

BANDARBAN ABDUCTIONS

# One worker escapes captivity

## Joint operation begins to rescue others

STAR REPORT

One of the 25 plantation workers, who were abducted by unknown people from various rubber plantations in Fasiakhali area of Bandarban's Lama upazila on Sunday, managed to escape last morning.

Meanwhile, joint forces have started an operation to rescue the abductees.

Ziaur Rahman fled by dodging the abductors' eyes and informed the authorities, said police.

The kidnappers were constantly changing their locations with the abductees, said Lama Police Station Officer-in-Charge Shahadat Hossain, quoting Ziaur.

The OC, quoting him, said there were at least 12 to 14 suspected abductors and all of them were armed.

He also said rubber garden officials claimed that they received ransom letters from the abductors.



Protesters injured in the July uprising block the Shahbagh intersection yesterday, demanding rehabilitation and compensation from the government. Story on Page 3.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

### MOVE FOR STATE REFORMS

# It won't work without elected reps: Tarique

UNB, Dhaka

BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman yesterday said the initiative for state reforms will not work until elected representatives are entrusted with the responsibility of running the country.

"Those who believe reforms should come before the election must understand that for those reforms to be successful, people who are truly connected to the masses are needed [in power]. Without them, no reforms will be possible," he said while addressing a programme at the Krishibid Institution Bangladesh virtually.

He also warned that any delay in election would only deepen the conspiracy against both the country and the government.

"Amra BNP Poribar" organised the programme aimed to provide financial assistance to photojournalists who were injured during the July uprising.

Tarique said it was politicians, not anyone else, who presented the reform proposals to the nation over two years ago.

"If real reforms are to be made in this country, they must be carried out by real politicians," the BNP leader said.

He said politicians must seek suggestions and opinions from professionals, intellectuals, and members of civil society to effectively run the state.

"Based on those suggestions, we will gradually move the country forward. But until the direct representatives of people are entrusted with the responsibility of running the country, no reform will be fully implemented in any way," he said.

Tarique also said those who have a good connection with people can understand their desires and move the country forward in line with the people's wishes.

He said the public wants a Bangladesh where basic rights and economic freedom are ensured.

He said political freedom is essential for economic freedom and to build a discrimination-free Bangladesh. "To achieve this, voting rights and the guarantee to exercise that right must be ensured."

# We'll launch independent student body

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formed based on the spirit of the July Uprising and promised to uphold its principles. The organisation will never engage in partisan politics or follow a parent political party's agenda.

The need for a standalone student organisation came as the student platform would not allow them to carry out all necessary political activities, Kader said.

Many essential tasks could not be accomplished under that platform, so they felt a responsibility to form a new student organisation.

The student platform included students from various political backgrounds, including Chhatra Dal, Shibir, leftist groups and Islamist groups. However, after the uprising, everyone returned to their original political positions.

"Those who support the ideals of July'24 and wish to work for the greater good of the country are welcome to join the new organisation," Kader said.

The organisational structure

and official launch date will be determined after discussions with students, Baker said.

The leadership structure will be entirely democratic and bottom-up, and the organisation will be funded through membership fees from its members.

The new organisation will operate independently according to its own programmes and will not engage in partisan politics.

A public opinion survey and membership recruitment drive would be conducted nationwide as part of the preparations for forming the new part.

This campaign will take place both online and offline in key locations at Dhaka University, Jahangirnagar University, Jagannath University, Rajshahi University, Chittagong University, and all other public and private universities, national universities, colleges, schools, and madrasas across the country.

The leaders of the new organisation proposed seven fundamental principles: establishing

moderate student politics that move beyond ideological and cultural binary conflicts; creating an inclusive student movement that does not discriminate based on nationality, religion or race; and building the future of Bangladesh through a new form of politics shaped by the July uprising.

