide.

National unity alone can ensure stability and desired reforms



Saifur Rahman
is a senior IT specialist and certified professional.

SAIFUR RAHMAN

In August 2024, the chief adviser of the interim government said in his speech, “We are one family. We have one goal. We are committed to fulfilling the aspirations of our youth, and we are ready to take on this challenge.” This statement reflected his concern that if national unity collapsed, the achievements of the mass uprising could be lost. That very concern is now becoming evident.

Since taking over the country’s governance, the interim government has faced disruptions to public life from more than 170 movements driven by diverse vested interests. This wave of demonstrations arises from the perceived weakness of the interim administration, marked by fractured state institutions and the absence of a political party’s organisational strength. Protesters have exploited this vulnerability to push their demands—some legitimate, others serving personal agendas—at a time when maintaining national unity is more critical than ever. Since independence, political parties have weaponised divisive ideologies such as the “spirit of independence,” “Bengali vs Bangladeshi,” and “Pro-India vs Pro-Pakistan.” Although these differences are minimal in reality, they have been exaggerated to serve political agendas.

This deliberate polarisation has kept Bangladesh trapped in a cycle of disunity and stagnation. Oxford development economist Paul Collier refers to such situations as a “Conflict Trap,” where persistent division severely restricts a society’s potential for progress. To break free from this cycle, the country’s politics must prioritise public welfare over divisive narratives.

The previous government left the country’s economy and governance system in a fragile state. Due to the inefficiency of state institutions and the perceived weakness of the government, the law-and-order situation has deteriorated, commodity prices have soared, and extortion has become rampant. Continuous street protests threaten to paralyse public order, further worsening an already fragile situation.

When the interim government was formed, many hoped it would steer the country towards stability. However, six months down the line, that optimism has faded. Even the chief adviser recently acknowledged growing concerns over the government’s ability to manage the crisis.

Political theorists have long argued that while governments enforce laws, citizens must uphold them, and

political parties should act as a bridge between the state and the people. The current crisis has revealed weaknesses in all three areas.

The interim government has taken on the responsibility of managing a weakened state, where law enforcement, the judiciary, and public administration were dismantled by previous rulers. These institutions

police personnel. However, since such an expansion cannot happen overnight, deploying other disciplined forces is necessary to manage the country’s current crisis.

Military forces with expanded authority have been deployed, but their numbers remain limited for policing duties due to their primary defense responsibilities. Paramilitary

Leaders of the anti-discrimination student movement played a crucial role in recent political events and must now set a clear, purposeful direction. Forming a party with government support would merely repeat past mistakes. Instead, they should prioritise a long-term vision focused on addressing the root causes of underdevelopment. The most effective reform lies in fostering a politically aware and engaged citizenry—transforming individuals into active citizens. Although this is a lengthy process, it remains the only sustainable solution.

require extensive reforms, which cannot be achieved in the short term. Given this, the government must engage in open dialogue with political parties, civil society, and key stakeholders to present a clear roadmap for necessary reforms and announce a specific date for national elections. It appears the government is moving in that direction.

The country faces severe law and order challenges due to the lack of an impartial and effective police force. Currently, the police-to-population ratio in Bangladesh is significantly inadequate. To meet effective policing standards, Bangladesh needs to recruit a substantial number of additional

groups such as the Ansars, the Village Defence Party (VDP), and the Bangladesh National Cadet Corps (BNCC), along with retired military and law enforcement personnel, can play a vital role in maintaining public order. The VDP alone consists of thousands of trained individuals with strong grassroots connections, making it particularly well-suited to managing law and order in upazilas and rural areas.

Finally, the performance of the advisers within the interim government must be critically assessed. Formed hastily amid a national crisis, the government, now after six months in power, must

identify and replace underperforming advisers with competent, results-driven individuals.

Political parties must move beyond verbal support and actively assist the government. While insisting on a definitive election date is logical, political parties must play an active role in resolving several critical national issues—improving law and order being one of them.

During Durga Puja, political parties played a commendable role in protecting Hindu temples. A similar model could be adopted to combat extortion, highway robbery, and the activities of teenage gangs through community policing initiatives. This would have the added benefit of increasing public support for the parties, which would help them in the next election.

Recent protests by students, bureaucrats, and labour unions have prioritised narrow interests over national stability, disrupting public life. Political parties, leveraging their networks within these groups, should mediate these grievances through constructive dialogue, ensuring short-term demands do not aggravate the current crisis.

A political party that claims broad public support must demonstrate it by actively engaging with all segments of society to improve current conditions. Failing to do so weakens its credibility and casts doubt on its ability to lead a future government. With public scrutiny at its peak, the party’s actions today will significantly shape voter sentiment in upcoming elections.

Leaders of the anti-discrimination student movement played a crucial role in recent political events and must now set a clear, purposeful

direction. Forming a party with government support would merely repeat past mistakes. Instead, they should prioritise a long-term vision focused on addressing the root causes of underdevelopment. The most effective reform lies in fostering a politically aware and engaged citizenry—transforming individuals into active citizens. Although this is a lengthy process, it remains the only sustainable solution.

Thus, the primary aim of a new political party formed by students should be to spearhead systemic reforms by confronting colonial-era structures that hinder effective governance. Their most significant role would be to educate grassroots communities, fostering socio-political awareness and mobilising citizens to stand against injustice, corruption, and deep-rooted misgovernance. By choosing to remain in opposition rather than pursuing power, they can serve as an effective watchdog—ensuring government accountability without becoming entangled in it. Bangladesh is at a critical juncture. The August 5 movement has highlighted the urgent need for structural reform, but achieving this will require the active participation of all stakeholders. Playing the blame game will not resolve the crisis. The country’s future depends on shared responsibility, strategic reforms, and a commitment to unity. If the interim government fails, it will not be their failure alone—it will be a collective failure of the political class, civil society, and the people. Only a unified, pragmatic approach can enable Bangladesh to break free from the cycle of conflict and division. The time to act is now.

Global harm reduction organisations urge recognition of tobacco harm reduction

STAR HEALTH REPORT

Advocacy organisations in Africa, Latin America, and Asia Pacific— In a united effort, representing millions of adult consumers who use nicotine products that do not involve combustion, they have sent a letter to the Special Rapporteur to the United Nations Human Rights Council. The correspondence addresses recent comments made in a recent report regarding the validity of Tobacco Harm Reduction and urges the United Nations to recognise its importance in promoting public health.

The letter, signed by organisations in Latin America, Africa, and Asia Pacific, highlights the significant impact that THR has had on reducing smoking rates and improving public health in their respective regions. It also emphasises the need for the United Nations to acknowledge and support THR as a legitimate harm reduction strategy, as they have already done with drugs and sex work.

According to the World Health Organisation, tobacco use is responsible for over 8 million deaths each year, with the majority of these deaths occurring in low- and middle-income countries.

Reducing the harm from tobacco includes the use of alternative nicotine products that have been proven to be an effective tool in reducing the harm caused by traditional combustible cigarettes. The evidence is in reduced smoking rates in the United Kingdom, Japan, New Zealand, and Sweden. The letter urges the United Nations to take a science-based approach and recognise the validity of THR as a harm reduction strategy. It also calls for the inclusion of THR in the upcoming United Nations High-Level Meeting on Non-Communicable Diseases, as well as in future tobacco control policies and initiatives.



Devil’s Breath: truth or urban legend?

DR ZUBAIR KHALED HUQ

Stories about Datura are heard since childhood. One can be hypnotised if you take or inhale Datura. Scopolamine is also present in Jimson Weed (*Datura stramonium*), a plant found in most of the Latin American countries. Devil’s Breath effects seem to be quite like Datura. Pharmacologically, scopolamine is classified as an anticholinergic medication and belladonna alkaloid.

We see and hear news about its charismatic influence by the imposters. Blown into the face, glued in slips, to render unaware citizens incapacitated. A state that left victims with no ability to control their actions, leaving them at risk of being robbed, goods stolen, or raped by a criminal. Are these scenes totally real or an urban legend making a mockery?

Devil’s Breath is derived from the flower of the “Borrachero” shrub, common in Colombia. The seeds, when powdered and extracted, contain a chemical similar to scopolamine called “Burandanga.” The compound leads to



hallucinations, frightening images, and a lack of free will. Amnesia, leaving the victim powerless to recall events or identify perpetrators. It blocks the muscarinic receptors, causing hallucination.

