

A mixed bag in NCP convening committee

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University, and Alik Mree, leader of Adivasi Chhatra Sangram Parishad, as joint chief organisers. Mujahidul Islam Shahin, ex-general secretary of Islami Chhatra Shibir's DU unit, and Anik Roy, former general secretary of Chhatra Union, and Sarwar Tusher from Rastrochinta were named joint conveners. Pritom Das from Rastro Sangskar Andolan became a joint member secretary.

Ashraf Uddin Mahadi and Rafiqul Islam Aini from Qawmi madrasa were made joint convener and organiser for the northern region, respectively.

The committee also includes nine lawyers and twelve physicians. Two retired army majors – Abdullah Al Mahmud and Md Salahuddin – were appointed joint chief organiser and general member, respectively. Khokon Chandra Barman, an injured protester from the July uprising, and Sanjida Khan Dipti, mother of martyred protester

Anas, were included as general members.

The committee consists of two senior joint conveners and two senior joint member secretaries, 16 joint conveners, and 33 joint member secretaries, a chief organiser each for the northern and southern regions, nine joint chief organisers, 18 organisers for the northern region, 24 organisers for the

southern region, a chief coordinator, a senior joint chief coordinator, 23 joint chief coordinators, and 76 general members.

'Super Ten' Leadership
Several founding members have been referred to as the party's top 10 leaders, known as the "Super Ten".

Nahid Islam, convener of NCP, was a key organiser of the student movement that led to the ouster of prime minister Sheikh Hasina. A sociology graduate from DU, Nahid was one of the student representatives within the interim government and resigned from the advisory council before taking on his new role.

Akhter Hossen, the member secretary, is a former social service affairs secretary of the Dhaka University Central Students' Union (Ducusu) and was one of the key organisers of Students Against Discrimination (SAD).

Nasiruddin Patwary, the chief coordinator, is an ex-student of DU's marketing department. He was active in the left-wing student organisation Chhatra Federation and served as the organising secretary of its DU unit.

Samanta Shermeen, senior joint convener, was involved in left-leaning student politics and was a former member of the politico-civic group Rastrochinta.

Ariful Islam Adib, another senior joint convener, is an alumnus of

Jahangirnagar University's zoology department and served as the general secretary of Chhatra Odhikar Parishad. He was also a member of the liaison committee of SAD.

Masud, a DU student and one of the coordinators of the organisation, was named as the senior joint chief coordinator.

Dr Tasnim Zara, senior joint member secretary, completed her MBBS from Dhaka Medical College before obtaining a degree from Oxford University.

Nahida Sarwar Niva, a former student of DU's microbiology department, is the other senior joint member secretary. She was at the forefront of the 2018 quota reform and road safety protests. She was also an active member of SAD.

Sarjis Alam, chief organiser for the northern region, is an alumnus of Dhaka University's zoology department and was elected a member of the hall union in the 2019 Ducusu election from the Chhatra League panel.

Hasnat Abdullah, chief organiser for the southern region, is a former student of DU's English department. He came into the spotlight after staging a hunger strike in front of the university's register building in protest against bureaucratic inefficiencies in administrative services.

PBI quizzes five, including Justice Manik

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court, a PBI official said. Yesterday, the magistrate directed Palash to meet the investigation officer Md Azizul Haque by April 15 this year.

In the application, the investigator said Palash was arrested on October 10, 2012 but was later released on bail. He needs to be interrogated to find vital clues about the killings.

Palash yesterday remained absent by submitting an application for his non-appearance before the court.

In addition, the court yesterday extended the deadline for submitting the probe report to April 15 as IO Haque, also an additional superintendent of police at the PIB, failed to submit the report yesterday, said court police.

Sagar Sarowar was a news editor at Maasranga TV and his wife Meherun Runi was a senior reporter at AIN Bangla. They were killed in the early hours of February 11, 2012 at their rented flat in the capital's West Rajabazar.

Their only child Mahir Sarowar Megh, who was only five at the time, was in the apartment.

