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## DEMOCRACY INDEX Bangladesh nosedives to 100th spot

STAR REPORT

Bangladesh saw the sharpest decline in the 2024 Democracy Index by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), falling 25 spots to 100th out of 167.

The country remains a hybrid regime but now ranks closer to the lower end of the classification.

Bangladesh also recorded the largest score decline globally, falling 1.44 points on the 0-10 scale, following a "rigged election, the ousting of the prime minister, and political unrest".

In the index released on Thursday, India ranked 41st, Bhutan 79th, Nepal 96th, Pakistan 124th, and Afghanistan 167th, the lowest in the world.

The index highlights a continued decline in global democracy, with autocracies gaining strength. "The world's democracies are struggling," said Joan Hoey, director of the Democracy Index.

The index assesses five key factors: electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, government functioning, SEE PAGE 7 COL 5



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Buyers push and shove for subsidised essential commodities as soon as the TCB truck carrying supplies enough for only 200 people arrives in the capital's Dhanmondi area around noon yesterday. Every day, people from low-income groups, who are unable to keep up with the soaring market prices of essentials, wait for hours for TCB trucks at various locations around the capital.

## GONOTANTRIK CHHATRA SANGSAD 30 from pvt univs now in committee

Student body announces 205-member panel; 3 quit

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Gonotantrik Chhatra Sangsad, the newly emerged independent student organisation, announced its full central committee yesterday.

The 205 member committee includes at least 30 private university students who were directly involved in the July uprising.

According to several private university representatives, they will review the full committee and decide whether to accept the positions or resign.

**3 MEMBERS QUIT**

Meanwhile, three members of the new student body have already resigned from their appointed posts.

During the organisation's inauguration on Wednesday, Rifat Rashid, a DU student, was appointed as the senior joint member secretary of the central committee. He reportedly resigned from his post yesterday, citing personal reasons. Al Mashnun, a student of Chittagong University, replaced Rifat.

Sources close to Rifat, however, said that Rifat resigned because he did not get the position he desired.

Meanwhile, hours after the full committee was announced, former SAD coordinators from Rajshahi University (RU), Mehedi Sajib and Salauddin Ammar, also resigned from their appointed posts.

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## Grant NHRC power to probe disciplinary forces

Say speakers at law ministry event

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The law pertaining to the National Human Rights Commission needs amendments to give the watchdog more investigative powers, speakers said at an event yesterday.

Organised by the law ministry and chaired by its additional secretary, the discussion addressed the challenges the NHRC faces and the path forward in this regard.

The law currently prohibits the commission from investigating disciplined forces.

Sultan Mohammed Zakaria, a former Bangladesh Country Specialist at Amnesty International, said the law should be amended to grant full investigative powers over disciplined forces, including the authority to summon evidence directly and conduct on-site inspections.

"Many instances of serious human rights abuse directly involve disciplined forces, and NHRC intervention is required to prevent impunity."

At present, the commission's recommendations are non-binding, and the government can choose to ignore its findings.

Zakaria proposed amending the law to make the NHRC's recommendations enforceable.

Eminent human rights lawyer Sara Hossain said, "The law doesn't allow the NHRC to intervene in sub judice or under-trial cases. But it should be allowed to investigate the human rights violation aspects of cases even if they

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## Govt engaging with Arakan Army

Says CA's representative on Rohingya issue

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh is maintaining contact with the Arakan Army (AA), which has occupied some 90 percent of Rakhine State, for the sake of protecting the country's border and Rohingya repatriation, said Khalilur Rahman, the chief adviser's high representative on the Rohingya issue.

"The day the AA raised its flag on our border, I instantly realised it's a new world -- you got to deal with them," he said at a seminar yesterday on the situation in Rakhine and implications for Bangladesh.

The seminar was organised by the South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance (SIPG) at the North South University premises.

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## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN Most victims abused by husbands

Disturbing trend uncovered in BBS survey of 27,476

NILIMA JAHAN

Women in Bangladesh are three times more likely to be physically abused and over 14 times more likely to suffer sexual violence from their husbands than from others, according to a Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics survey on violence against women.

Over half of all women surveyed (54 percent) have reported physical and/or sexual abuse by their husbands at some point in their marital lives.

The Violence Against Women Survey 2024 -- based on interviews with 27,476 women -- reveals that intimate partner violence (IPV) remains widespread, with 70 percent of respondents experiencing at least one form of abuse, including physical, sexual, emotional, economic violence, or controlling behaviours, at some point in their lives.

In the past 12 months, 41 percent of women reported being abused by their intimate partners.