Also used as medicine to reduce gastric motility in vomiting and seasickness. The active ingredient is available in a 1 milligram transdermal patch worn behind the ear to reduce motion sickness or postoperative nausea and vomiting. Whereas the criminals use large amounts, like grams and milligrams, that dose is toxic. Motor activity is blocked, starts to work within twenty minutes, and remains up to eight hours.

Overdose can cause heart attack, respiratory failure, and death. In large doses, it can cause respiratory failure and death. Overdoses can lead to fast heart rate, dilated pupils, toxic psychosis, confusion, vivid hallucinations, seizures, or coma, among other events; it can also be added to food and drinks. It can even be made in the laboratories.

These effects are due to oral administration in liquid or powder form in foods and beverages, not being blown into one’s face or absorbed via a piece of soaked paper. Side effects like dry mouth, blurred vision, headache, urinary retention, and dizziness can occur even at the low dose.

As a preventive measure, one can wear a mask outside and not leave food or drinks unattended when travelling. Do not accept food or drinks from strangers. Seek medical assistance immediately if you believe you have been drugged.

The writer is a gerontologist and a public health specialist.
E-mail: zubairkhaledjoy@gmail.com

Thinking of switching your diet? Choose the Mediterranean diet



MD BILLAL HOSSEN

Are you tired of eating biryani, fried chicken, or fast food regularly? Are you looking for a healthy solution? If yes, a Mediterranean diet can be the best solution for your health.

The Mediterranean diet is a traditional diet followed by the people living along the borderlands of the Mediterranean Sea and originated during the 1960s in Greece and Southern Italy. The style of this diet is unique and appealing.

The Mediterranean diet prioritises vegetables, fruits, whole grains (such as rice, wheat, barley, and maize), beans, nuts, seeds, and legumes. It also includes low-fat or fat-free dairy products, fish, poultry, eggs, and vegetable oils in moderate amounts.

This diet restricts excessive sugary foods, excessive oily foods, sugary beverages, ultra-high processed foods (UHPF), refined carbohydrates,

saturated fats, and processed meats.

If you want to be healthy, you must choose the Mediterranean diet. While shifting dietary patterns, you can wisely select the Mediterranean style, as it is one of the best dietary styles to heal your body.

This diet has several potential benefits. They are as follows:

- It helps maintain the body’s cholesterol level in a homeostatic condition, preventing heart disease and stroke.
- It reduces the risk of obesity as the diet consists of low carbohydrates and fats.
- It reduces inflammation and oxidative stress in the body as the diet is rich in different types of antioxidants (such as polyphenols, flavonoids, and carotenoids) and also contains complex phytonutrients that exert beneficial effects on our body.
- It controls blood sugar levels as the Mediterranean diet is rich in insoluble fibre from fruits and vegetables.
- It prevents plaque formation in the arteries and maintains a proper balance of fat in the human body.
- It also boosts brain health.

Besides these benefits, the Mediterranean diet has many other positive impacts on our body. When an individual wants to switch their diet from a traditional Western pattern to a healthy meal pattern, they can easily follow the guidelines of the Mediterranean diet. This can be one of the best decisions in life. In fact, everyone should try to follow this diet to become physically, mentally, and socially fit.

The writer is a Lecturer at the Department of Food Engineering and Nutrition Science at State University of Bangladesh. Email: billal.jet@sub.edu.bd

Pioneering global delivery of childhood cancer medications

The World Health Organisation (WHO) and St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital have launched the distribution of essential childhood cancer medicines in Mongolia and Uzbekistan as part of the Global Platform for Access to Childhood Cancer Medicines. This initiative aims to provide free, quality-assured cancer treatments to children in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). The treatments will reach approximately 5000 children across 30 hospitals within these countries this year, with upcoming shipments planned for Ecuador, Jordan, Nepal, and Zambia.

The Global Platform is the first of its kind and will eventually expand to 50 countries over the next 5 to 7 years. Its goal is to treat 120,000 children with cancer in LMICs, significantly reducing mortality rates, as childhood cancer survival rates in these countries are often below 30%, far lower than in high-income nations.

WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus emphasised the importance of the initiative, stating, “For too long, children with cancer have lacked access to life-saving medicines.” St. Jude CEO Dr. James R. Downing added, “A child’s chances of surviving cancer are largely determined by where they are born,” highlighting the stark disparities in global healthcare.

Launched in 2021, the platform unites governments, the pharmaceutical industry, and NGOs to provide comprehensive support, from market shaping to medicine selection and treatment standards.

Source: World Health Organisation



Strengthening alliances and building movements to end female genital mutilation

Joint statement by UNFPA Executive Director Dr Natalia Kanem, UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell and WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus



Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a grave violation of human rights that causes lifelong physical, emotional, and psychological harm to girls and women. It currently affects over 230 million girls and women, and by 2030, an estimated 27 million more could suffer this abuse if immediate action is not taken.

On the International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM, UNFPA, UNICEF, and WHO reaffirm their commitment to ending this harmful practice. The theme for this year, “*Stepping up the pace: Strengthening alliances and building movements to end female genital mutilation*,” emphasises the importance of collaborative efforts. Countries like Kenya and Uganda show that strengthening alliances and community-led actions can drive significant change.

Since the launch of the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme in 2008, nearly 7 million girls and women have gained access to prevention and protection services. Moreover, 48 million people have publicly pledged to abandon FGM, and 220 million individuals have been reached through mass media campaigns. Over the past two years, grassroots organisations and community workers have been key in galvanising change.

However, progress remains fragile. In the Gambia, for example, there have been attempts to repeal the ban on FGM, threatening decades of hard-won progress. Only seven countries are on track to meet the Sustainable Development Goal of ending FGM by 2030. Urgent action, stronger alliances, greater accountability, and investment in proven interventions are crucial to achieving this goal.

The time to end FGM is now, and every individual has a role to play in protecting girls and ensuring their rights are upheld.

Source: World Health Organisation

Advances in cancer treatment and the role of medical oncology

STAR HEALTH DESK

On 4 February 2025, the global community observed World Cancer Day, a time to raise awareness about cancer prevention, detection, and treatment. This year’s theme, “*Close the Care Gap*,” highlighted the importance of equitable access to cancer care and the latest advancements in oncology. In line with this mission, we spoke with Dr Tan Wei Chong, a Consultant in Medical Oncology at the National Cancer Centre, Singapore, to explore the evolving landscape of cancer treatment and the critical role of early detection and personalised medicine. Dr Tan specialises in lung and genitourinary cancers and has extensive experience in managing complex cancer cases.

1. The role of a medical oncologist
Medical oncologists focus on the medical aspects of cancer treatment, which traditionally meant chemotherapy. However, with advancements over the last two decades, their role has expanded to include immunotherapy, targeted therapy, and hormonal therapy. “We work alongside surgeons and radiation oncologists to provide comprehensive care, especially for patients with locally advanced or metastatic cancer,” he said.

2. Advances in cancer treatments
Dr Tan highlighted significant progress in immunotherapy and targeted therapy. “Immunotherapy, particularly immune checkpoint inhibitors, has revolutionised treatment, offering better efficacy and fewer side effects,” he said. He also noted the rise of targeted therapy, especially in lung cancer. “In Asia, many non-smoking-related lung cancers have specific mutations that can be targeted, allowing patients to maintain a good quality of life.”

3. Cancer awareness and early

detection
Modern treatments have improved outcomes. “While cancer is not always curable, it is almost always treatable. The key is finding the right treatment for the right patient,” he said. He stressed the importance of early detection through screening programmes for cancers like breast, cervical, and colon cancer. “Early detection can lead to early intervention, greatly improving the chances of a cure,” he explained.

4. Managing side effects



Dr Tan discussed advancements in managing treatment side effects. “With modern antiemetics and supportive treatments, most patients can continue their treatment without hospitalisation,” he said. He emphasised the importance of patient education. “Patients need to be aware of potential side effects and report symptoms like fever promptly.”

5. Preventing common cancers
Dr Tan highlighted the role of lifestyle changes in cancer prevention. “Smoking and alcohol consumption are major risk factors. Reducing

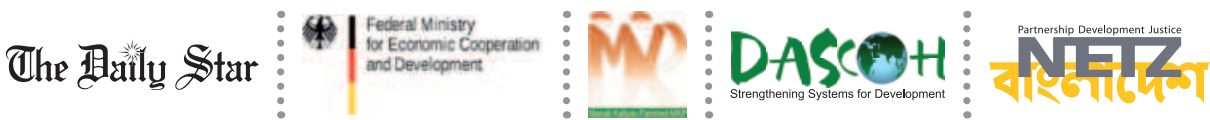
tobacco exposure, especially in Asia, could significantly impact cancer incidence,” he said. He also underscored the importance of screening programmes for breast and cervical cancer.