After the killings, eight suspects – Kamrul Islam alias Arun, Abu Sayeed, Rafiqul Islam, Bakul Miah, Masum Mintu, Palash Rudra Paul, Anamul Haque alias Humayun Kabir and Tanveer Rahman Khan – were arrested. Tanveer and Palash are now out of jail, while the others are behind bars.

After the case was filed, the Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Police Station was

tasked with the investigation, which was handed over to the Detective Branch (DB) of police three days later on February 16, 2012. The DB investigated the matter until April 18 of that year.

The case was transferred to the Rapid Action Battalion in April 2012. The force conducted the probe until November 3 last year.

On November 4 last year, the PIB took over the charge of investigation into the case following a High Court order.

On October 23 last year, a four-member task force was formed to investigate the case where the PBI chief was made the convener.

The task force has been asked to submit its report to the High Court within six months after completing the investigation.

Incomplete power line delays test run

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Committee of the National Economic Council for completion by December 2024.

As of February, the overall physical progress of the project is 44 percent and the financial progress is 33 percent.

On the other hand, the physical progress of the gridline on Jamuna river is 50 percent as of February, according to project officials.

The construction work for the transmission line through the Padma and Jamuna rivers for the Rooppur nuclear power plant started later than scheduled as its Indian contractor left the country following the ouster of the Sheikh Hasina-led government on August 5 last year.

A total of 669 kilometres of the gridline, including 16 kilometres of river

crossing line in both Padma and Jamuna, is needed for power transmission to the national grid from the country's first nuclear power plant, according to the Power Grid Company Bangladesh.

However, project officials said they have resumed work and they are hopeful of completing the gridline's work soon.

The physical work of unit-1 is almost complete but the gridline work is yet to be ready, said Zahedul Hasan, project director of the Rooppur nuclear power plant.

As a result, the technical tests through the power supply in the unit cannot be done.

At least two months is needed to complete all tests.

After completing the tests, fuel needs to be loaded in the reactor building,

which will take another three months.

"After completing the gridline work, we need five to six months to reach the 'Change Reaction' step for starting up unit-1."

A top official of the IAEA will come to Bangladesh on March 7 to check the preparations.

"After IAEA's observation we will go for the next step," Hasan said.

The 2,400MW power plant is being built in Rooppur, Pabna for \$12.65 billion.

According to the original project proposal, unit-1 would be in operation on December 23, 2022, unit-2 on October 8, 2023 and the entire project would be completed by December 31, 2025.

The construction of unit-1 formally started on November 30, 2017 and unit-2 on July 14, 2018.

Our gentle giants in peril

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63 wild elephants were killed, clearly indicating that the rate of elephant killings has doubled in the last decade.

However, it was not determined how many of the recorded deaths involved migratory elephants.

Meanwhile, a circus elephant died in Lalmonirhat in 2019 due to extreme stress, while a captive elephant calf was killed after being hit by a train in Uttara, Dhaka, in 2023.

WOES OF THE WILD

With Bangladesh's forests disappearing at an alarming rate, conservationists fear these magnificent creatures may soon vanish from the country altogether.

According to data from the Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation Division (WMNCD) under the forest department, at least 102 wild elephants were killed in the Chattogram region alone in the past decade (2016-Jan 2025).

Data obtained by The Daily Star showed that 16 died from electrocution, while five were shot dead. The Wildlife Division reported that 53 elephants died from "old-age complications" or "natural causes" such as heart failure. At least 17 died from accidents, while the causes of the remaining deaths could not be determined.

During this period, 44 people died in human-elephant conflicts in the region.

Conservationists, however, argue that all the elephant deaths resulted from human intervention.

Despite the scale of the crisis, only 18 cases have been filed for the killing of elephants.

One such incident involved Ali Akbar, a 36-year-old welder from Chattogram's Karnaphuli upazila.

One night, upon stepping out of his home, he encountered an elephant nearby. Fearing it might trample his home and family, he attempted to chase it away, triggering the animal's "fight or flight" instinct.

Within moments, Akbar was crushed to death.

"He was the sole breadwinner of the family... His death has left us in turmoil," said Akbar's wife, Minu Akter.

