

ELECTORAL SYSTEM EC opposes key reform proposals

Objects to polls timing, separate body for delimitation

MD ABBAS and
AHMED DEEPTO

The Election Commission has objected to 10 key reform proposals, including those on the delimitation of constituencies, the timing of local government polls and the national election, and investigations against election commissioners.

In a letter sent to National Consensus Commission's Co Chairman Prof Ali Riaz yesterday, the EC warned that holding local government polls before the national election would delay the parliamentary polls.

The EC differed with the proposal to complete national and all local government polls within a four-month timeframe, saying that experience shows local elections alone take nearly a year to complete as these polls are held in phases.

It also raised objection to the Electoral Reform Commission's proposal on authorising a parliamentary committee to investigate failures of election commissioners.

Additionally, the EC opposed the proposed Election Commission Ordinance 2025, which seeks to introduce criminal liability for election commissioners for failing to ensure fair elections. This provision would erode the commissioners' independence and expose them to political pressure, the EC said.

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BNP cautiously optimistic of polls in December

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA and SAJJAD HOSSAIN

The BNP wants to put its trust in the interim government but cannot do so confidently until a specific timeline for the next general election is unveiled.

Despite earlier assurances from the interim government that the polls would be held in December this year, varying statements from Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus have fuelled scepticism within the party leadership.

Addressing police officers, the chief adviser yesterday stressed the need for implementing reforms, saying that the interim administration has "limited time before the upcoming election in December".

Three days earlier, he said the election could take place either in December this year or in June next year, depending on the political consensus around proposed reform packages.

If the political parties agree to a "short reform package", the election could happen this December. However, if they opt for a "comprehensive reform package", the election would be postponed until June next year.

Until the election date is announced, such "floating remarks" are not reassuring, BNP Standing Committee member Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury told The Daily Star yesterday.

"What is the problem in declaring the election date? There has to be

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What is the problem in declaring the election date? There has to be a cut-off date for everything. Nothing can be open-ended.

AMIR KHASRU MAHMUD CHOWDHURY



Bangladesh situation a 'concern' for US

Says Tulsi Gabbard; CA's press wing refutes her remarks



STAR REPORT

US Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard yesterday said the situation in Bangladesh is a "major area of concern" for the United States, citing "the long-time persecution of religious minorities."

In an interview with NDTV World, she said, "The long time unfortunate persecution, killing, and abuse of religious

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TOILING UNDER THE HOT SUN... A worker collecting wheat that has fallen during shipment at a jetty at Anu Majhir Ghat on the Karnaphuli river, Chattogram. As the temperature rises, engaging in physical labour outdoors has become challenging. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Be impartial during polls

Yunus asks cops, reiterates commitment to election, reforms by Dec

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR and MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Reiterating the government's plan to hold the next general election in December, Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus yesterday told police to act impartially and not give in to pressure from any group during the polls.

Prof Yunus also asked them to ensure the safety of women, minority communities, and the underprivileged people.

The interim government doesn't have much time left, he said at a special meeting with senior police officers at his office in the capital's Tejgaon.

"We have already spent seven months. We're saying the election will be held in December. So, within this time, we must accomplish what we want.... We should make the necessary reforms -- whether they are the ones we are discussing or the ones you suggest."

Those who run for office may become desperate, but



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CHILD RAPE
New DNA labs, tribunal for victims

UNB, Dhaka

The interim government has in principle decided to bring necessary changes to the existing Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, including introducing a provision to have a tribunal to deal with child rape cases.

"A final approval [on proposed amendments] is likely to come on Thursday," Law Adviser Asif Nazrul told reporters at the Foreign Service Academy yesterday afternoon.

The decision was taken at a special meeting of the advisory council held yesterday with Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus in the chair.

Forests and Climate Change Adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan and Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam were also present at the media briefing.

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Freeze stolen assets parked in UK

BB governor urges British parliamentary body

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Bank Governor Ahsan H Mansur sought help from the UK's All Party Parliamentary Group on Anti-Corruption in getting sanctions on stolen assets parked in Britain.

During a meeting at Portcullis House in London yesterday, the governor told the British MPs that a handful of business magnates directly syphoned \$20-25 billion out of Bangladesh's banking system.

The figure would stand at \$70 billion if assets pilfered from general corruption were also accounted for, said Ifty Islam, who advises the government on asset recovery.

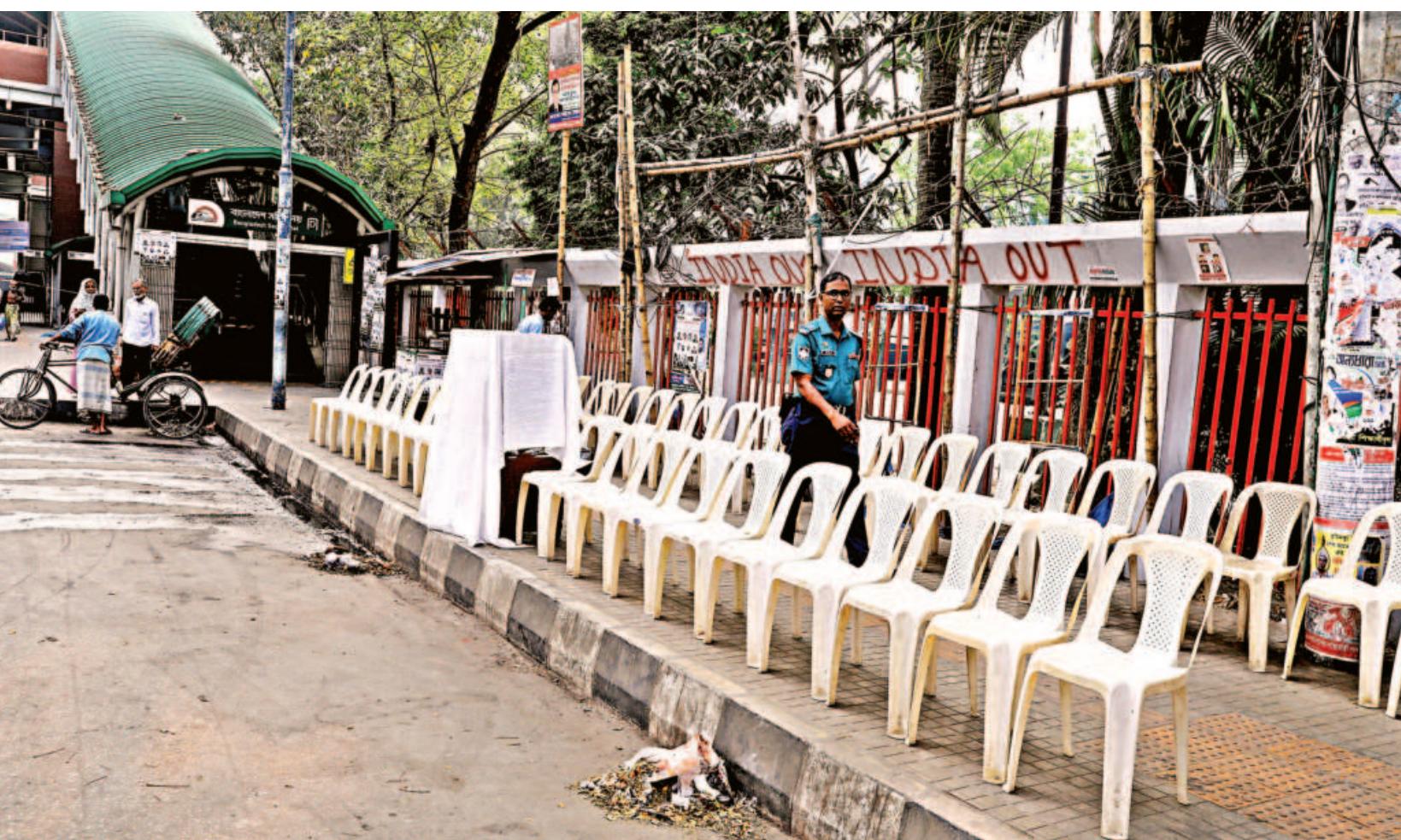
This is the largest asset recovery attempt in history, Mansur and Ifty said.

Former justice secretary Alex Chalk KC and Rupa Huq MP, among others, attended the meeting hosted by Lloyd Hatton MP.

The governor said that the government had identified 160 potential cases and was approaching the issue from both criminal and civil law perspectives.