The other principles are: addressing the lack of female representation in mainstream politics; creating a political environment supportive of women and ensuring equal opportunities for all; recognising Bangladesh's history of struggle and independence, upholding the legacy of the movements of 1947, 1952, 1962, 1966, 1968, 1969, 1971, 1990 and 2024 as foundational to their student politics; restoring student unions in educational institutions to counteract the systematic political disempowerment of students and ensuring democratic representation in student governance; and strengthening student-citizen solidarity to safeguard the rights of students and citizens alike.

# Transport reforms a pressing need

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campaigner Bangladesh Jatri Kalyan Samity, around 1.05 lakh people were killed and 1.49 lakh others were injured in 60,980 crashes from 2013-2024. Of those who got killed, 8,067 were children.

However, the actual number of fatalities is likely to be much higher because many of the crashes often go unreported.

The report, launched in October last year, said 88,127 vehicles were involved in the crashes. The highest, 37.59 percent, of the crashes happened on regional highways and 31.76 percent on national highways.

What is more worrying is the spike in the road crashes and casualties.

In another report, the Jatri Kalyan Samity on January 4 said there were 6,359 crashes, 8,543 deaths, and 12,608 injuries in 2024, compared to 6,261 crashes, 7,902 deaths, and 10,372 injuries in 2023.

Motorcycles were involved in nearly one-third of all crashes, said the platform.

The sheer number of deaths on Bangladesh's roads exposes a glaring lack of governance and deep systemic flaws in the transport sector. The

causes of these tragedies are well known: reckless driving, dilapidated roads, weak enforcement of traffic laws, and the unchecked presence of unfit vehicles and unqualified drivers. Unregulated transport syndicates operate with impunity while political influence shields wrongdoers from law.

Over the years, successive governments have attempted to address the issue through ad hoc interventions like traffic awareness campaigns and crackdowns on unfit vehicles. However, these measures only provided temporary relief. The previous Awami League government's effort to enforce a law, enacted in response to public outrage following the 2018 student protests demanding safer roads, failed to bring about any meaningful change. The law's implementation was delayed and ultimately weakened by opposition from transport owners and workers.

After the fall of the Awami League government in the wake of a mass uprising, there has been a growing public expectation for a long-overdue overhaul of the transport sector. Sadly, apart from sporadic drives to fine unfit vehicles, the interim government has yet to take meaningful steps to make the roads safer. Road safety campaigners

have already called for the establishment of a Road Safety Commission, arguing that the era of superficial solutions and temporary fixes must end.

The reform commissions tasked with addressing various sectors have offered a glimmer of hope for systemic changes. The transport sector deserves the same level of attention given its profound impact on millions of lives. The interim government now has an opportunity to pave the way for real reform by treating road safety as a national priority. Bangladesh urgently needs a comprehensive, data-driven strategy to make its roads safer. Establishing a Road Safety Commission would be a bold and necessary step toward that goal, ensuring that road safety is no longer a neglected issue but a top concern.

We cannot afford to let more precious lives be lost due to negligence and mismanagement. The transport sector cannot continue to operate at the whims of a few syndicates. Without structural reforms, the cycle of preventable deaths and injuries will persist, and each delay in action will only add to the growing toll of tragedies. The question remains: How many more lives must be lost before real, lasting change takes place?

# IMF defers release of 4th tranche

FROM PAGE 1

"That is why we are not desperate to get loans from the IMF and the World Bank. Besides, getting funds from development partners is not begging as Bangladesh has to comply with various conditions," he added.

One of the issues could be that the government was supposed to take few tax-related measures to collect additional Tk 12,000 crore this fiscal year, said Zahid Hussain, former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office.

While the government took measures to increase revenue collection, it walked back on the step, which might have displeased the IMF, he said.

Also, there could be some disagreements between the government and the IMF over separating tax policy and administration and also the exchange rate management.

"These could be the issues which are likely under discussion between the government and IMF at present."

The government should settle the issues through effective negotiations.

"Issues like VAT rate hikes are not politically feasible in the present context. However, there are some other conditions which the government could fulfil," he said.