Over the past six years (2019-2024), such incidents in Chattogram have claimed 44 lives, left at least 33 injured, and destroyed the property of 382 families.

The Wildlife Division attributes these encounters to habitat destruction and food shortages, which force wild

elephants into human settlements.

"Deforestation, hill-cutting, and industrial expansion are driving elephants out of their habitats and into human settlements," said Abu Naser Md Yasin Newaz, divisional forest officer of the Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation Division in Chattogram.

Meanwhile, 22 elephants and 39 people have died in human-elephant conflicts in the Mymensingh region since 2016, said ANM Abdul Wadud, divisional forest officer in Mymensingh.

Three cases were filed with Nalatabari and Jhenaigati police stations in 2023 and 2024 regarding the deaths of three elephants.

Additionally, a total of seven general diaries were filed with different police stations over elephant deaths, Wadud said.

According to forest department sources, elephant deaths were recorded as follows: four each in 2016 and 2017, three in 2018, one in 2019, two in 2020, two in 2021, three in 2022, two in 2023, and one in 2024.

WHY THIS CONFLICT AND WHAT CAN BE DONE

MA Aziz, a professor of zoology at Jahangirnagar University who has dedicated his career to studying elephants, warned that wild elephants are currently the most vulnerable species in Bangladesh.

"An elephant needs around 200-250kg of vegetation and 150 litres of water daily. But their habitats can no longer provide these... So, they wander into human settlements, desperately looking for food. And that's where tragedy strikes."

Bangladesh has never launched a long-term conservation initiative for elephants, he said. "If the government does not take immediate action, Bangladesh may no longer be one of the 13 Asian countries with wild elephants within the next decade."

Simanta Dipu, programme manager at IUCN, said, "In 2016, the IUCN recorded only 457 elephants in Bangladesh. A century ago, these creatures roamed freely across the country's forests."

Human settlements, agricultural lands, roads, highways, brickfields, and village markets have developed within or near elephant movement routes and corridors, exacerbating human-elephant conflicts, he said.

Amir Hossain Chowdhury, chief conservator of forests (CCF), admitted that most elephant deaths occur due to human-elephant conflicts. Of the 12

elephant corridors that once existed, one in Ramu and two in Teknaf have already been completely closed.

An elephant corridor is a narrow strip of land that allows elephants to move between habitats without human interference.

"We need to involve local communities to save these elephants," Amir said, adding, "We've submitted a project proposal to the Planning Commission for elephant conservation."

The proposed "Elephant Conservation Project," if approved, will be Bangladesh's first government-funded elephant conservation initiative since independence. Under it, the forest department will conduct an elephant census in 2026 to estimate the remaining elephant population.

With a budget of Tk 41 crore, the three-year pilot project aims to support elephant response teams with funding and logistics, raise public awareness, and install solar fencing to prevent elephants from straying into human settlements.

Solar fencing, which delivers a harmless shock, is expected to deter elephants while protecting villages from destruction. Currently, farmers set up illegal electric fences to keep elephants away from their farmlands, leading to fatal consequences for the animals.

To address this, the conservation project also plans to ensure that affected farmers receive compensation for crop damage, aiming to reduce hostility towards elephants.

Speaking to The Daily Star yesterday, Environment Adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan, said, "The situation has reached a alarming level as we've destroyed almost all the elephant corridors. Elephants have the habit of using the same routes they're familiar with."

"With the involvement of experts and different organisations, we've already resolved the human-elephant conflict issue in the KEPZ [Korean Export Processing Zone] area [in Chattogram's Anowara]."

Regarding the elephant conservation project, she said it is expected to be approved by the Planning Commission by the end of March.

"Under the project, a certain area of the Gazipur Safari Park will be assigned to rehabilitate captive elephants. We'll also protect the remaining elephant corridors and form elephant response teams in different areas."

Cultural affairs ministry

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finance ministry would send the money.

He also left the WhatsApp group chat meant for swift production of the video to be showcased at UNESCO headquarters on February 20-21 to depict Bangladesh's efforts in preserving the history of International Mother Language Day.