The stolen assets would stand at \$70 billion if general corruption were also accounted for, said Ifty Islam, who advises govt on asset recovery.

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RENT-A-RALLY!...The stage is set occupying this footpath in front of the Jatiya Press Club. Dozens of chairs have been put together in rows with a dais, equipped with a microphone and loudspeakers, nestled in between. For Tk 1,500, a party can rent this set-up for an hour and hold a meeting. The photo was taken yesterday morning.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

CAAB staffers stage protests across airports
Demand cancellation of plans for new airport security force

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) staffers demonstrated in airports across the country yesterday protesting the authority's proposal of a separate airport security force comprised of civil and military personnel.

Carrying banners, the staffers organised demonstrations in front of their headquarters in Dhaka as well as at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, Shah Amanat International Airport in Chattogram, Osmani International Airport in Sylhet, Hazrat Shah Makhdum International Airport in Rajshahi, Cox's Bazar Airport, Saidpur Airport and Jashore Airport.

On March 10, 2025, a proposal was made to the CAAB chairman, floating the idea of a new security outfit called "Bangladesh Airport Security Force".

According to the proposal, prepared by CAAB's security department, 70 percent of the people from the new force would be recruited from the air force, while 30 percent would be recruited from civilian staffers. A total of 10,632 people would be

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BSF 'tortures' Bangladeshi on Jhenaidah border

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

A Bangladeshi was tortured allegedly by Indian Border Security Force members along Maheshpur border in Jhenaidah early yesterday.

The victim was Faruk Hossain, 42, of Berli village in Narail's Kalia upazila.

Farmers found Faruk in the Cumilla Para border area in the morning.

Later, the villagers informed his family members. After primary treatment, he was taken home.

Local UP member Obaidul Islam said Faruk was trying to enter Bangladesh through the Khasulpur border around 12:30am with his wife Hasi Sheikh and daughter Ayesha Khatun. At that time, he was detained by the BSF members and tortured brutally.

Injured Faruk told the media that he was tortured after being detained by the 194th Battalion BSF in Baranbera, India.

"They tied a rope around my neck and threw me towards the border, thinking I was dead," he said. He regained consciousness around dawn.



The Ismail Shah Shrine at Bottola in Barguna's Amtali upazila came under an arson attack early yesterday. The fire burnt down the shrine's hall rooms and sheds. Inset, the photo shows the shrine engulfed in flames around 12:15am.

PHOTO: SOHRAB HOSSAIN

BNP cautiously optimistic of polls

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a cut-off date for everything. Nothing can be open ended. Uncertainty surrounding this matter is creating doubts among people, which is unfortunate," he added.

Salahuddin Ahmed, another member of the party's standing committee, termed the chief adviser's remarks "inconsistent".

"Earlier, he [Yunus] said that the election would be held in December. Now he is saying the date may change depending on the undertaking of comprehensive or short reform packages. What we figure now is that constitutional reforms are a major issue, and for this, a parliament is needed."

The other reforms could be done through ordinances if all political parties agreed, and it would not take more than three months.

"We don't know why he [Yunus] is making inconsistent comments. We expect him to make it clear that the election will be held by December," he added.

At a programme on Sunday, Mirza Abbas, another standing committee member, said: "We've heard many things -- some say the election will happen, the others say it won't. We don't want to believe in anything. We want to believe that Dr Yunus will stand by his words. We hope to see an election

by December."

The BNP's suspicion deepened following a February 10 meeting between its senior leaders and Yunus.

After the meeting, BNP leaders said they were assured that the election would be held in December.

However, two weeks later, Shafiqul Alam, the chief adviser's press secretary, said the election could also be held in March next year depending on political consensus.

The BNP leaders believe that the government is trying to cater to the interests of multiple political groups, which may explain the conflicting statements.

They point to the emergence of the National Citizen Party (NCP) led by Nahid Islam as a factor influencing the interim government's strategy.

Nahid recently told Reuters that holding the election in December may be difficult because of the current law and order situation.

However, he added that before polls can be held, it would be crucial to reach a consensus on the "July Charter" that the interim government plans to prepare in consultation with political parties and student activists.

"If we can reach that consensus within a month, we can call for polls immediately. But if it takes more time, the election should be deferred," Nahid added.

Following Nahid's remarks, the BNP standing committee held an emergency meeting where it discussed the possibility of a deliberate delay in the election.

"It is clear that the government is trying to play both sides. On one hand, it is trying to assure the BNP that an election would be held in December. On the other hand, it is trying to keep open the option of holding the election in June next year to satisfy the other political parties," said a senior leader wishing not to be named.

Sarjis Alam, the chief organiser of the NCP for the northern region, made a controversial statement that reinforced BNP's concerns.

Until the execution of Sheikh Hasina, no one should even talk about the election, he said.

Meanwhile, despite the uncertainty, the Election Commission is preparing for a December election.

However, logistical challenges remain.

If the election is delayed beyond December, the next feasible window might not open until October 2026 as there will be Ramadan, HSC exams and the monsoon season from February to June.

The BNP leaders argue that an election delay will only add to the political instability and distrust towards the government.

EC opposes key reform proposals

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It also argued that the Supreme Judicial Council already handles this and such a provision would weaken the EC's ability to make firm decisions.

The letter, signed by EC Senior Secretary Akhtar Ahmed, said that the formation of a separate commission for delimitation would weaken the commission's constitutional authority and disrupt the electoral process.

During a press conference yesterday at the EC Secretariat, Akhtar said: "Implementing these recommendations will undermine the EC's independence."

The EC also disagreed on transferring voter list management and national ID card distribution to a proposed National Citizen Data Commission.

This would weaken the EC's ability to conduct elections independently and violate article 119 of the constitution, which outlines the Election Commission's functions, the EC said.

The commission objected to the inclusion of a proposal to bar fugitive individuals from contesting elections, saying such restrictions should be handled through existing legal mechanisms, not electoral reforms.

The EC differed with the proposal to make candidates submit nomination papers in person instead of allowing online submissions. In this regard, the EC cited concerns over adequate logistical support and previous incidents where candidates faced obstacles in filing nominations in person.

The EC rejected the idea of appointing returning officers solely from its own officials, emphasising that appointments should be based on competence and seniority rather than rigid rules.

The commission raised objection to a proposal to allocate its budget through a vote on behalf of an expatriate.

Asked whether proxy voting would lead to a lack of trust in the electoral

process during yesterday's briefing, Fazl said, "If we aim to facilitate voting for expatriates on a large scale, proxy voting seems to be the only practical solution. The two other methods could be tested at the pilot level, but may not be feasible."

"This system [proxy voting] is already in place in India for defence personnel. Additionally, some European Union countries, such as France, Belgium, and the Netherlands, also have similar arrangements. Postal ballots are no longer effective for us. The time between printing the ballot papers and the actual voting day is too short to send, collect, and return the ballots for counting," he said.

The commissioner further said, "The second option is online voting. However, as the Egyptian ambassador mentioned, their experience with online voting was not good, leading them to discontinue the system. On the other hand, while the Pakistani ambassador spoke positively about online voting, they have not been able to implement it on a full scale."

During the meeting, Chief Election Commissioner Brig Gen (Retd) Abul Fazl Md Sanaullah briefed reporters about the matter at the EC Secretariat yesterday after a meeting with the heads of missions from Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member states in Bangladesh.

"If we truly want to provide our expatriates with the opportunity to vote, we must adopt either one option or a combination of multiple options," he said. The EC earlier said it was also considering a postal ballot system with a specified timeframe and an online voting system for the expatriates.

Asked whether proxy voting would lead to a lack of trust in the electoral

on any evidence or specific allegations. "They paint an entire nation with a broad and unjustified brush. Bangladesh, like many countries around the world, has faced challenges of extremism, but it has continuously worked in partnership with the international community, including the US, to address these issues through law enforcement, social reforms, and other counterterrorism efforts."

Groundlessly linking Bangladesh to the idea of an "Islamist caliphate" undermines the hard work of countless Bangladeshis and their friends and partners around the world who are committed to peace, stability, and progress. Bangladesh strongly condemns any efforts to link the country to any form of "Islamist caliphate", the statement added.

"Political leaders and public figures should base their statements, especially about the most sensitive issues, on actual knowledge and take care not to reinforce harmful stereotypes, to fan fears and potentially even stoke sectarian tensions."