6. Personalised medicine
Dr Tan explained how personalised medicine has transformed oncology. “We can now tailor therapies based on the genetic makeup of a patient’s tumour. This approach is revolutionising cancer care,” he said.

7. Message for Bangladeshis
Dr Tan shared a message for individuals and families dealing with cancer in Bangladesh. “Early detection and access to the right treatments are key. I encourage patients to seek timely medical advice and adhere to screening programmes,” he said. For healthcare providers, he emphasised staying updated with the latest advancements in oncology.

These insights highlight the importance of a multidisciplinary approach to cancer care, the promise of personalised medicine, and the critical role of early detection and lifestyle changes in reducing cancer risk.





TOWARDS SAFER DIGITAL SPACES

Enhancing Legal and Policy Responses to VAWG in Bangladesh

NETZ Bangladesh in collaboration with The Daily Star organised a roundtable titled, "Towards Safer Digital Spaces: Enhancing Legal and Policy Responses to VAWG in Bangladesh," on December 13, 2024. Here we publish a summary of the discussion.



Shahidul Islam,
Director, NETZ
Bangladesh

Women are doubly marginalised, first by their gender and then by their socio-economic circumstances, such as living in poverty or belonging to marginalised groups like ethnic minorities. They face persistent and emerging challenges, particularly in cyberspace. Like any innovation, cyberspace brings its own set of issues, including patterns of misuse and the urgent need for a robust legal framework to prevent exploitation. However, addressing these challenges has been hindered by a lack of political, social, mental, philosophical, and structural preparedness.

Although the state has undertaken initiatives involving law enforcement agencies and other departments, significant gaps remain due to the time required by authorities to comprehensively understand these issues. Other notable barriers include legal loopholes, difficulties in

(FGDs) with girls, young women, and their mothers; 12 Key Informant Interviews (KIs); eight in-depth interviews (IDIs); and four participatory rural appraisals (PRAs). Additionally, we surveyed 300 respondents.

Findings revealed that 57% of respondents used the internet weekly, and 78.7% of women reported experiencing TF-VAW. Among these, 78.4% occurred on Facebook, while 28% were through messaging services like WhatsApp and Emo. Many women altered their online behaviour to mitigate risks: 84% restricted their profiles to private settings, 60% avoided sharing personal numbers, and 50% limited their social media presence.

The consequences of TF-VAW extended beyond cyberspace. Around 10.7% of women either lost or changed jobs, and 14.3% of female students changed schools or stopped attending altogether. Mental health issues affected 35% of women subjected to online threats.

Addressing TF-VAW presents numerous challenges, including a conceptual gap between cybercrime and digital harassment targeting women. Law enforcement struggles to apply the appropriate legislation, such as the Pornography Control Act 2012, Cyber Security Act 2023, or Women and Children Violence Protection Law 2000. Moreover, existing laws do not adequately cover digital violence against women.

The absence of laws addressing cyberbullying, hate speech, and digital



action. However, many girls remain unaware of cyberbullying and lack the necessary skills to respond effectively to such incidents. This highlights the pressing need for targeted awareness programmes and practical tools to empower them, ensuring that these issues are promptly addressed and that victims feel supported in seeking help.



Md. Minarul Islam,
Student Forum
Member

It is essential to educate new users, particularly students, on identifying and responding to TF-VAW. The ICT Ministry could play a pivotal role by developing protocols to address these issues, enabling victims to report incidents anonymously and thereby reducing the impact of social stigma. Collaboration with the Department of Women's Affairs would further strengthen prevention efforts. Additionally, support from teachers and relevant authorities is crucial in fostering awareness and establishing a robust framework to effectively address and prevent technology-facilitated violence.



Mst. Liza Zoni,
Student Forum
Member, Polashbari
High School, Birol,
Dinajpur

Cybercrime is increasingly prevalent in both urban and rural areas, affecting individuals across various demographics. A friend of mine recently experienced harassment via social media, leaving her distressed and unsure of how to respond. When she shared the issue with me, we decided to report it to a teacher. His prompt response and unwavering support ensured the matter was resolved swiftly and effectively. This experience underscores the importance of seeking timely assistance and fostering a supportive environment to combat cybercrime.



Sarwat Tarannum Nadia, Gender Focal,
MRDI

With technological advancements, gender-based violence has evolved to include forms such as cyberbullying, and crimes driven by artificial intelligence, such as deepfakes, are beginning to surface in Bangladesh. Proactive awareness initiatives are essential to address these emerging issues.

Mass media plays a critical role in creating public awareness, as gender-based violence cannot be tackled in isolation. A holistic approach is necessary, involving awareness campaigns for children and women, with journalists bringing these issues into public discourse.



Israt Jahan, Project
Director, YUKTA
Project & Capacity
Building Manager,
DASCOH Foundation

Our research indicates that victims frequently hesitate to share their experiences with their families due to social stigma and a lack of awareness, leaving them isolated and unsupported. Tackling this issue necessitates raising awareness not only within student forums but also among families about responsible internet use and how to offer support in cases of harassment. Without emotional and mental support from their families, victims may withdraw from school or resort to self-destructive behaviours.



Rakiba Yasmin,
Project Director,
YUKTA Project, MKP

Violence against women is a global issue demanding urgent attention. To raise awareness, I recommend incorporating the potential dangers of internet usage into textbooks, accompanied by case-study-based stories to highlight real incidents.

Additionally, many pre-installed applications on new mobile devices,

which often encourage addictive behaviour, cannot be uninstalled and must be force-stopped. This issue needs to be addressed at the policy level.



Irin Parvin Pinki,
CSO Member, Paba,
Rajshahi

As primary victims of cybercrimes, girls and women require parental awareness and support. Blaming them does nothing to resolve the issue. By fostering open, friendly relationships, parents can help prevent mistakes and ensure children make informed decisions online.



Humayn Kabir Azam,
Assistant Professor of
ICT, Rajbari College,
Chapai Nawabganj,
CSO Member

In contrast to my generation, which grew up in the early 1980s, today's students seem less motivated to attend classrooms. They spending a significant amount of time outside the classroom, deeply immersed in digital platforms. This growing trend demands immediate attention and regulation—this is a sincere appeal to the relevant authorities.



Mst. Mahabuba Yeasmin, Member,
Agra Village CSO,
Birol, Dinajpur

My personal experience with cyber safety has been profoundly unsettling, exemplified by a troubling case involving a newlywed couple. The couple initially connected through mobile phones, eventually leading to marriage. However, after just two years, the husband abandoned his wife. Recently, he resumed contact, expressing renewed interest and urging her to relocate to Dhaka despite her unwillingness. His persistent, unwanted messages constitute harassment and reflect the broader challenges faced by victims of digital violence.



Md. Sohan Islam,
Student Forum
Member, Danghirhat
School and College,
Taragonj, Rangpur

One of the most distressing incidents I recently witnessed involved a classmate who had been subjected to repeated bullying through fake Facebook, Instagram, and Messenger accounts. Upon further investigation, I discovered that this harassment had been occurring for a considerable period. We immediately reported the matter to the police, ensuring that the issue was given the attention it deserved.



Md. Belal Hossain,
Member, Hariarekuthi
Union CSO, Taragonj,
Rangpur

I recently came across the case whose Facebook ID was registered a General Diary (GD), and the issue was resolved however could not identify the perpetrator. I believe the concerned ministry should take proactive measures to address this issue



Nishath Sultana,
Director - Influencing,
Campaign and
Communications,
Plan International
Bangladesh

We know, the Police Cyber Support for Women initiative, launched in November 2020, has received 18,000 reports of gender-based violence through its helpline, highlighting the extent of the issue. To tackle these challenges, it is crucial to enhance the capacity of law enforcement agencies, as current help desks face significant limitations. Furthermore, the recently abolished Cyber Security Act failed to adequately address digital harassment. A stronger focus on combating online gender-based violence is essential to protect women and ensure the success of the

country's digital initiatives.