The group included the cultural affairs adviser Mostofa Sarwar Farooki and high-ranking officials from the UNESCO headquarters, the Bangladesh embassy, and the ministries of foreign affairs and cultural affairs.

"Therefore, the allegation that the ministry 'pressured' the academy to provide money for the video is untruthful and personally disrespectful to the cultural adviser himself."

The ministry also refuted the allegation that there was undue interference in the academy's proceedings as it neither interfered nor stopped any programme.

"Rather, it suggested increasing the number of cultural programmes

to bring forth a collective cultural statement."

The ministry suggested nationwide filmmaking initiatives across eight districts. It also allocated increased and special budgets for eight new theatre productions and the establishment of guerrilla theatre.

On the allegation of improper budget allocation, the ministry said the matter is under the jurisdiction of the finance ministry.

"When the prescribed budget of Tk 200 crore was presented by Shilpakala at a meeting on February 27, the finance adviser said that due to the current economic recession and other limitations, the prescribed budget might be re-evaluated. However, the next allocated budget for Shilpakala will be more than the current one, and special allocations will be provided in case of new projects at Shilpakala."

Ahmed intentionally held up the musical composer from taking part in rehearsals for the recital of the national anthem and the background score for the Ekushey Padak award giving

ceremony in the name of a meeting, the press release said.

He also held up a singer who was supposed to take part in the musical arrangement.

Ahmed's claims of bureaucratic delays are untrue too, the ministry said.

On February 28, Ahmed handed in his resignation after giving a fiery speech in which he made several allegations against the cultural ministry.

He alleged financial mismanagement within the academy, claiming the administration treated allocated funds as "personal assets".

"My request for a Tk 165 crore budget was not fully met. If we [Shilpakala authorities] must repeatedly call upon the administration and still fail to establish a collaborative and peaceful working environment due to bureaucratic obstacles, I don't see how I can effectively fulfill my role here."

"I've given this decision a lot of thought. It's now time for me to return to my own theatre work," he said in his speech.

Election rigging never ends well

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longer just a right; it is also a responsibility."

He said differences in opinion on various issues among the political parties are not a problem; rather, it is the beauty of democracy, and he believes the parties will unite on the matters that are fundamental to upholding democratic practices.

FREE, FAIR POLLS MAIN GOAL
The CEC said that their prime objective is to hold a free, fair, and credible election.

He urged EC officials to make a promise that in the holy month of Ramadan, they would work impartially to make the next election free and fair.

Election Commissioner Tahmid Ahmed suggested holding elections in open fields instead of inside closed rooms to ensure transparency.

"I want our elections to be transparent. How can they be transparent if they are held in closed rooms? Therefore, I propose that our elections be conducted in open fields."

Election Commissioner Abdur Rahmanuel Masud said people have the right to choose their representatives, and this right can only be upheld if they are able to vote freely.

Election commissioners Anwarul Islam Sarkar and Abul Fazal Md

Sanaullah also spoke at the programme.

TOTAL VOTERS: 12.37 CR
While inaugurating the day's proceedings in the morning, CEC Nasir said that the total number of voters in the country now stands at 12,37,32,274.

Of them, 6,33,61,615 are male, 6,03,69,665 are female, and 994 are "hijra" voters.

The number reflects a 1.54 percent growth compared to the previous year's voter count of 12,18,50,160.

As per tradition, the final updated voter list is published on March 2 every year, coinciding with the observance of National Voters' Day.

Tk 2.42 crore seized

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the raid, he said.

However, the ACC has yet to disclose further details regarding the case or any potential legal action against the former intelligence chief.

Saiful's arrest warrant was issued as he had been in charge of the DGFJ between February 28, 2020, and July 5, 2021, during which time some enforced disappearance victims were reportedly held in the Joint Interrogation Cell inside the directorate's compound.

In a letter to the ACC yesterday,

Saiful's wife, Lubna, stated that his passport had been cancelled in the last week of November 2024 and that his current situation remains uncertain.

"Since my husband's future is uncertain for the foreseeable moment, he liquidated the savings earned from his job and left the money with me," she wrote.