"In support of our shared global efforts to combat extremism and terrorism, the interim government remains committed to engaging in constructive dialogue based on facts and on respect for the sovereignty and security of all nations."

Be impartial during polls

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"you must operate within the boundaries of the law" regardless of what the political parties say.

"No matter who it is -- whether it's the newly formed political parties led by students or the established ones -- if they make any demands, respond by saying, 'We will adhere to the law.'

Police's special focus should also be on women's safety, now "a critical topic of discussion", and it is an enormous task, he said.

"Due to our negligence... half of our country's population has become helpless, with no one to pay attention to them. Women are even afraid to walk on the streets... They are unsure where to look -- whether to gaze up or down. They are also uncertain about what clothes to wear."

Every man has a personal responsibility to ensure women's safety. "But as police officers, we have the greatest responsibility. The law has given every citizen their rights, and it is our duty to uphold those rights."

The safety of minorities is equally important. It is the government's responsibility to ensure the rights granted to them by the constitution, he said.

The country is going through a war-like situation. And as the election approaches, the "defeated forces" are likely to engage in more misdeeds to create unrest to disrupt peace, he said.

The government ultimately depends on the police to create the environment

for implementing its initiatives.

Terming the previous regime a dark period, Prof Yunus said the police were "active participants" in that era.

During the Awami League rule, police were influenced by bad individuals, he said, expressing hopes that they would prove that they are good people.

"To build a new Bangladesh, you must move away from that mindset and embrace the idea of building a truly new Bangladesh... In this new Bangladesh, police must prove their commitment to maintaining law and order. The police must also demonstrate that they were victims of circumstance, not wrongdoers. They are now ready to help build a reformed nation."

THE MEETING
Senior officials told the chief adviser that only an independent commission could bring the police force back to the right track and make it service-oriented.

Barahul Alam, inspector general of police, said a proposal to form a police commission was placed before the Police Reform Commission, but the police do not know whether it would be implemented.

An independent commission is crucial for ensuring stability.

A high official, requesting anonymity, said that there were enthusiasms among the police over the meeting.

IGP Barahul later held another meeting at the Police Headquarters where he told officers that they must face the challenges in the coming days with utmost professionalism.

these areas, and suggested that the new organisation will act as a supplementary body to AVSEC.

Petitioners on the other hand, demanded the de-militarisation of AVSEC.

In 2016, people from the disciplined forces were deployed to AVSEC for a temporary period "in aid to civil power", but their stays have been extended multiple times such that they have become permanent, said the statement given by the protesters.

They demanded a clear cut-off date by which people from the disciplined forces been to be pulled out of AVSEC.

AVSEC and the Airport Armed Police Battalion have been involved in a dispute over the past months over security responsibilities at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport.

It said that AVSEC is not "entirely successful" in providing security to

minorities -- Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Catholics, and others -- have been a major area of concern for the United States government and of course President Trump and his administration."

"The talks are just beginning between President Trump's new cabinet coming in and the government of Bangladesh, but this continues to remain a central focus area of concern," she added.

In reaction to Gabbard's comments, the Bangladesh government said that her statement is both misleading and damaging to the image and reputation of Bangladesh.

A statement from the chief adviser's press wing last night said, "Bangladesh as a nation traditionally practises Islam that is famously inclusive and peaceful and has made remarkable strides in its fight against extremism and terrorism."

Talking to the NDTV World, Gabbard said, "The threat of Islamist terrorists, and their overall effort, the global effort of all of these different groups, are rooted in the same ideology and some objective -- which is to rule or govern with an Islamist Caliphate."

"This obviously affects people of any other religion, other than the one that they find acceptable, and they chose to carry this out with terror and very

violent ways and means."

She further said, "President Trump remains committed to identifying the ideology that drives Islamist terrorism, and working to defeat this ideology and their ability to exact that terror on people, the American people and others."

Gabbard's remarks came a day after she, along with Britain's National Security Adviser Jonathan Powell and New Zealand's intelligence chief Andrew Hampton, attended a security conference in New Delhi.

The event was hosted by India's National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, along with RAW chief Ravi Sinha and Intelligence Bureau chief Tapan Deka.

Gabbard is the first senior level official from the Donald Trump administration to visit India during the US president's second term that began on January 20.

STATEMENT FROM CA'S PRESS WING
"We note with deep concern and distress the remarks made by DNI Tuli Gabbard, in which she alleged 'persecution and killing' of religious minorities in Bangladesh, and that 'the threat of Islamic terrorists' in the country is 'rooted' in the 'ideology and objective' to 'rule and govern with an Islamist caliphate,'" the government said in the statement.

Gabbard's comments are not based

CAAB staffers stage protests

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recruited for the new security body.

The proposed security force would be headed by an air vice marshall or an air commodore, given the status of a director general, according to the proposal.

Maintaining the force would cost the Civil Aviation Tk 397 crore, shows the project proposal budget.

A petition given to the chairman by the protesters yesterday demanded that CAAB immediately cease all proceedings to form this new paramilitary force.

CAAB Chairman Air Vice Marshal Md Monjur Kabir Bhuiyan verbally backedtrack on the decision in the face of the protests.

"A proposal for a separate airport security force was placed before us, but

and the advisory council, in principle, agreed on those."

"We have already received some opinions and we will scrutinise these opinions tomorrow and the day after tomorrow. We expect the proposed amendments will get final approval on Thursday," she said.

Adviser Rizwana said lack of adequate DNA labs is one of the reasons for the delay in settling rape-related cases, and at this moment, there is only one DNA lab.

She said the government decided to set up two more DNA labs quickly in Chattogram and Rajshahi.

The adviser also said some judges

New DNA labs, tribunal

FROM PAGE 1

Adviser Asif Nazrul reiterated that time for trial and investigation will also be shortened in line with the government's efforts to deal with cases in an expedited manner.

He said there is no relation between the proposed changes and the case of the Magura child, as her case will be settled on a priority basis.

The adviser said the DNA report of the Magura girl case will be prepared in two to three days and the trial of the case will begin soon.

Adviser Rizwana said a good number of amendments were placed from the Law Ministry before the meeting,

20 hurt in Barguna shrine attack

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

At least 20 people were injured as the Ismail Shah Shrine at Bottola in Barguna's Amtali came under an arson attack during an urs early yesterday.

The shrine's hall rooms and sheds were burnt in the attack carried out by Islami Andolan Bangladesh men around 12:15am, alleged Mostafizur Rahman Babul, the shrine's custodian.

Firefighters managed to douse the flames around 2:45am.

Locals said the shrine, established

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Abul Mansur Ahmad's death anniv today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Today is the 46th death anniversary of Abul Mansur Ahmad, a renowned litterateur, journalist, and politician of the sub-continent. He passed away in 1979.

One of the greatest satirists of Bangla literature, he was also a pioneer of modern and progressive journalism. He worked for prominent newspapers such as Krishak, Nabajug, Sultan, and Mohammadi, and was editor of the Kolkata-based Daily Ittehad from 1946 to 1948.

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Large crowds thronged the outpatient department at Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday, as many patients sought consultations and tests ahead of returning to their villages for Eid.

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Interim govt overstepping elected govt's role

Says Amir Khasru

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP standing committee member Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury yesterday questioned why the interim government's structure and activities were expanding further.

It seems like a certain group is taking on the responsibility of carrying out all the tasks of the upcoming government, he said while speaking at an event at Jatiya Press Club.

"It looks like the future elected government of Bangladesh will have little to do, as the interim government wants to take responsibility for everything - short term, mid-term, long-term, and even beyond, if anything remains. As if all issues must be resolved by the interim government," he said.

"If that's the case, then why even talk about democracy and elections? Why do we talk about the ownership of the people of the country? Why do we mention accountability and responsibility?" he asked.

Meanwhile, at another programme, BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi yesterday accused advisers of the interim government of attempting to create a division between the long-standing anti-government movement and the recent July-August uprising and

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DEATH IN CUSTODY

Ensure fair, impartial investigation: MSF

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Manabdhikar Shongskriti Foundation (MSF) has called for an immediate, impartial, and fair investigation into the death of a murder suspect - Hezar Bin Alam, also known as Ezaz - in police custody.

The rights organisation also urged that those responsible be held accountable and face legal action to ensure justice.