Jinat Ara Haque, Chief
Executive, WE CAN
On Human Rights
Day, phrases like
"preventive,"
"transformative," and
"responsive" dominate

discussions. However, the focus must shift towards leveraging technology as a tool for empowerment.

Government campaigns should be strategically crafted to address and protect the "Boddho Duwar" (closed doors) and "Ruddho Pran" (stilled lives) of women, drawing inspiration from the evocative expressions of Begum Rokeya.

Bridging the intergenerational gap also emerges as a critical priority in this context. Ultimately, reducing and eventually eliminating violence against women demands sustained cooperation between men and women. This calls for a societal shift in attitudes rather than reliance on superficial campaigns.



Masuma Billah,
Programme Head,
Gender Justice &
Diversity Programme,
BRAC

While school students benefit from accessing educational materials online, their digital engagement must be closely monitored to ensure their safety. In rural areas, orientation programmes should actively involve teachers to guide and protect students, helping them navigate the digital world responsibly.

The alarming increase in suicides among girls due to mental distress underscores the urgency of addressing these issues. Comprehensive strategies, along with effective community engagement, are crucial to safeguarding the mental and emotional well-being of young people, especially girls, in the digital age.



Abu Sayed Md. Kamruzzaman, NDC,
Additional Secretary,
ICT Division & Director
General, National
Cyber Security
Agency, Information
& Communication Technology (ICT)
Division

The Cyber Security Act includes provisions under Sections 21, 24, and 25 to address sexual harassment and the dissemination of offensive content. While this Act improves upon existing laws, some adjustments have been made, such as recognising bullying as an offence and increasing penalties for hacking-related crimes. However, verbal harassment remains unclassified as an offence.

To combat cyber offences, the government has established a strong framework. A central committee under the ICT Department oversees these efforts, while district-level committees, led by district commissioners, and upazila-level committees, led by UNOs, manage local enforcement. Additionally, every school and college is now required to form committees to address cyber-related issues.

Awareness is crucial. Citizens must be informed about cyber offences and the available remedies. In this regard, a national helpline (3338) and a cyber security awareness call centre (13219) have been launched, specifically to assist teenagers who may feel uncomfortable discussing their problems with guardians or teachers.



Hasne Ara Begum,
Social Development
and Gender Expert,
Asian Development
Bank (ADB)

Rather than tackling these problems collectively, the burden is frequently shifted onto parents or the youth themselves. Responsibility must be shared by all.

While it is encouraging to see policies being revised, an ideological focus on protection—rather than mere prevention—must underpin every act and policy to ensure meaningful progress.

While discussions around digital cyber security often emphasise centralised government control, there is a notable lack of platforms for individuals to report incidents promptly. A robust system is needed to process allegations in real time, categorise cases effectively, and ensure timely support for victims.

Legislation must go beyond punishing offenders to also raising awareness about the consequences of such actions. Although a grassroots government structure exists, its functionality and sensitivity in addressing these issues require critical evaluation.



Md. Manir Hossain,
Additional Director
(Deputy Secretary),
Department of Women
Affairs Ministry,
MOWCA

The Government of Bangladesh is committed to protecting women's rights through legislation. However, it is imperative that these laws are not only established but also enforced effectively. Additionally, public awareness of rights must be significantly enhanced.

Since its inception, the Department of Women Affairs has tirelessly advocated for gender equality, striving to create equitable opportunities for women and children in diverse contexts. Its programmes and training initiatives focus on improving the digital skills of Bangladeshi women while prioritising their safety in an interconnected world.

At the district and upazila levels, committees focused on the prevention of violence against women and children are working diligently to eliminate hostilities. Furthermore, the National Action Plan for the Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children (2018-2030) is being implemented with meaningful impact.



Taherul Huq Chauhan, Additional
Deputy Inspector
General of Police,
Bangladesh Police

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police must actively negotiate and design daily action plans to address complaints lodged by women, most of which pertain to violence. In the digital sphere, Bangladeshi children and youths are increasingly exposing themselves on social media, often driven by a desire for quick recognition and fame.

The Cyber Security Act of 2023 lacks a clear definition of 'harassment,' and similar ambiguities exist in the Suppression of Violence Against Women and Children Act, particularly within its sexual harassment provisions. For laws to be effective, they must reflect grassroots realities.

The absence of a comprehensive Financial Crimes Act is a critical gap, as current legislation on money laundering is insufficient to address the complexities of modern financial fraud. Police institutions often encounter challenges in addressing such cases, requiring further clarity and reform in the legal framework.



Afsana Binte Amin,
Programme Manager,
Equal Human Rights,
NETZ Bangladesh

Each year, on December 9, we commemorate the legacy of Begum Rokeya, a pioneer of Bengali feminist thought and a staunch advocate for women's rights during British India. Her contributions remain central to the history of gender politics in the region.

The harassment of women in public spaces, exacerbated by the misuse of technology, demands urgent attention. Community involvement and collective action are indispensable in addressing this growing issue effectively. As we confront gender-based violence within virtual spaces, we must adopt proactive strategies to ensure protection and empowerment.



Tanjim Ferdous,
In Charge, NGOs &
Foreign Missions,
Business Development
Team, The Daily Star &
Moderator

The increasing use of technology has given rise to a new concern: TF-VAWG. This not only compromises the safety of women but also limits their participation in the digital sphere. Such violence creates mental distress and acts as a barrier to social and economic empowerment. Despite existing laws and policies aimed at preventing violence against women and children, no specific legislation has been introduced to combat technology-facilitated violence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- » Enact a comprehensive sexual harassment law that reflects grassroots realities and effectively addresses TF-VAWG.
- » Strengthen coordination among the ICT Ministry, Ministry of Women Affairs, and Police Department to enhance the support system.
- » Develop and implement comprehensive capacity-building programmes for law enforcement agencies to foster gender sensitivity and enhance their technical expertise.
- » Provide proper orientation and guidance on safe online practices to new internet users, especially in rural areas.
- » Promote parental awareness

- of digital monitoring tools to supervise children's mobile phone usage responsibly.
- » Engage parents, schools, and NGOs in collaborative safety programmes to address cybercrime.
- » Conduct awareness campaigns to inform citizens about cyber offences and available remedies.
- » Develop a robust system to address allegations in real time, categorise cases effectively, and ensure timely support for victims.
- » Engage teachers in rural orientation programmes to guide students responsibly through the digital world, and incorporate internet safety topics and real-case studies into textbooks.

implementation, and women's limited awareness of justice mechanisms.

We initiated this research to support the state's efforts by involving local communities and identifying areas where policies and strategies can be improved. Today's discussion offers an opportunity to build a more comprehensive understanding through insights from the research team, lessons learned from other organisations, and dialogue with government representatives.



Sara Khatun,
Programme Manager,
Equal Human Rights,
NETZ Bangladesh
(Keynote presentation)

Despite the existence of over 25 policy instruments designed to protect women's rights, the reality of violence against women (VAW) in Bangladesh remains deeply concerning. While the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) provides an overview of VAW through its national surveys, it does not include specific data on Technology-Facilitated Violence Against Women (TF-VAW).

The COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath saw a surge in technology use, but this rapid shift revealed critical gaps in understanding technology's risks. This lack of knowledge has created new opportunities for violence, particularly targeting women. In our study, conducted across eight divisions—Rajshahi, Natore, Joypurhat, Chapainawabganj, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Panchagarh, and Nilphamari—we documented various forms of online violence. These areas, already prone to gender-based violence (GBV) such as child marriage, have also experienced TF-VAW.

While existing reports highlight VAW, the representation of TF-VAW is minimal. Furthermore, most studies focus on internet users, neglecting women who rely on other communication technologies. This oversight inspired our research, which aimed to explore a broader scope of VAW, with particular attention to TF-VAW, while assessing community awareness, existing challenges, and policy gaps.

Our mixed-method study, conducted by Mamunur Rahman between July and November 2023, involved 11 focus group discussions

sexual harassment exacerbates the problem. Social stigma and concerns about family reputation deter many victims from reporting cases, while the limited understanding and lack of gender sensitivity among law enforcement agencies undermine existing support mechanisms.

To effectively combat TF-VAW, it is essential to develop comprehensive legislation addressing sexual harassment, including technology-facilitated VAW. Community awareness campaigns, involving both government and NGOs, must be prioritised alongside capacity-building initiatives for law enforcement to enhance gender sensitivity and technical expertise. Strengthening coordination between women's help desks and cyber support units is crucial, as is developing online tools, helplines, and psychosocial support services for victims.