She requested that the money be returned to her for the sake of her children, elderly parents, and in-laws.

Saiful was forcibly retired on September 10, 2024, under Section 289(A) of the Army Regulations,

which pertains to removal for misconduct and inefficiency.

Following the fall of the Awami League government on 5 August, he was posted to the foreign ministry the next day.

Previously, on September 3, the Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU) froze the bank accounts of Saiful, his wife, and children and instructed all banks to submit account-related information or documents, including account opening forms, KYC records, and transaction statements, to the BFIU within five working days.

Home adviser urges all

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locals for smoking in public, police said.

The women were physically assaulted by the group of men.

Jewel Rana, additional deputy commissioner of Mohammadpur zone, said the women were escorted to Mohammadpur Police Station for their safety.

According to police, the women were smoking at a tea stall in Lalmatia, behind Aarong, when some locals confronted them, asking them not to smoke in public. The situation escalated into a heated argument,

prompting police intervention.

Meanwhile, the home adviser also requested that businessmen refrain from increasing the prices of goods during Ramadan.

"You will see that in other religions, during their religious events, they reduce the prices of goods. However, in our country, the opposite happens. During Ramadan, prices are actually raised."

He urged businessmen to lower the prices to ease the burden on consumers.

Compared to last Ramadan, the prices are somewhat lower this time, he said.

10 gunmen, one soldier killed in northern Benin

AFP, Cotonou

Clashes in Benin over the last week between armed groups and the military left ten dead, including one soldier, as the West African country faces an uptick in attacks on army positions.

While the country's economic capital Cotonou, in the south, continues to draw in international tourists, Benin's poorer north has for years now seen such attacks, often blamed by the government on jihadist groups seeking to extend their reach from neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger.

Overnight Thursday into Friday, the army launched "an offensive operation" that led to "the neutralisation of nine terrorists," a source close to the military high command told AFP on Saturday.

The operation – which a local source said took place in the commune of Karimama – came after an improvised explosive device left one soldier dead and two others

injured in nearby Kantoro.

Both communities are near the border with Niger. While the border near Burkina Faso remains the epicentre of such attacks, communities near the Niger border have seen an uptick in violence recently.

"Offensive aerial operations aided by those on the ground resulted in the destruction of an important logistics hub" belonging to unnamed "terrorists," an officer told AFP, speaking on the condition of anonymity.

Long-running insurgencies in Burkina Faso and Niger have seen Islamic State and Al Qaeda-linked groups seize swathes of rural territory, often capitalising on longstanding ethnic or local political disputes as well as weak state presence.

Attacks in Benin's north have led observers to worry of a spillover of violence in the country.

In February, six Beninese soldiers were killed by unidentified gunmen. The army killed 17 assailants in response.

July victims' families to share quota

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freedom fighters and martyred freedom fighters.

According to the order, applicants seeking admission under this quota must submit certified copies of relevant documents or gazettes with their applications and present the original documents during admission.

Authorities must verify freedom fighter certificates issued by the Ministry of Liberation War Affairs and the official gazettes listing those martyred in the July uprising before finalising admissions.

If no eligible candidates from these categories are available, the seats must be filled from the merit list. The order also specifies that these seats cannot be left vacant under any circumstances.

TCB outlets

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complete the distribution of smart cards by March 17, as new cardholders will then become eligible for TCB services.

Additionally, he urged DCs to monitor and prevent the hoarding of goods by traders attempting to create an artificial shortage of commodities.

On February 12, Bashir Uddin announced that the TCB would sell certain essential commodities at subsidised rates to low-income individuals via mobile truck sales during Ramadan.

As part of this initiative, an additional 9,000 tonnes of goods will be distributed, he said while inaugurating TCB's mobile truck sales in Khulna last month.

At present, each buyer receives two litres of soybean oil, two kilogrammes each of lentils and chickpeas, one kilogramme of sugar, and 500 grammes of dates from TCB trucks. Prices have been set at Tk 100 per litre for oil, Tk 70 per kg for sugar, Tk 60 per kg for lentils and chickpeas, and Tk 156 for dates.