In a press statement issued yesterday, MSF said the death of an individual in police custody is a matter of grave concern.

The organisation emphasised that all custodial deaths require thorough investigations, as they raise serious public concerns.

The state has a legal obligation to ensure the safety of individuals in custody, said the statement, signed by rights activist and MSF Founding President Sultana Kamal.

Ezaz, 37, died at Dhaka Medical College Hospital on Saturday, just hours after detectives detained him from the Japan-Bangladesh Friendship Hospital in Jigatola, Dhamundi, where he was undergoing treatment.

An inquest report prepared on Sunday by Sheikh Kader Ahmed, a sub-inspector at Mohammadpur Police Station, in the presence of an executive magistrate, documented dark bruises on Ezaz's back, handcuff marks on his wrists, and additional bruises on his thighs, buttocks, and swollen legs.

Ezaz's father, Shah Alam, claimed his son was taken by a joint forces team from Mohammadpur's Baroikhal area on March 10 and tortured at a nearby camp before being handed over to Mohammadpur police early on March 11.

According to police, an army team arrested Ezaz and then handed him over to police on March 11 as his name was found in a murder case.

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HC scraps food adulteration case against Yunus

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday scrapped the trial proceedings of a food adulteration case filed in 2010 against Prof Muhammad Yunus, the then chairman of Grameen Danone Food Limited.

The HC bench of Justice KM Hafizul Alam and Justice Md Atabullah delivered the verdict after hearing a petition filed in 2011 by Prof Yunus, challenging the legality of filing the case and its trial proceedings.

Dhaka South City Corporation filed the case with the Pure Food Court on the charge of storing adulterated dairy products against Grameen Danone Food Limited.

The HC quashed the case proceedings after examining an affidavit submitted by the DSCC's chief health officer on March 13.



A DAY IN COURT

Shajahan's smirk gives way to tears

EMRUL HASAN BAPPI

The smirk was still there as Shajahan Khan stepped out of the Dhaka Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court lockup. His lips curled into the familiar expression that had become his signature -- whether in moments of controversy, tragedy, or now, as an accused in a murder case.

But the confidence that once fuelled it seemed to waver.

At 10:08am, he silently stood in the dock, a stark contrast to his earlier demeanour in the holding area, as he was usually seen chatting and laughing before.

The prosecution argued for a five-day remand, linking him to the death of Rafiqul Islam in Badda on July 19 last year.

During the hearing, Shajahan raised his hand, trying to get Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate MA Azharul Islam's attention. No response. He tried again -- nothing. Only after his lawyers had spoken did the court permit him to speak. "Honourable court, please give me some time to speak. I want to say something," he began.

With permission granted, his tone turned pleading. The public prosecutor mentioned that police fired

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Manik Howlader and his wife Baby Akter spray pesticides on their sunflower plants to protect them from pests. They sowed the seeds in mid-November last year and are now waiting for the flowers to fully mature. The photo was taken from South Char Aicha village of Barishal Sadar upazila yesterday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Umrah pilgrims in limbo

RASHIDUL HASAN

Several thousand Umrah pilgrims and hajj agencies are facing major disruptions as the Saudi government has almost completely stopped issuing Umrah visas without prior notice.

This sudden decision has left thousands of pilgrims stranded, while many travel agencies are facing huge losses, said the Hajj Agencies Association of Bangladesh (HAAB).

The abrupt policy change has created uncertainty for those planning to perform umrah.

Many Bangladeshi pilgrims are now in limbo due to the visa situation.

Amid this situation, the Religious Affairs Ministry will hold a press conference on Umrah visas at its office at the Secretariat office today.

The Saudi government had opened Umrah visas through the Nusuk app, allowing millions of pilgrims to travel.

However, due to overcrowding, particularly in Makkah and Madinah, visa issuance has been reduced by 90 percent, sources at the ministry said.

This situation is not limited to Bangladesh, as other countries are also facing similar issues.

According to ministry sources, Saudi Arabia is currently seeing a lot of visitors, more than it sees even during the Hajj season, making it difficult for people to worship properly.

Saudi Arabia is currently seeing a lot of visitors, more than it sees even during the Hajj season, making it difficult for people to worship properly. Due to the overwhelming number of pilgrims during Ramadan, the Saudi government may have temporarily halted visa issuance.

The Saudi government may have temporarily halted visa issuance due to the overwhelming number of pilgrims during Ramadan, they added.

Farid Ahmed Majumder, secretary general of HAAB, said around 45,000 to 50,000 Bangladeshis travel to Saudi Arabia for Umrah during Ramadan.

"The sudden visa halt has put these people in uncertainty," he said, adding that many have already purchased airline tickets and booked hotels, which has put them in trouble.

"In previous years, Saudi authorities informed us in advance before reducing or stopping visa issuance, but this time, they didn't give any prior notice," he added.

Farid also mentioned that around 30,000 to 33,000 Bangladeshis have already bought air tickets for Umrah.

The Religious Affairs Ministry has already written to the Saudi ambassador expressing concerns but has not yet received a response.

Regarding ticket refunds, a ministry official said they are in contact with the respective airlines to ensure refunds.

Unlike Hajj, there is no formal agreement between Bangladesh and Saudi Arabia for Umrah.

Man gets life term over rape in Dhaka 5 sent to jail, 2 arrested in 3 districts on same charges

STAR REPORT

A Dhaka tribunal yesterday sentenced a 22-year-old man to life-term imprisonment for raping a seven-year-old girl in South Keraniganj in 2014.

Judge Munshi Md Mashiar Rahman of Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal-4 of Dhaka delivered the verdict in presence of the lone convict, Md Arshad.

The tribunal also fined him Tk 1 lakh, in default of which he will have to serve one year more in jail.

Meanwhile, at least five people were sent to jail and two others were arrested yesterday over rape charges in three districts.

In Jashore, a youth was arrested on charge of raping a woman keeping her four-year-old child at knifepoint at their home.

The accused is Hasan Ali, 18, from Sadar upazila, said Babul Hossain, OC of Jashore Kotwali Station.

While leaving the scene, Hasan also stabbed the woman and the child, according to the case.

In another incident, four Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) leaders allegedly gangraped an 18-year-old girl in the district on Sunday.

A court sent Al Mamun Hossain, 20, as general secretary of Gakhalik union unit of JCD; Yasin Arifat, 21, office secretary; Jaber Hossain, 22, executive member; and Amirul Islam, 20, activist, to jail yesterday, said Jhikargachha Police Station OC Bablu Rahman Khan.

Ashraful Alam Rana, Jhikargachha upazila JCD convener, said the four were expelled from their organisational positions.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

Ensure fair, impartial

FROM PAGE 3
According to the inquest report, Ezaz received primary treatment twice after being handed over to the police. On March 12, he was produced before a Dhaka court, which granted him bail.

A local trader claimed that Ezaz was linked to top criminal Emon and engaged in criminal activities.

Ezaz's father refuted this claim, accusing law enforcement of falsely labelling his son and torturing him to death.

The family alleged that despite being out on bail, DB police forcibly took Ezaz from the hospital, leading to his death in their custody. However, DB police have denied this claim.

Shajahan's smirk gives way

FROM PAGE 3
shots during the movement. Such an order can only be given by senior police officials. I cannot order them to fire. I am not involved. Why was this case filed against me? Not only me, my son Asibur Rahman has also been accused. He is now in jail."

Then, before the packed courtroom, Shajahan Khan broke into tears.

"I am getting old. I haven't seen my son... What did my son do? While I stayed in Dhaka, he was in

Man gets life

FROM PAGE 3

MSF quoted Dhaka Metropolitan Police Deputy Commissioner Talebur Rahman as saying, "Ezaz did not die in DB custody. He was arrested earlier and later released on bail. Since then, he had been undergoing treatment at Japan-Bangladesh Friendship Hospital. The hospital referred him to DMCH, where he was admitted at 4:00am on Saturday. He died in the evening while receiving treatment. As there were ongoing legal cases against him, both local police and DB police were present at DMCH."

MSF stated that the explanation given by the deputy commissioner regarding Ezaz's death was not satisfactory.

[Our correspondents from the respective districts contributed to this report]

Abul Mansur Ahmad

FROM PAGE 3

In Netrakona, one Abdul Hamid, 67, was sent to jail yesterday on charge of raping a 16-year-old girl.

According to the case, the incident happened at an abandoned house in the town on March 10.