Mahira Mamun,
Research Team
Member and Co-
founder, Ella Pad

Students as well as community members those some lacked internet access, others, despite limited use, had already experienced technology-facilitated violence.

New internet users, particularly in rural areas, often lack proper orientation and guidance on safe online practices. They need structured training to navigate digital spaces responsibly, including managing social media interactions, blocking strangers, and implementing safety measures.



Mst. Hafiza Khatun,
Student Forum
Member, Damkura
High School, Paba,
Rajshahi

One of my classmates experienced cyberbullying and threats from her private tutor on social media. Fortunately, her awareness of cyberbullying prompted her to inform a teacher, who subsequently reported the matter to the head teacher, leading to its resolution. Her knowledge, acquired through the student forum, empowered her to take appropriate

ESSAY

Desire, Identity, and the boundaries of silence

The unraveling complexity of Saikat Majumdar's literary universe



ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

The characters in both novels are forced to navigate their yearning for authenticity in environments that stifle individuality in favor of conformity.

NAMRATA

Saikat Majumdar, a professor of English and Creative Writing at Ashoka University, is a writer whose works delve deep into the intricacies of identity, desire, and the tensions between personal yearnings and institutional expectations. With novels such as *The Firebird* (Hachette India, 2015), *The Scent of God* (Simon and Schuster India, 2019), and *The Remains of the Body* (Vintage Books, 2024), Majumdar has established himself as a unique voice in contemporary Indian literature. A seasoned writer and academic, Majumdar's literary trajectory is marked by a continuous exploration of human longing, repression, and the complex interplay between the self and societal structures. His previous works, such as *The Firebird*—also published as *Play House* (The Permanent Press, 2017) in the US—and *The Remains of the Body*, further illuminate his distinctive voice, weaving together intricate psychological landscapes with critical commentaries on class, culture, and the human condition. In *The Scent of God*, Majumdar's hallmark narrative approach emerges clearly: a sensitive, lyrical engagement with the inner lives of his characters,

whose desires and vulnerabilities often clash with the cultural and institutional structures around them. Much like in his earlier works, Majumdar uses settings that are not merely backdrops but almost characters in their own right. Whether in the suffocating, monastic world of *The Scent of God* or the theatre-focused realm of *Play House*, his settings are carefully crafted to reflect both the outward constraints of society and the internal struggles of the protagonists; these characters often find themselves caught in systems that demand conformity. This tension between individuality and socialisation is a recurring theme in Majumdar's writing, shaping the lives of his characters in ways both subtle and powerful. Themes of desire, identity, and alienation persistently take center stage in his works, offering a layered and nuanced exploration of the human condition. In *The Firebird*, the protagonist's life is an intricate dance between his pursuit of personal artistic fulfillment and the oppressive societal forces that demand conformity. Majumdar delves into the tension between the artist's creative desires and the constraining expectations imposed by the institutions that seek to shape his art. This internal conflict is not merely personal, it is

deeply tied to the broader societal norms and pressures that dictate who one should be. Majumdar's portrayal of the artist's struggle is one of yearning—an attempt to carve out an authentic identity within a world that demands adherence to conventional norms. This thematic exploration of selfhood is not only a reflection of individual longing but also an examination of the dissonance between the private and public selves. In *The Scent of God*, these themes of desire and identity are amplified and made complicated within the context of religious and monastic life. The protagonist, Anirvan, is drawn to the serenity and discipline of monastic life, hoping to achieve purity and spiritual enlightenment. Yet, his monastic aspirations are continually thwarted by his profound emotional and physical attraction to another person, Kajol. This conflict between spiritual aspiration and earthly desire reflects a deeper struggle within Anirvan's identity. While the monastic order professes celibacy and purity, Anirvan's desires—quiet, yet undeniable—force him to confront the contradictions of the very space he has chosen for transcendence. His journey becomes not just one of spiritual enlightenment but also one of grappling with the tensions between the self he

is taught to be and the self he cannot deny. Majumdar's treatment of religious communities in this book echoes the same questions explored in *The Firebird*, though this time with a sharper focus on the limitations and contradictions inherent in the structures meant to guide moral and spiritual lives. Both novels probe the ways in which systems—be it art institutions or monastic orders—create spaces for individuals to form their identities, but these spaces are often fraught with tension. In the case of *The Firebird*, the artist's identity is formed and constrained by the expectations of society, while in *The Scent of God*, Anirvan's identity is shaped by the monastic vow of celibacy, even as he struggles against the desires that threaten to disrupt it. Majumdar's works poignantly explore the tension between institutionalised ideals and human desires, illustrating the ways in which institutions—whether artistic, religious, or societal—attempt to control, shape, and suppress natural human yearnings. Majumdar suggests that desire is not a simple force to be eradicated or ignored, but an integral part of identity that informs who we are. The characters in *The Scent of God* cannot fully suppress their longings, and as they try to reconcile their desires with the monastic discipline they have chosen, they experience profound internal conflict. This conflict extends beyond mere sexual or romantic desires and speaks to a broader struggle between personal authenticity and the external pressures of institutional expectations. Majumdar's exploration of this internal dissonance reveals that desires—whether they are related to love, passion, or simply the yearning for a deeper connection with oneself—are inextricably bound to our sense of self. When these desires are repressed or misunderstood by institutional frameworks, they can distort a person's sense of who they are and how they fit into the world around them. *The Firebird* explores the artist's struggle to reconcile personal ambition and societal expectations similarly underscores Majumdar's central theme: the tension between personal desires and external pressures. The artist in this book seeks creative authenticity, yet finds himself ensnared by the rigid structures of the art world, which demand conformity and subordination. Here, the internal conflict is not just about artistic expression but about the very act of self-definition—how one's identity is shaped by forces both external and internal. Like the monks in *The Scent of God*, the artist here too must contend with the limitations placed

on him by the institutional forces that define what is “acceptable” or “worthy.” Majumdar deftly shows that the repression of personal desires—whether artistic, emotional, or otherwise—often results in alienation. The characters in both novels are forced to navigate their yearning for authenticity in environments that stifle individuality in favor of conformity. The alienation that arises from this conflict is a central theme in Majumdar's work, one that reflects the broader societal reality where individuals often find themselves at odds with the expectations placed upon them. In both *The Scent of God* and *The Firebird*, the characters' struggles are emblematic of the wider human experience of yearning for a true sense of self in the face of external impositions. These institutional spaces—the monastery in *The Scent of God* and the art world in *The Firebird*—attempt to channel and mold the desires of their members, but in doing so, they inadvertently create spaces of profound alienation. The characters' inability to fully reconcile their inner selves with the roles they are expected to play leads them to question their identities, their desires, and the very systems that try to define them. Moreover, Majumdar has a unique way of layering his novels with socio-political undertones. In *The Scent of God*, the cloistered world of the boarding school, isolated from the outside world, is gradually pierced by the outside forces of political tension, social inequalities, and the rawness of human survival. Similarly, *The Firebird* interrogates the world of art and theatre, offering a critique of performance as both a form of expression and a mechanism of control. These works are grounded in a keen awareness of the larger socio-political world that influences and shapes the personal lives of the characters. In *The Remains of the Body*, his most recent work, Majumdar continues to explore the internal landscape of identity, but with a sharper focus on the body—both its materiality and its symbolic significance. This shift suggests an ongoing deepening of his engagement with the notion of selfhood and its construction in relation to both individual and collective experiences. It is this gradual expansion of his thematic scope—moving from the psychological to the corporeal—that marks Majumdar's evolution as a writer. This is an excerpt. Read the full essay on The Daily Star and Star Books and Literature's websites.

Namrata is a writer, a digital marketing professional, and an editor at Kitaab literary magazine.

EVENT REPORT

The space for indigeneity: Discussing ‘Ethnicity and Adivasi Identity in Bangladesh’

The second chapter deals with the colonial archive and its effects, covering topics such as the CHT Manual enacted in the British period and how it protected the hill tracts at that time.