- Women are over 14 times likelier to suffer sexual violence from their husbands than from others.
- 54pc of women have reported physical and/or sexual abuse by their husbands at some point in their marital lives
- 70pc of women have faced at least one form of intimate partner violence in their lifetime.
- Among divisions, Barishal and Khulna have the highest IPV rates, while Sylhet has the lowest.
- IPV rates are 76pc in rural areas and 75.6pc in urban areas.

In comparison, the figures were 73 percent for lifetime prevalence and 55 percent for past-year prevalence in the 2015 survey.

The survey stresses that intimate partner violence is more prevalent than non-partner violence. For the purpose of this survey, "intimate partners" are defined as current or former husbands, and "non-partners" are those other than a current or former husband with

whom the respondent has had contact since the age of 15.

BBS Project Director Iftekharul Karim presented the study, prepared in collaboration with UNFPA, yesterday at the BBS auditorium in the capital's Agargaon.

According to the study, 76 percent of women in rural areas and 75.6 percent in urban areas

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## TEESTA PROJECT China to get the job if BNP voted to power

Says Moyeen Khan in China

UNB, Shaanxi

BNP Standing Committee member Dr Abdul Moyeen Khan yesterday told a senior leader of the Communist Party of China (CPC) that if his party is elected to power in the next election, it will sign an agreement with China to implement the Teesta River water management project.

"Chinese ambassador in Dhaka has recently made a clear proposal to assist us in developing a project for managing the water of Teesta River," he said during a meeting between a Bangladesh delegation and CPC Deputy Secretary of the Shaanxi Provincial Committee Xing Shanning.

Dr Moyeen said the Chinese envoy had sincerely made the offer for the welfare of thousands

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## UPRISING, AFTERMATH Human rights violated in 11,348 incidents

Finds study by Manabadhikar Shongskriti Foundation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A staggering 11,348 people fell victims to human rights violations -- including murders, injuries, torture, and attacks on minority communities -- in July and August 2024, according to a study by Manabadhikar Shongskriti Foundation.

The study, supported by the National Endowment for Democracy, was unveiled yesterday at the Jatiya Press Club.

The report is based on key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and conversations with 12,434 people reached through household surveys.

Between July 1 and August 5, 2024, physical injuries accounted for 75 percent of documented cases, threats 9 percent, killings 8 percent, and torture 7 percent.

In the later half of August, after Sheikh Hasina fled, attacks on properties surged, with 38 percent involving arson, 34 percent vandalism and looting, 26 percent attacks on properties of minority communities, and 2 percent attacks on temples and shrines.

Of the 881 individuals killed, 763 were shot dead, 69 burned alive, 45 beaten to death, one was stabbed to death, and another was hit with a brick, finds the study.

Of the victims, 340 were aged between 20 and 30, at least 223 between 10 and 20, and six aged below 10.

Twenty-nine percent of the killings took place in Dhaka division, 20 percent Chattogram, 11 percent Mymensingh, 10 percent Barishal, 9 percent each in Khulna and Rajshahi divisions, 7 percent in Rangpur, and 5 percent Sylhet divisions.

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## RAY'S OF THE BAY

A mangrove whipray spotted six feet into the Bay of Bengal, off Saint Martin's Island. This captivating stingray species inhabits the Indo-Pacific region. Solitary by nature, mangrove whiprays often rest half-buried in sandy or coral substrates during the day and become active at night, preying on small bottom-dwelling fish and invertebrates. A unique aspect of this species is its reproductive method: females nourish their developing young in the womb through "histotrophy", producing a nutrient-rich "uterine milk". Ecologically, these stingrays play a vital role in controlling prey populations, thereby maintaining a balanced ecosystem. However, they face increasing threats from habitat degradation and fishing pressures. As of July 2023, the IUCN has classified the mangrove whipray as "Endangered", highlighting the urgent need for conservation efforts to protect this remarkable species.

PHOTO: SHARIF SARWAR

## Actor Gene Hackman, wife found dead at home



REUTERS

Gene Hackman, the intense character actor who won two Oscars in a more than 60-year career, has died alongside his wife, pianist Betsy Arakawa, and their dog at home, the sheriff's office in Santa Fe, New Mexico, said yesterday.

A statement from the sheriff said deputies had found the 95-year-old actor and Arakawa, 64, deceased on Wednesday afternoon at around 1:45 pm.

"Foul play is not suspected as a factor in those deaths at this time, however exact cause of death has not been determined. This is an active and ongoing investigation by the Santa Fe County Sheriff's Office," it said.

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