Hamid was arrested early yesterday in a case filed by the victim's mother, said Sadar Model Police Station OC Kazi Shahnewaz.

In Lalmonirhat, police arrested a 15-year-old boy early yesterday over raping a 5-year-old girl on Sunday, said Hatibandha Police Station OC Mahmudun Nabi.

The girl was undergoing treatment at a hospital, said doctors.

[Our correspondents from the respective districts contributed to this report]

Madaripur. You can check this right now!" His voice cracked as he wiped his eyes with tissue paper.

The judge remained impassive. "Your lawyer has already spoken on your behalf."

But Shajahan wasn't done. Folding his hands, he begged for more time. "They [lawyers] could not explain the matter properly. Local Sirajul chairman is accused in six murder cases. I was not on his side. That is why this case has been filed

against me as part of a conspiracy."

At 10:37am, the magistrate delivered his ruling -- a four-day remand.

Then, as the judge left, Shajahan wiped his face again. His smirk returned, but now it looked forced, his eyes reflecting the exhaustion beneath.

He was led out wearing a police helmet and bulletproof vest, his hands cuffed behind his back. As he walked towards the lockup, journalists tried to speak to him. A police officer stopped him from responding, but Shajahan, said, "Is it forbidden to speak? It's a democratic country..."

The officers didn't let him continue. They quickly moved him inside.

At noon, his son, Asibur Rahman Khan, was escorted into the courtroom for his hearing. The ruling was the same -- four-day remand. Asibur was taken back to the lockup, just like his father.

A sub-inspector confirmed later, "Shajahan Khan and his son were kept in separate cells."

Abul Mansur Ahmad wrote about the language issue from the early 1940s and contributed to the Language Movement as the editor of the Ittehad.

A very successful politician, Abul Mansur Ahmad played a key role in the formation of the Awami Muslim League. He served as vice-president of the organisation from 1953 to 1958.

Abul Mansur Ahmad was the author of the famous Ekush Dafa (21 point programme) election manifesto of Jukt Front in the 1954 election through which the Muslim League was ousted from power.

The Ekush Dafa was the first comprehensive articulation of the political, economic and cultural demands of the then eastern part of Pakistan.

He was elected a member of East Bengal Provincial Assembly in that election, and served as health minister in the United Front

PPRC Executive Chairman and UHC Forum Convener Hossain Zillur Rahman stressed that addressing NCDs requires a shift from a fragmented, vertical approach to a more integrated and systemic transformation.

He underscored the importance of reimagining the role of community health workers, strengthening knowledge-sharing mechanisms among organisations, and advancing preventive strategies.

Prof Syed Zakir Hossain, line director for NCD Control at DGHS, said the government has established 435 NCD corners at the upazila level to facilitate early detection and provide referral services.

Former DGHS Director Aminul Hasan, DGHS Deputy Director Abu Hena Mohammad Raihanuzzaman Sarkar, and representatives from various organisations also spoke at the event.

Abul Mansur Ahmad was born in 1898 in Dhanikholia village of Trishal, Mymensingh.

Bangla Academy has published Ahmad's writings which are available in four volumes now.

He always propagated secularism in a manner unparalleled in the forties and sixties.

Abul Mansur Ahmad was known for his strong stand in favour of regional autonomy of East Pakistan. He also made remarkable contributions to industrialisation of the long neglected East Pakistan.

He then retired from politics.

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Anticipation builds for a cinematic showdown this Eid



With Eid-ul-Fitr fast approaching, the Bangladeshi film industry is buzzing with excitement.

Audiences are eagerly waiting for the new titles to release, and the promotional whirlwind has already begun.

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

From those tantalising teaser reveals to dialogues that are already winning over the hearts, this year's Eid promises a cracking line-up that has gotten everyone talking. Let's have a proper look at some of the most discussed teasers and promotional campaigns that are setting the stage for these grand releases.

Two years ago, Afran Nisho made a real splash with his silver-screen debut in *Surongo*, directed by Raihan Rafi. This Eid, after a bit of a break, he's back with *Daagi*, directed by Shihab Shaheen. Nisho's fans have been eagerly waiting for this one, and the recently released teaser has only cranked up the anticipation. Showing off a brand-new look for the actor, *Daagi*'s teaser has certainly made an impression, with audiences especially taken by the line: "The stench of prison, once it's on you, makes you forever a *Daagi*." That dialogue has already become quite the talking point, buzzing across social media. This project will see Nisho and Tama

Mirza duo once again.

Meanwhile, another much anticipated Eid release is *Jongli*, starring Siam Ahmed. The film's teaser, packed with intensity and raw energy, hints at a proper cinematic treat. Over the years, Siam has successfully shifted from those romantic roles to more diverse characters, and *Jongli* seems to be pushing

collaborate on the web-film *Taan*, alongside Siam's first collaboration with Dighi.

No Eid is complete without a Shakib Khan blockbuster. The superstar returns with *Borbaad*, sparking quite the debate about how it will fare against the other Eid releases. Social media is abuzz with reactions to its teaser, particularly the chemistry between

Celebrated actor Mosharraf Karim makes his big screen return with *Chokkor 302*, where he plays Detective Moinul, a character dedicated to solving intricate mysteries. Directed by Sharaf Ahmed Zibon, the teaser has been widely appreciated, giving audiences a taste of the suspense and intrigue.

that transformation even further. The teaser introduces a rugged, bearded Siam, walking purposefully with sunglasses on, while the dialogue "Gunpowder, fire, and air—when they unite, smoke rises" has already found its way into everyday conversations among film enthusiasts.

The film unites Bubly and Siam after they

Idhika Paul and Shakib Khan once again after *Priyotoma*. With Shakib sporting a refreshed look, his loyal fanbase is already counting down the days.

Celebrated actor Mosharraf Karim makes his big screen return with *Chokkor 302*, where he plays Detective Moinul, a character dedicated to solving intricate mysteries.

Directed by Sharaf Ahmed Zibon, the teaser has been widely appreciated, giving audiences a taste of the suspense and intrigue. Additionally, a promotional video has been released, which has caught the attention of film enthusiasts.

Shajal Noor and Nusraat Faria's upcoming supernatural thriller, *Jinn 3*, is taking a slightly different approach to its promotional campaign. Instead of a teaser, the film has focused on songs and posters to build anticipation. The film's romantic track *Konya* was released yesterday, featuring the lead pair in a captivating performance. The film's team has been actively engaging audiences with visually striking posters, making sure the hype stays strong ahead of its release.

The festive cinematic landscape is shaping up to be one of the most exciting in recent years, with a diverse range of films catering to all sorts of tastes. From those intense action-packed thrillers to supernatural dramas, the industry is set to deliver a memorable festive season for cinephiles.

NEWS

Freeze stolen assets parked in UK

FROM PAGE 1

"It's a challenge to try to recover these assets. One reason I'm here is because I'm seeking your support in building a consensus and creating political pressure," said Mansur, briefing the group.

The government is cognisant of the fact that money recovery takes four to five years, and that goes beyond the time the interim administration has, he said.

"What we are looking for is the kind of asset freeze that becomes difficult to undo for the next government."

The Bangladesh side pointed out that major destinations of the stolen funds included the UK, Singapore, Dubai, Canada, and the US. In the UK, properties were bought with the money.

"The UK is the first country we would like to get help from.... If something positive happens in the UK's legal system, there are global ramifications," said the governor. He also sought the British government's support in lobbying other countries to do the same.

He said that the government is already in discussion with asset tracing firms and would meet with

law firms and litigation sponsors on Wednesday.

"There is limited information about assets abroad. We are counting on information sharing between the Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit and financial investigation units of different countries."

The governor sought action against former land minister Saifuzzaman Chowdhury Javed and Sheikh Hasina's former adviser Salman F Rahman.

"You may have heard of Saifuzzaman Chowdhury, former land minister of Bangladesh and also a chairman of one of the private banks. He diverted funds from his bank and misused power. We are looking at those banks which have been seriously impacted by people like Beximco Group's Salman F Rahman, who has \$4.5 million worth of non-performing assets diverted."

Mansur also spoke about how large sums were taken out of Islami Bank. "This is the largest private sector bank and the second largest bank. Between 2017 and 2024, 85 percent of new loans were taken by the same family. On average, their portfolio was

impacted by 55 percent.