The deferral of the fourth tranche might make it tough for the government to get budget support from the WB.

Besides, such delay could also negatively impact outlooks forecast by different international credit rating agencies, Hussain added.

So far, Bangladesh received \$2.3 billion in three tranches under the programme.

"There are some conditions which we will not fulfil just based on their demands but achieve those in our way," he added.

He further said that Bangladesh's macroeconomic indicators are good to some extent, citing now the current account and financial account balances are positive while inward remittances have also been seeing a significant growth.

"That is why we are not desperate to get loans from the IMF and the World Bank," he added.

Earlier, the IMF staff mission led by Chris Papageorgiou visited Bangladesh between December 3-18 last year.

Upon completion of the visit, IMF in a statement said "We are pleased to announce that the IMF team reached a staff-level agreement with the Bangladesh authorities on the policies needed to complete the third review under the ECF, EFF, and RSF arrangements. The IMF's Executive Board will consider completion of the review based on the implementation by the authorities of prior actions."

Zahid Hussain, former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office, said he assumed the loan release had been deferred because of disagreements over some issues.

He said one of the issues could be that the government was supposed to take few tax-related measures to collect

additional Tk 12,000 crore in revenue by this fiscal year.

However, the government took measures to increase revenue collection but later stepped back which might have displeased IMF, he added.

Also, there could be some disagreements between the government and IMF over separating tax policy and administration and also exchange rate management, said Hussain.

"These could be the issues which are likely under discussion between the government and IMF at present," he added.

Hussain said the government should settle down these issues through effective negotiation so that the problems are resolved.

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The \$4.7 billion loan programme was approved by the IMF in January 2023. So far, Bangladesh has got \$2.3 billion in three tranches.

During the last visit to Dhaka, the IMF staff mission upon request from the interim government agreed to provide \$750 million additionally.

In Feni, at least six people were killed and nine others injured when a lorry hit a pickup in Sadar upazila last night.

The deceased were identified as Mohiuddin, Arif, Jahangir, Shohag, Nur Uddin, and Nazmul.

The bodies of the deceased were taken to the Feni Sadar General Hospital morgue for autopsy, said Harunur Rashid, officer-in-charge of Mohalip Highway Police Station.

The lorry hit the pickup carrying construction workers around 7:30pm in the Hafizia area on the Dhaka-Chattogram highway, said the OC, adding that five people died on the spot.

Arif died on the way to a hospital. The injured were being treated at a nearby hospital, he added.

FROM PAGE 1

According to our Lalmonirhat and Dinajpur correspondents, the demonstrators, including students, locals, and BNP activists, were staying on Teesta shoals for the programme.

Other events, including cultural performances such as Palagan, Sarigan, Bhawaiya, and Lalon songs, and traditional rural games, including kabaddi, Chengupenti, kite flying, Gollachhoot, and races, were also organised.

BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman will virtually join the programme at 11 locations across five districts today.

Party leaders called on the government to take a stronger stance to ensure a fair share of Teesta water for Bangladesh and implement the Teesta Mega Project.

Fakhrul said, "We want to make it clear to India, as I have said before and am saying now: If you [India] want to be friends with the people of Bangladesh, then first ensure our just share of water from the Teesta. Stop the killings at the border. And stop treating us like you are the big brother."

"We certainly want India as a friend. But that friendship should come with respect."

Asadul Habib Dulu, chief coordinator of the Teesta River Protection Movement and an organising secretary of the BNP, presided over the rally in Lalmonirhat.

Appreciating Dulu for organising the programme, Fakhrul said "Jago Bahe Teesta Bachai" was not merely a slogan, it is crucial for the survival of the people living along the river, BSS reported.

"When India opens the dams or barrage gates, floodwater washes away

our houses, properties and villages. And then, the whole area dries up when India closes the dams or barrage gates, causing unending sufferings to our people.

"Nothing can be achieved without struggle. We will bring Teesta water and establish our rights through this struggle for survival," he added, according to the BSS.