SADMAN AHMED SIAM

The recognition of indigenous citizens and their rights has been a point of contention in Bangladeshi politics for quite some time. It gained more traction after August 5, once Sheikh Hasina was ousted and the hope for a new Bangladesh where all ethnic and religious identities would live with dignity was reignited. This served as the backdrop for the book talk on *Ethnicity and Adivasi Identity in Bangladesh* by Mahmudul H Sumon, which was held at DrikPath Bhubon on February 8, 2025. The discussion panel included the author himself and journalist Saydia Gulrukh. The talk commenced with Saydia Gulrukh introducing the book, which has gained renewed relevance in the present as the subject of indigenous rights sparked nationwide discussion. She talked about the modern state and the conspiratorial role it assigns to groups of people it marks as “enemies”, providing examples of the Bawm people facing systemic subjugation under that conspiratorial narrative. She expanded on how the new political establishment seems to exclude indigenous citizens not only in violent ways, such as the attack on indigenous activists on January 15, but also in non-violent ways, such as reform commissions not actively engaging with indigenous people. Following her introduction, author Mahmudul H Sumon discussed

indigenous activism, which he categorised as a type of “politics of recognition” that can be traced back to the 90s. He shared his own experiences of getting to know indigenous activists during this period and observing how the movement for indigenous recognition took shape. He realised that academic discussions surrounding indigenous people often took a much more romantic and aestheticised tone, which was both unhelpful and ahistorical. Therefore, he wanted to theorise and historicise it, focusing on how previous colonialism and its view of indigenous people affected them. He also wanted to look into how indigenous activists are reclaiming their own heritage and history through their work. According to the author, *Ethnicity and Adivasi Identity in Bangladesh* is about all indigenous people in Bangladesh, whether they resided in the plain or the hills. Afterwards, the author elaborated on the book's five chapters and what each dealt with. Discussing the first chapter, which is about transnational governmentality and adivasi subjectivity, Mahmudul H Sumon dove into what he called the “transnational discourse of indigeneity”—how indigenous activism sprang up worldwide and how the global movement has affected debates about indigeneity, colonisation, land dispossession, etc., transcending



PHOTO: SADMAN AHMED SIAM

national borders. Anthropological studies have both shaped and been shaped by this discourse. The second chapter deals with the colonial archive and its effects, covering topics such as the CHT Manual enacted in the British period and how it protected the hill tracts at that time. He also brought up the systemic dispossession of indigenous communities such as the Garo from Madhupur and Shalban, which is an often neglected issue in indigenous discourse. The reclamation of the identity of Adivasi as their own forms the basis of the third chapter. This includes debates surrounding the recognition of Adivasi or indigenous identity under the clauses 107 and 169 of ILO, which grants a certain set of special privileges to the community, including the protection of their habitat and customs. The

fourth focuses on a very specific festival as a part of this reclamation—Wanna or Wangala, which has seen a revival through activism in recent times. The final chapter poses a heavy question: Do Adivasis exist? Despite the misconception many Bangalis hold about the word, and repeated denials of Adivasi identity on a national stage (such as when former Foreign Minister Dipu Moni said that Adivasis don't exist in Bangladesh), the author concluded that Adivasis do, in fact, exist. This conversation recalled the previous discussion on the transnational discourse of indigeneity. Next, Sumon emphasised the role of the government in finding solutions to these problems, and pointed out that the government has, so far, been reluctant to initiate or enter a dialogue on the issue. He mentioned that the denial of indigenous identity and rights

has only strengthened the movement more. Bangali nationalism was also discussed, considering its role in the subjugation of indigenous peoples in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. After this session, the floor was opened to the audience for questions. Questions ranged from the lack of female and working class activists in the formation of Bangali identity, to the geopolitical reasons which are often brought up to justify denying recognition to indigenous people. The lack of indigenous people in the discussion panel was also questioned, and both Gulrukh and Sumon expressed that this was a limitation on their part. The questions surrounding indigenous citizens continue to be complex, as do their answers. It can get easier, but until the state volunteers to come forward and have a meaningful and genuine conversation, progress will not be possible. Discussions such as these are important steps in getting there, and it must include more representatives from indigenous communities themselves. It is hoped that their struggles will pay off in a post July Bangladesh, which held the principles of equality and justice as its leading force. Sadman Ahmed Siam, as the name suggests, is indeed a sad man. Send him happy quotes at: siamahmed09944@gmail.com.

Tigers can turn fortunes against India, Pak: Talha

SPORTS REPORTER

Former national pacer Talha Jubair believes Bangladesh can turn things around against India in the upcoming ICC Champions Trophy and is optimistic about their chances against hosts Pakistan in the eight-team event, set to begin on February 19.

“Whenever we play against India, we have big expectations. Having come close on many occasions, we couldn’t finish the job. I hope that we’ll be able to finish this time. And it’s possible to beat Pakistan,” Talha told reporters in Mirpur on Saturday.

Bangladesh, who started their pre-tournament preparations in Dubai on Saturday after arriving a day earlier, are in Group A alongside India, Pakistan, and New Zealand.

Since Bangladesh’s 2007 ICC World Cup victory over India, the Tigers have fought hard in a losing cause several times, with the 2016 T20 World Cup being a notable heartbreak as they lost by one run in Bengaluru despite needing just two runs off three balls.

In the 2022 T20 World Cup, they suffered a narrow five-run defeat in Adelaide after a rain-affected chase. Bangladesh also fared well in the 2015 World Cup quarterfinals and the 2017 Champions Trophy semifinals but India proved a tough nut to crack.

Against Pakistan, Bangladesh’s record in ICC events is rather unimpressive, with only one win in the 1999 World Cup. However, they made history last year by defeating Pakistan 2-0 in Rawalpindi in the ICC Test Championship, securing their first-ever Test series win over them. With their Champions Trophy match set for the same venue, Talha remains hopeful.

The current BCB coach also feels that bowling in partnership will be key for the Tigers in the mega event.

“Bowling in partnership is essential... So it’s important to keep pressure on them by not leaking runs, even if you can’t take wickets,” said Talha, who was recently seen working with the Tigers during their Bangladesh phase of preparation after the end of the Bangladesh Premier League.

“There is a matter of changing the mood when you are switching from T20 to the one-day format. We worked on that aspect,” he concluded.

Bangladesh will begin their tournament campaign against India on February 20 in Dubai before they take on New Zealand and Pakistan in their remaining Group A matches on February 24 and 27, respectively.

Before the tournament campaign gets underway, Bangladesh are also scheduled to play a warm-up game against Pakistan Shaheens on February 17 at the ICC Cricket Academy in Dubai.



The pace quartet of Bangladesh -- Taskin Ahmed, Mustafizur Rahman, Nahid Rana, and Tanzim Hasan Sakib -- gears up at the ICC Cricket Academy in Dubai yesterday during the Tigers' first practice session ahead of their Champions Trophy 2025 opener against India in the UAE on February 20. India named the most spin-heavy squad among the eight teams participating in the competition but the Tigers, with three regular spinners in their squad, might have to counter that with their in-form pace unit.

PHOTO: BCB

Indian spin trial awaits Bangladesh in Dubai

SPORTS REPORTER

Before leaving for the UAE for their opening fixture of the ICC Champions Trophy against India, Bangladesh underwent a five-day training camp in Mirpur, where a few extra bowlers were brought in to assist the squad.

While most of the net bowlers were either internationally capped cricketers or had extensive experience in the domestic circuit, there was also a 17-year-old spinner in the camp, with just one List-A match to his name: Nuhayel Sandeed, son of the national team’s assistant coach Mohammad Salahuddin. The presumed reason behind his inclusion was his unique profile as a left-arm leg spinner.

Bangladesh are in Group A of the Champions Trophy, slotted alongside three former champions: India, Pakistan and New Zealand. Interestingly, out of the three, only India have a left-arm leg-spinner in their ranks in Kuldeep Yadav.

So, the Bangladesh think tank went out of their way to prepare the batters for the challenge they will face against Kuldeep in the India clash on February 20 in Dubai. However, in that match, Kuldeep will not be the only spinner that the batters would have to deal with.

Out of the eight participating teams in the tournament, India are the only side who have named a spin-heavy team. They have five spin-bowling options in their 15-man squad -- three spin-bowling all-rounders in Ravindra Jadeja, Washington Sundar and Axar Patel -- and two spinners in Varun Chakravathy and Kuldeep.

With star pacer Jasprit Bumrah out

with a back injury, India brought in pacer Harshit Rana. However, India also made the interesting choice of dropping batter Yashasvi Jaiswal to bring in Varun, a move to further strengthen their spin-bowling reserves.

We will take preparation for the main game from our practice match [against Pakistan Shaheens on Monday]. We will try to gather knowledge about the wicket and will also try to know which deliveries are effective here. We will also try to figure out the type of deliveries in which the batters would struggle.