"Since 2017, there has been a systematic robbing of our banking system. The banks were being handed over to a few key groups who were known to be fund diverters."

The chosen people were put in the banks using government machinery, including the intelligence agencies.

"It was very unfortunate that the former government gave some people superpowers to divert funds. In some cases, for example, 87 percent of the bank deposits were taken away, directly or indirectly by one group. The money is gone."

Bangladesh Bank has hired global accountancy firms EY, Deloitte, and KPMG for an "asset quality review" of six banks, the governor said. Five of these banks have shares linked to S Alim Group.

"We, the government, have to compensate for the money that has been taken away. There is no free lunch. The gap that has been created has to be filled either by printing money or by some other type of loan financing, which will cost general taxpaying people. The ordinary people will have to pay the full price."

"We are in discussions with the Gates Foundation, which has an internationally applied application already launched in 15 countries. We plan to test it and quickly implement it," Mansur said in the roundtable on January 29.

Binimoy is currently non-operational.

"The deal was made with the companies for maintenance and

ACC DG Akhtar.

In the cases, Shahin has been accused of obtaining illegal wealth worth Tk 42.47 crore. Additionally, he allegedly conducted suspicious transactions amounting to Tk 341.62 crore in 29 bank accounts under his name.

His wife Farhana has been accused of amassing illegal assets worth Tk 11.20 crore.

Conspiracy unfolding against BNP, Bangladesh

FROM PAGE 12

Zia Cyber Force organised the iftar at a city hotel to honour online activists.

Tarique said there had been a plot in the past against the country, its people, and democracy.

In recent days, he said, they have observed that the BNP has been subjected to a media trial, as the party has the highest chances of gaining support from voters.

The BNP acting chief also said he came across media reports yesterday involving party leaders and activists in an untoward incident.

After gathering information from the party's central office, he found that the incident was misrepresented in newspapers.

"A vested quarter, or those conspiring against the BNP, the nationalist forces, and the independence and sovereignty of the country, are gradually trying to create a scenario similar to the media trial the BNP was subjected to during the 1/11 political changeover, by using certain media houses to which they are connected," Tarique observed.

Tarique called upon the nationalist cyber forces to be vigilant about such plots, saying, "Those of you who are online activists must realise this."

He also urged pro-BNP online activists to play a crucial role in countering such plots by circulating facts and genuine information on social media.

He recalled with gratitude the role of the pro-BNP online activists in mobilising anti-fascist public support during the Hasina regime.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir too acknowledged the role of online activists in "movements against the Awami League regime over the last 17 years".

"They made many sacrifices and endured serious repression during the fascist regime," he said.

Referring to online activists as cyber warriors, Fakhrul said they have to once again play a major role in thwarting the plot against the country and BNP.

20 hurt in Barguna

FROM PAGE 2

brought the situation under control. Mostafizur alleged that the attackers also looted donation boxes. He said, "I demand punishment for those responsible."

Contacted, Islami Andolan Bangladesh leader Gazi Bayezid admitted that their supporters went to the shrine and urged the custodian to stop the music and rituals as it was the month of Ramadan.

He claimed, "When he [the custodian] refused and his followers attacked Maulana Omar Faruq Jejahi, the shrine was vandalised."

Asked, Maulana Omar said, "This shrine is a den of frauds where drug abuse and immoral activities happen

in the name of ours. We asked the custodian to stop these activities during the holy month of Ramadan, but he refused. Instead, his men attacked us. I demand punishment for the custodian and his accomplices."

Mohammad Hanif, warehouse inspector at Amtali Fire Station, said, "We managed to douse the blaze by 2:30am, but the overhead covering and two halls were already destroyed in the fire."

OC Md Ariful Islam said police brought the situation under control. Legal action would be taken after investigation, he added.

UNO Ashraful said, "Strict action will be taken against those involved in the incident."

Putin, Trump to discuss

from page 12

The US president last spoke to Putin last month in a call that broke Western efforts to isolate the Russian leader as long as his forces keep up their Ukraine offensive.

Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff met Putin last Thursday in Moscow to present the details of the joint ceasefire plan, which envisages a 30-day pause in hostilities.

Witkoff told CNN he expected some sort of deal in the "coming weeks".

Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelensky has reacted with anger to Putin's statements, accusing him of wanting to prolong the lighting.

On Saturday, Zelensky warned that Moscow wanted to first "improve their situation on the battlefield" before agreeing to any ceasefire.

Moscow has been pressing ahead in several areas of the front for over a year.

On Monday, Russia claimed its forces had captured Stepove -- a village in Ukraine's southern Zaporizhzhia region -- although open-source battlefield maps showed it outside Moscow's control.

Russia has also in the past two weeks mounted a major counter offensive against Ukrainian troops in its Kursk region.

Moscow last week retook the main town that Ukraine seized in its summer 2024 incursion, Sudzha, and swathes of areas around it.

Russia has said it has moved

several hundred civilians that were previously trapped in Kyiv-held areas.

Ukraine has conceded it is in a difficult position in the region but denies its troops are surrounded.

Zelensky replaced his army's chief of general staff last week as Kyiv's front line troops continued to struggle.

After a brief lull in drone fire last week, both sides appeared to have stepped up attacks yesterday.

DMP chief

FROM PAGE 12

On Saturday, Sajid Ali at an event organised by the Broadcast Journalist Centre (BJC) in the capital said, "I strongly dislike the word 'rape'. I request you not to use it. Instead, use terms like 'violence against women' or 'repression of women'. Even the law is called the 'Women and Children Repression [Prevention] Act.' Let's avoid words that sound unpleasant."

The remarks sparked outrage among rights activists and the general public.

The Chief Adviser's Office on Sunday condemned the DMP commissioner's call on the media not to use the term "rape" in their reporting.

"Rape is rape, whether committed against an 8-year-old or an 80-year-old. Such a heinous crime must be called by its rightful name," said a statement issued by the CA Press Wing.

AL govt sought to pour Tk 277cr

FROM PAGE 12

The entire cost was borne by the government exchequer, with planned expenditures of Tk 47.25 crore this fiscal year, Tk 49.48 crore in fiscal 2025-26, Tk 55.75 crore in fiscal 2026-27, Tk 60.61 crore in fiscal 2027-28, and Tk 64.54 crore in fiscal 2028-29.

This plan came crashing down with the fall of the Hasina-led government.

The Bangladesh government should have managed the financial transaction-related systems, but the previous regime snatched control from the central bank to financially benefit individuals

close to the administration, Ahmad said.

For this, they deliberately weakened the National Payment Switch Bangladesh, he added.

"The interoperability of MFS is facing challenges because the previous government handed it over to the ICT ministry and a shell company has been created by Joy, introducing a platform called Binimoy, which is no longer functioning," said BB Governor Ahsan H Mansur on January 29.

Binimoy is currently non-operational.

"The deal was made with the companies for maintenance and

operation. But after August 5, they disappeared. We are not willing to continue with such companies," said Arif Hossain Khan, the central bank's spokesperson.

BB is now working to replace Binimoy with a new platform under its control.

"We are in discussions with the Gates Foundation, which has an internationally applied application already launched in 15 countries. We plan to test it and quickly implement it," Mansur said in the roundtable on January 29.

The Daily Star could not reach Velwira, Zareef and Zarif Munir for comment.

ACC DG Akhtar.

In the cases, Shahin has been accused of obtaining illegal wealth worth Tk 42.47 crore. Additionally, he allegedly conducted suspicious transactions amounting to Tk 341.62 crore in 29 bank accounts under his name.

His wife Farhana has been accused of amassing illegal assets worth Tk 53.67 crore, said

ACC to probe Tk 22,000cr

FROM PAGE 12

According to the complaint, a syndicate led by Salman, who was also an adviser to deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina, misappropriated Tk 22,000 crore in the name of Covid-19 vaccine procurement.

Besides Salman and Zahid, other syndicate members included Lokman Hossain, former health secretary,

Prudent budget planning is essential

CPD's pre-budget talks emphasise the need to focus on macroeconomic stability

In a number of pre-budget discussions in the capital on Sunday, economists rightly stressed the need for designing a national budget for the upcoming fiscal year in a way that prioritises macroeconomic stability. They also emphasised the need for tax policy revision and tariff reforms in line with the World Trade Organization (WTO) regulations to aid in Bangladesh's preparation for graduating from the Least Developed Country (LDC) bracket in November 2026. Given the country's ongoing economic challenges, we believe these recommendations are timely and should be considered.