It also reported that Fakhrul said Bangladesh always talked about the Teesta water issue, even before its independence from Pakistan.



PHOTO: STAR

People attend the Lalmonirhat rally

"When the Awami League government came to power, everyone initially thought: 'Since the Awami League is friends with India, perhaps they will get Teesta's water.' Right? In 15 years, they have sold Bangladesh, but they couldn't bring a drop of water," he said.

"India has built dams not just on Teesta, but on 54 rivers upstream. They take the water and generate electricity, while our people can't grow rice or crops, and are deprived of their livelihoods. Our fishermen can't fish. Everyone is suffering today."

The BNP leader also criticised India

# Govt moves to save electricity

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similar levels of outages in summer.

"There will be no difference between cities and villages [in terms of loadshedding]," he told reporters after a session on the second day of the Deputy Commissioners' Conference 2025 at the capital's Osmani Memorial Auditorium.

The national power demand reaches 18,000 megawatts in summer, compared to around 9,000MW in winter, he said.

"This increase is primarily due to irrigation and excessive use of ACs. Since irrigation is crucial for food security, we'll prioritise it while also controlling AC usage to save several thousand megawatts of electricity."

In the last two years, power cuts disproportionately affected the rural areas, with many villages facing almost eight-hour outages in a day last year.

Meanwhile, power cuts in the capital lasted around two hours.

Kabirpointed out that in some offices, ACs are set at 19-22 degrees C while people wear sweaters and jackets indoors. "The country's weather does not require such low temperatures."

"Our demand for cooling can be reduced if we enforce these [AC temperature] guidelines," he said, adding that instructions had also been sent to the religious affairs' ministry to ensure that AC temperatures in mosques remain at or above 25 degrees Celsius during Taraweeh prayers.

Addressing financial constraints, he said the economy remains fragile due to significant amounts of money being siphoned out of the country earlier, making it difficult for the government to pay fuel import bills for power generation. "Despite this, we've made all

necessary arrangements to ensure a stable power supply during the upcoming Ramadan."

Earlier, he said that if the AC temperature guidelines were properly followed, the country could save 2,000-3,000MW during summer.

Currently, the PDB produces 10,000MW to 11,000MW -- a 2,000MW increase from recent months. According to PDB projections, the power demand may reach 15,700MW during Ramadan, and up to 18,000MW on the hottest summer days.

The board has planned for zero loadshedding during Ramadan, but there will be power outages of up to 750MW in summer -- meaning there would be one-hour power cuts per day across the country. However, sources said outages may increase due to technical issues.

# 10 lives lost on road

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driving, our whole family has been torn apart!" Jui's elder sister, Jannatul Ferdous, cried in disbelief.

"We did not inform my sister of the death of my parents as it may worsen her condition," she told this newspaper.

Jannatul said their family is from Islampur upazila in Jamalpur and that they resided in the capital's Demra area.

Police seized the lorry, but the driver fled the scene, said Mahmudul Hasan Irfan, sub-inspector (SI) of Jatrabari Police Station.

In another tragic accident, a man and his son died after a Dhaka-bound bus rammed a battery-run three-wheeler in Pirojpur's Nazirpur upazila yesterday morning.

The deceased Mahbub Mollah, 45,

and his son Yead Mollah, 15, were from the upazila's Chalitabari village.

The accident took place at Ruhitalabuniya village on the Pirojpur-Nazirpur-Gopalganj road around 8:00am, said Mahamud Al Farid, officer-in-charge of Nazirpur police station.

Ariful Islam, a witness, said the father and his son were going to Nazirpur on a three-wheeler when a bus of Emad Paribahan hit the vehicle.

When they were taken to Khulna Medical College Hospital, the doctors declared Mahbub and his son dead.

The driver of the three-wheeler was also injured.

"The accident likely occurred because of dense fog," said OC Ariful.

Police seized the bus, but its driver fled.