Bangladesh pacer **Tanzim Hasan Sakib** after the Tigers' practice session in Dubai yesterday.

As India will not travel to Pakistan for the tournament, all of their matches will take place at the Dubai International Stadium, which was one of the three venues in the recently concluded ILT20, and perhaps the Indian management is

hoping that the pitches would be worn out, allowing their spinners to dictate terms.

In their last ODI assignment before the Champions Trophy, India played three spinners in all three matches against England, trying out different combinations of the five spinners.

As Bangladesh are likely to play three left-handers in the top three -- Tanzid Tamim, Soumya Sarkar and Najmul Hossain Shanto -- chances are that India would include Washington or Varun as a right-arm spinner, Axar or Jadeja as the left-arm spin-bowling all-rounder, and then Kuldeep as the wrist spinner, meaning Bangladesh batters would have to deal with at least 30 overs of quality spin bowling.

Bangladesh, on the other hand, have three genuine spin-bowling options in their squad: Mehedi Hasan Miraz, Rishad Hossain and Nasum Ahmed.

The Tigers have lately banked more on their pace attack, who have delivered for them, but in Dubai, Bangladesh might have to revert to the old days and field a spin-heavy team if the conditions demand so.

Bangladesh had their first taste of the conditions yesterday when they had their first training session in Dubai at the ICC Academy. They will play a warm-up game in Dubai on Monday against Pakistan Shaheens, which will give them a chance to better gauge the conditions.

However, the chances of a trial by spin waiting for Bangladesh in their tournament opener are really high.

BNS renamed as National Stadium

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangabandhu National Stadium was renamed National Stadium, Dhaka on Saturday, a directive from the National Sports Council (NSC), signed by NSC secretary Aminul Islam, confirmed.

Built in 1954 in Paltan as Dhaka Stadium, Bangladesh’s premier sporting venue hosted some major international sporting events.



Owned and maintained by the NSC, the infrastructure was renamed from Dhaka Stadium to Bangabandhu National Stadium in 1996 after Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League first came to power.

This is the latest move in renaming sporting infrastructure across the country in recent times as 150 mini stadiums in 150 upazilas, originally named as Sheikh Russel Mini Stadiums, were renamed after the respective upazilas last Wednesday.

The NSC had, in November last year, renamed Tangail District Stadium as Shaheed Maruf Stadium and Kushitia District Stadium as Shaheed Abrar Fahad Stadium.

In same boat, Spurs and United face off

AGENCIES

Two fallen titans of the English game face off in Sunday’s Premier League as Tottenham welcome Ruben Amorim’s Manchester United.

The two teams find themselves in unfamiliar territory in the standings with United 13th and Spurs 14th, two points behind Amorim’s side.

Given the plight of both clubs, it is understandable Amorim said he shares a connection with his counterpart Ange Postecoglou.

Both managers have tried to get their players to adopt a specific style of play, which has often cost them at the back as they leak goals.

Tottenham have already beaten United twice in all competitions this season, 3-0 in the Premier League and 4-3 in the EFL Cup quarterfinals.

“I’m a huge fan of Ange Postecoglou,” Amorim told reporters on Friday.

“The simple thing is that I use one system at the moment because I believe if you work on that system you can play in different systems at the same time. “But we are not winning games and I understand the connection between me and Ange, we have the same problems.”

Despite Amorim being understanding of Postecoglou’s situation, the latter would definitely not want anything other than a win against United. And Spurs have a good omen to forward to in this case.

Following their 2-0 win against Brentford in their previous Premier League fixture, Spurs are looking to win back-to-back Premier League games for just the second time this season, previously doing so in September when, funnily enough, their two wins were over Brentford and United.

Sinner’s ban to end before French Open

REUTERS

World number one Jannik Sinner has accepted an immediate three-month doping ban after the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) said they had reached a settlement on his period of ineligibility, allowing him to return before the French Open in May.

WADA had appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) against an independent tribunal’s decision in August to clear Sinner of wrongdoing after the three-times major winner failed drug tests.

Sinner, who successfully defended his Australian Open crown last month, had tested positive for anabolic agent clostebol which the 23-year-old said had entered his system from a member of his support team through massages and sports therapy.

Sinner’s ban began on February 9 and will end on May 4 while he can return to training on April 13. The French Open main draw is scheduled to begin on May 25.

“WADA accepts that Mr Sinner did not intend to cheat and that his exposure to clostebol did not provide any performance-enhancing benefit and took place without his knowledge as the result of negligence of members of his entourage,” WADA said

in a statement on Saturday.

“However, under the Code and by virtue of CAS precedent, an athlete bears responsibility for the entourage’s negligence.”

WADA has formally withdrawn its appeal to CAS after they reached a settlement while they did not seek disqualification of his results.

“This case had been hanging over me now for nearly a year and the process still had a long time to run with a decision maybe only at the end of the year,” Sinner said in a statement.

“I have always accepted that I am responsible for my team and realise WADA’s strict rules are an important protection for the sport I love.

“On that basis I have accepted WADA’s offer to resolve these proceedings on the basis of a three-month sanction.”

Meanwhile, Australian Nick Kyrgios said it was a “sad day for tennis” after several other players received longer bans for similar positive tests.

“Obviously Sinner’s team have done everything in their power to just go ahead and take a three-month ban, no titles lost, no prize money lost,” Kyrgios wrote on social media platform X.

“Guilty or not? Sad day for tennis. Fairness in tennis does not exist.”



Midfielder Mikel Merino scored two late goals to keep Arsenal’s Premier League title hopes alive with a 2-0 victory at Leicester City on Saturday after the Spaniard was thrust into a makeshift centre-forward role due to his club’s injury crisis up front. Second-placed Arsenal move to 53 points from their 25 matches, four behind leaders Liverpool, having played a game more. Leicester, meanwhile, remain in the relegation zone with 17 points from 25 matches.

PHOTO: REUTERS

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Falgun festivities obstructed

STAR REPORT

Programmes to celebrate Basanta were forcibly halted in at least three locations across the country over the weekend.

On Chattogram's CRB Road, a Basanta Baron (spring welcoming) programme was cancelled midway yesterday.

The day-long cultural festival, organised by Proma Abritti Sangathan, began on the CRB Shirishtala ground in the morning. The first session, which ran until noon, went smoothly.

However, things took a turn later. One of the organisers, speaking anonymously, said, "We received a call from the Bangladesh Railway [BR] around noon, informing us that the permission for the afternoon session had been cancelled, although we had been granted permission for the entire day."

Some railway officials claimed the instruction to shut the programme down came from higher authorities.

Officials from BR, whose Kalyan Trust handles permits for using the

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SPRING IN THE AIR ... Dancers spreading some colours and joy as they perform at the Charukala's Bakultala in Dhaka University on the occasion of Basanta Utsab – a festival celebrating the first day of spring -- yesterday morning.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN



AMAR EKUSHEY-15

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.

Khulna becomes city of rallies

AHMAD ISTIAK

On February 27, 1948, some days after Dhirerandranath Datta's proposal of Bangla as the state language was opposed by the Muslim League, a protest meeting was held in Khulna's Daulatpur College.

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Natya Utsab postponed amid 'security concerns'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Organisers have postponed Dhaka Mohanagar Natya Utsab, citing security concerns.

This happened amid objections to the event from the BNP's cultural wing Jatiyatabadi Samajik Sangskritik Sangstha (Jasas).

Thandu Raihan, convener of the utsab, said they were forced to postpone the festival after receiving threats from an unidentified group.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police said it did not issue any directives for the postponement.

The festival was scheduled to open at 5:00pm yesterday at the Mohila Samity Auditorium. In the evening, the Liberation War-themed play "Payer Awaj Pawa Jay" was set to be staged.

A total of 85 theatre groups were supposed to perform at the festival.

But police officers came to the venue on Friday and requested the organisers to stop the programme, saying they had received complaints about it and that the organisers did not have proper "permissions", according to Thandu.

"We are not hosting any foreign groups, so an event at the Mohila Samity does not require permission, as far as I know," he said.

"We then contacted the OC of Ramna Police Station. In the evening,

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Form separate body to redraw constituencies

Reform commission stresses maintaining global standards

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

The Electoral Reform Commission has proposed a new law in line with internationally accepted guidelines, such as maintaining impartiality and ensuring true representation, while demarcating parliamentary constituencies.