In its discussions, the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) said targeted interventions are required to address the economic challenges, and these should be incorporated into the new budget to ensure fiscal prudence—maximising the use of our scarce resources. At the same time, as Bangladesh transitions into a developing economy, it must phase out direct export incentives to meet WTO standards and employ alternative WTO-compliant measures. Revision of agricultural trade policies, elimination of minimum import prices on certain goods, and adjustment of tariff structures to keep custom duties aligned with the bound tariff commitments that Bangladesh made under the WTO agreements are also necessary for maintaining compliance in the post-LDC graduation scenario.

Ensuring WTO compliance is of utmost importance as Bangladesh is set to lose the perks and waivers that come with the LDC status. CPD also advised the government to plan for legal counselling, in-depth trade policy analysis, and proper dispute resolution mechanisms—steps we think are essential for securing a favourable position in trade relations with other nations.

Meanwhile, at another discussion with the government, the CPD chief suggested formulating strict legislation to prevent tax evasion, track wealthy tax dodgers, and increase revenue through direct taxation. Bangladesh has long had one of the lowest tax GDP ratios in the world. It's high time this was corrected, and to do so, the authorities must ensure that all eligible taxpayers, including influential individuals, are held accountable. Moreover, the recent increase in VAT and supplementary duties should be reconsidered—something that we have also stressed for quite some time—as raising revenue through indirect taxes is placing undue burdens on ordinary and poor citizens already struggling with high inflation.

These are all recommendations worth serious consideration. As the next fiscal year is going to be a crucial one amid all the uncertainties caused by the July uprising, the national budget must reflect prudent and strategic thinking on the government's part. Long-term policies to address persistent and potential setbacks should be integrated into budget preparations to ensure Bangladesh is adequately prepared for the challenges that lie ahead.

Equip highway police properly

They must be able to prevent crimes on the highways

We are concerned about the challenges Highway Police have been facing in performing their duties. Reportedly, this special unit of the police—established nearly two decades ago to ensure public safety on the highways—is struggling to prevent frequent robberies and other crimes due to insufficient manpower, inadequate logistical support, and the absence of a modern, technology-driven policing system. Headquartered in a rented house in Uttara, it faces an acute shortage of personnel and vehicles, making highway patrolling difficult. Without such basic support, how are they expected to prevent crimes?

Over the past few months, highway robberies have increased alarmingly, with armed gangs frequently ambushing buses, trucks, and private vehicles, especially at night. Regional roads have become particularly vulnerable after dark, with returning expatriates, businessmen, and goods-laden trucks being the most frequent targets of these criminal gangs. According to data from the Police Headquarters, 171 robbery cases were recorded in January and 153 in February, marking a significant rise from this period last year. For instance, on February 17, there was a major incident in which a gang hijacked a bus near Mirzapur, Tangail, assaulting passengers and looting valuables. On February 21, armed criminals robbed passengers and drivers on the Dhaka-Sylhet highway. Many similar incidents have been reported in the media of late. Unfortunately, the Highway Police failed to play the role expected of them in preventing such incidents.

The Highway Police has an estimated 90 vehicles and around 3,000 personnel to cover over 3,000 kilometres of highways across Bangladesh, while they actually need at least 250 vehicles and 6,000 officers. Many police stations or outposts do not even have a single patrol vehicle, forcing officers to patrol on foot or in rented vehicles. Moreover, a shortage of arms and ammunition has further weakened them. Additionally, the force's wireless communication system has a range of just two kilometres, severely hindering coordination among units. These are some of the major challenges facing officers and contributing to the deteriorating safety situation on the highways.

We, therefore, urge the government to strengthen this unit by addressing all the challenges urgently so that they can do their job properly. The recent incidents of robberies have left citizens extremely worried. Only a well-organised and properly equipped police force can ensure the safety of our highways.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Chen Shui-bian elected president of Taiwan

On this day in 2000, Chen Shui-bian, leader of the pro-independence movement that sought statehood for the Republic of China (Taiwan), was elected president of Taiwan, breaking the Nationalist Party's 55-year rule.

EDITORIAL

How parties can reach a consensus on reforms and elections



Dr Rashed Al Mahmud Titumir
is a professor in the Department
of Development Studies at the
University of Dhaka.

RASHED AL MAHMUD TITUMIR

In a previous article published in this daily, "Towards a common minimum reform programme," I argued that Bangladesh's deep rooted political and economic crises demand a consensus-based approach to reform. The interim government's ongoing dialogue with political parties presents a critical opportunity to forge such a consensus. Prolonged uncertainty or a rigid "reform first, elections later" or "my way or the highway" stance will only deepen the crisis. Instead, political parties can thrash out a common minimum reform programme (CMRP)—a set of core reforms based on the max-min principle, where the maximum number of parties agree on a minimum set of urgent measures.

The CMRP is not a panacea, rather a necessary first step towards restoring stability, ensuring democratic governance, and unleashing the economic recovery. At its heart, the CMRP could focus on three core issues: peaceful transition of power, free and fair elections, and representational public order. These are not just political ideals but urgent necessities for Bangladesh's progress. The July 2024 uprising was a clear rejection of the status quo—a demand for a new social contract based on equity, democratic accountability, and economic justice. Fortunately, the recommendations of reform commissions covering elections, public administration, the judiciary, anti-corruption measures, and police activities provide a foundation for engagements and building consensus. Here is an outline of specific areas where political parties could engage in conversation to find common ground.

Breaking the cycle of one-party dominance

The absence of peaceful transitions of power has perpetuated political instability and eroded public trust. There is no denying the need for constitutional safeguards to ensure a neutral body to oversee elections, as was the case under the indigenously crafted caretaker government system. Political parties could also agree on a binding commitment to respect election results and refrain from violence or obstructionism during transitions. These measures would level the playing field and restore confidence in the democratic process.

Political parties are already talking

about instituting checks and balances on the executives, including the powers of president and prime minister, and their terms of office. There is also an agreement to establish a bicameral parliament. Importantly, there is a consensus on increased participation of women, and political parties could work to ensure such representation in the parliament. Additionally, political parties could agree on campaign finance regulations to limit the

all political parties during campaigns is an agreeable agenda. Finally, inviting reputable international organisations to monitor elections and provide impartial assessments would enhance transparency and credibility.

Safeguarding democracy and accountability

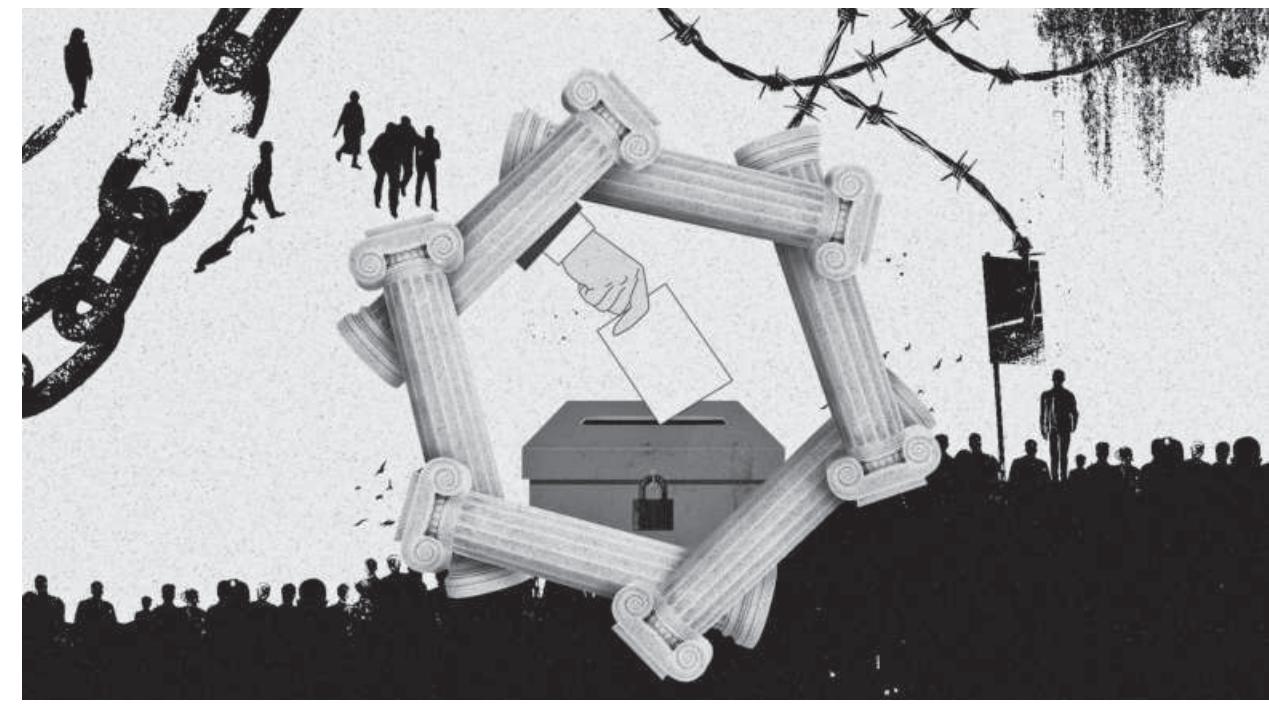
The erosion of democratic institutions and the rise of autocratic tendencies have created a culture of impunity. There is emerging consensus for ensuring the independence of the judiciary, including transparent appointments and fixed tenures for judges. These reforms are essential for restoring public trust and could form part of the CMRP. Similarly, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) must operate free from political interference, guaranteeing transparent appointments, and be equipped with adequate resources and