The draft law suggests that parliamentary seats in small districts be demarcated based on a standard that maintains an average population difference of 10 percent. For larger districts, like Dhaka and Chattogram, a 15 percent difference is acceptable.

The full report of the reform commission, submitted to the government on February 8, also proposed the establishment of a separate independent authority for the future delimitation of electoral constituencies. Currently, the Election Commission demarcates constituencies as part of its constitutional duty ahead of general elections.

The EC opposed the proposal for a separate body to handle delimitation, as it is one of the most fundamental pre-election tasks outlined in the constitution.

Delimitation refers to the process of

defining the boundaries of an electoral district or constituency. It involves determining the geographic area that will be represented by each member of parliament or legislative assembly in a democratic system.

Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin said, "The EC is already an independent body. Creating another one would complicate matters, as the demarcation of constituencies is a constitutional power of the EC. Establishing another authority would contradict the spirit of the constitution."

"I don't know the details, but I've heard they proposed a new law. Delimitation is my [the EC's] constitutional mandate, and I must retain control over it. If an independent institution handles delimitation, it can set its own timeline. The election might take place, but the delimitation process may not be completed in time."

Abdul Alim, a member of the reform commission, argued, "This isn't a question of independence; rather, the constitution has entrusted the Election Commission with a specific responsibility."

"Since this issue is often surrounded by

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"Delimitation is my [the EC's] constitutional mandate, and I must retain control over it. If an independent institution handles delimitation, it can set its own timeline. The election might take place, but the delimitation process may not be completed in time."

CEC AMM Nasir Uddin



Time for new European army Says Zelensky

AFP, Munich

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky yesterday called for the creation of a European army, as he insisted Kyiv and its backers on the continent must be listened to in peace talks with Russia.

Speaking at a gathering of top policymakers in Munich, the Ukrainian leader said that with the return of President Donald Trump to the White House Europe could no longer count on Washington to always have its back.

Trump stunned allies and upended the status quo of US support for Ukraine this week when he announced he would likely soon meet Russian leader Vladimir Putin to start truce talks.

Zelensky's rallying cry came a day after he met US Vice President JD Vance as Kyiv scrambles to ensure it is not sidelined in Washington's push to wrap up the three-year war.

"Let's be honest — now we can't rule out the possibility that America might say no to Europe

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

Scientists turn pollution into fuel in climate breakthrough

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Scientists have developed a solar-powered device that can pull pollution from the air and convert it directly into fuel for cars and planes.

The new reactor, built by a team from the University of Cambridge, takes its inspiration from photosynthesis, requiring no cables or batteries in order to turn atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO2) into syngas.

The researchers say the reactor offers a new solution to the climate crisis, providing an alternative to current Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) technologies.

CCS has been touted as a way of slowing down or even reversing the worst effects of climate change, with the UK government recently committing £22 billion to the technology.

Current CCS methods have been criticised for being too energy-intensive, and for not recycling the captured CO2. Safety concerns have also been raised about storing pressurised CO2 underground.

"What if instead of pumping the carbon dioxide underground, we made something useful from it?" said Dr Sayan Kar from Cambridge's Yusuf Hamied Department of Chemistry.



Hamas, Israel complete another prisoner swap

Talks on 'permanent ceasefire' expected to begin next week

AFP, Khan Yunis

Palestinian militants released three Israeli hostages on Saturday in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian inmates freed by Israel, completing the latest swap despite fears the Gaza truce deal was near collapse.

An AFP journalist saw masked Hamas gunmen parade the hostages onto a stage before a crowd in Gaza's southern city of Khan Yunis.

Israeli-American Sagui Dekel-Chen, Israeli-Russian Sasha Trupanov and Israeli-Argentine Yair Horn were made to make statements into a microphone before being handed over to the Red Cross and taken back home to Israeli territory, after being held for more than 16 months.

Clutching gift bags given by their captors, the three men, flanked by fighters, called for the completion of further hostage exchanges under the ceasefire deal.

Not long after, a busload of Palestinian prisoners departed Israel's Ofer Prison and were greeted by a cheering crowd in the occupied West Bank city of Ramallah, an AFP journalist said.

More buses took inmates from an Israeli prison in the Negev desert to the Gaza Strip, according to another AFP journalist.

Yesterday's swap, the sixth since the truce took effect

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Relatives mourn Palestinian Adel Bushkar, who was killed during an overnight Israeli military raid on the refugee camp of Askar east of Nablus in the occupied West Bank, during his funeral yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Musk keen on launching Starlink in Bangladesh

STAR REPORT

Elon Musk, head of the US Department of Government Efficiency and owner of satellite internet service provider Starlink, yesterday said he is looking forward to launching Starlink in Bangladesh.

Earlier yesterday, the X account of Bangladesh's chief adviser posted: "Had great meeting with Mr @elonmusk. We agreed to work together and hope to launch Starlink in Bangladesh soon."

Musk replied: "Looking forward to it!"

On Thursday, the Chief Adviser's Press Wing issued a statement saying that Prof Muhammad Yunus had an extensive discussion with Musk to explore future collaboration and advance efforts to introduce Starlink in Bangladesh.

According to the statement, the two discussed the transformational potential of Starlink's satellite communications, particularly for Bangladesh's enterprising youth, rural and vulnerable women, and remote communities.

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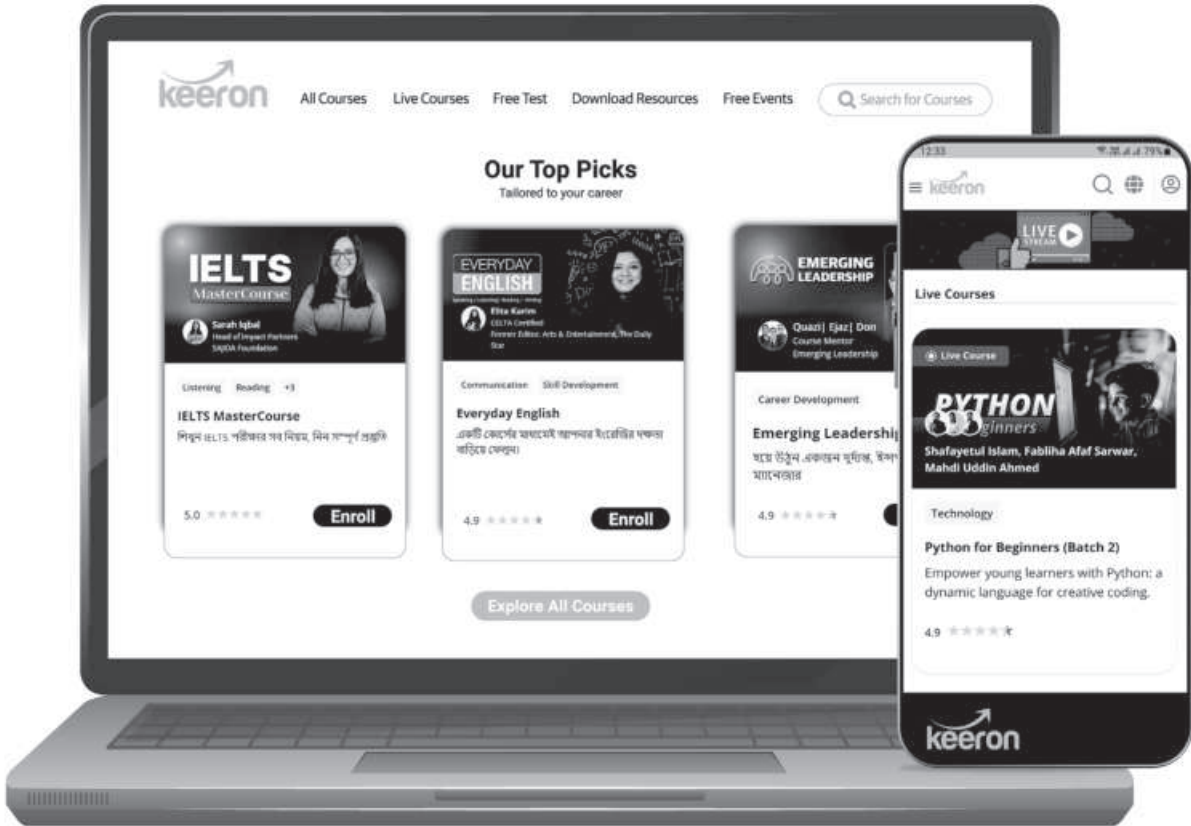
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