In addition to ensuring judicial independence by freeing the judiciary from executive and political influence, another area of likely consensus is expediting case resolution by increasing the number of judges and improving court infrastructure.

A call to action

The dialogue convened by the interim government is a historic opportunity to chart a new course for Bangladesh. As the political parties are pledging for the national interest above partisan scoring, they must walk the talk.

The CMRP is not about achieving perfection; it is about achieving the possible. While parties may differ on broader ideological issues, they can agree on core reforms, which are essential for restoring stability and legitimacy. To facilitate this consensus, the interim government and National Consensus Commission must act to



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

influence of money in politics and ensure accountability in campaign funding. Another area of discussion is ensuring inclusive participation in elections by guaranteeing equal opportunities for all political parties, including smaller ones.

Restoring voter confidence

There are proposals to address the flaws in the current electoral system. These include implementing biometric voter verification systems to eliminate ghost voters and ensure the integrity of the voter list. Restructuring of the Election Commission to ensure its independence from political influence enjoys broad public support. Commissioners could be appointed through a transparent, multi-party process. Furthermore, ensuring equal access to state and private media for

authority to investigate corruption cases independently.

Also, power must be devolved to local governments to ensure participatory democracy and reduce centralisation to establish a citizen's republic. This aligns with a representational public order and could be included in the CMRP. Additionally, the depoliticisation of the police service and ensuring its accountability to the public rather than to the party in power is a basic minimum for a long-drawn process of reforms in civil services. Finally, reorienting police as a part of community is a reform that political parties could support. These reforms are critical for restoring public trust in law enforcement and ensuring a fair and impartial administration of justice.

ensure that the dialogue process is inclusive, transparent, and focused on the national interest. Civil society, media, and academia also have a role to play in holding parties accountable and advocating for reforms that serve the public good.

By agreeing on core reforms, political parties can restore public trust, ensure stability, and create the conditions for free and fair elections. From there, an elected government can undertake the broader reforms—based on the consensus in the dialogue and people's mandate—needed to address the aspirations of citizens. The people of Bangladesh deserve nothing less than an inclusive, democratic, and prosperous future. Let us seize this moment and chart a new course for our nation.

We must be economical in our energy use



Shafiqul Alam
is lead energy analyst for Bangladesh at the
Institute for Energy Economics and Financial
Analysis (IEEFA).

SHAFIQUL ALAM

Bangladesh faces another summer of surging power demand. This year, the irrigation season and Ramadan both coincide with summer, adding to the demand. In the face of this challenge, the Ministry of Power, Energy, and Mineral Resources's (MPEMR) efforts to enforce energy efficiency among consumers to curb demand growth appear short-sighted.

The ministry's recent circular restricts private and public sectors from setting air conditioners (ACs) below 25 degrees Celsius. Media reports suggest that the government may even disconnect electricity connections for those running ACs at lower temperatures and implement load shedding if power distribution utilities observe excessive load in an area. Enforcing such measures will be difficult.

In a developing economy like Bangladesh, where disposable incomes and aspirations are growing, consumer awareness about energy efficiency is a key lever to changing behaviour. On the supply side, ensuring the availability of high-quality appliances and displaying energy efficiency standards on such items is critical. Finally, given the high upfront costs of switching to efficient appliances, the government may also want to consider financial incentives

to accelerate the transition.

Bangladesh's per capita income increased 9.67-fold between 1990 and 2024, resulting in higher disposable incomes. Many can now afford ACs and purchase multiple fans to cope with the summer heat. Additional cooling demand during the summer is estimated to be between 4,000 megawatts (MW) and 5,000 MW, according to ballpark estimates by the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA), based on the country's daily power sector data.

There was roughly a 7,000 MW difference between the summer peak demand in 2024 and the winter peak demand from November 2024 to February 2025. The difference between peak summer and winter demand is attributable to cooling and irrigation needs. The power demand for irrigation is around 3,000 MW.

As Ramadan begins in March, people will have more gatherings and activities at home during the evening, adding to the demand for summer cooling. This will require the Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) to generate more power, even as it grapples with weak financial conditions and the ongoing dollar crisis.

Studies show that increasing an AC's temperature by just one degree

can save up to six percent of energy, a strategy Bangladesh should pursue to reduce energy wastage. However, expecting consumer behaviour to change overnight through strict regulations may prove futile. While monitoring temperatures in public institutions may be feasible, doing so for residential users will increase monitoring costs without delivering the intended results. Moreover, since many people use efficient ACs, their energy consumption—even at 23 degrees Celsius—may be lower than that of inefficient units.

Furthermore, power demand will likely peak during Ramadan prayer times between 8pm and 9:30pm across the country, making it difficult to manage sudden spikes in power demand in different areas.

On the other hand, people sometimes tend to waste resources. Despite buying efficient air conditioners to save energy, some still set the temperature at 20 degrees Celsius due to a lack of understanding of energy efficiency. Likewise, fans in the market range from 35 watts to 120 watts, but without precise information and technical knowledge, consumers often choose higher wattage fans to save on upfront costs.

Consumers with sufficient disposable income and entrenched habits often pay their monthly electricity bills without considering the impact on the nation's energy crisis. Most people are unaware of how electricity reaches their homes. For example, less than 40 percent of the primary energy used in power generation reaches end consumers, considering the average efficiency (42.86 percent) of power plants and transmission and distribution (T&D)

losses (10.06 percent).

Therefore, efforts to promote energy conservation and efficiency may fail without awareness campaigns to change consumer behaviour and impart knowledge on energy-saving practices. A long-term energy efficiency strategy must be devised, incorporating measures to enhance people's awareness and capacity to make informed decisions when purchasing efficient appliances. The strategy should allocate sufficient funding to the Sustainable and Renewable Energy Development Authority (SREDA) to help organise awareness-raising events over an extended period, transforming Bangladesh into an energy-conscious country.

Additionally, energy efficiency standards and labelling will help consumers choose energy-saving appliances. SREDA should accelerate the establishment of minimum energy performance standards for different appliances. It may assess and recommend financial incentives to reduce the high upfront costs and increase the adoption of energy-efficient appliances. Finally, the strategy should emphasise monitoring the availability of high-quality appliances in the market.

While the installed power generation capacity in 2022 indicated sufficient supply for the country, policymakers struggled to meet demand consistently soon after. Although the government's focus on enhancing energy conservation is commendable, for a lasting impact on the country's power sector, it must adopt a long-term strategy to shape consumer behaviour and promote energy consciousness.

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Bangladesh Bank
Common Services Department-1
(Equipment Section)
Head Office, Dhaka-1000
Website: www.bb.org.bd

Invitation for Tenders

Bangladesh Bank, Head Office, Dhaka

1	Procuring entity name	Bangladesh Bank
2	Procuring entity code	Not used at present
3	Procuring entity district	Dhaka
4	Invitation for	Procurement of Original HP Black Print Cartridge for HP LaserJet Pro M404dn Printer of Bangladesh Bank, Head Office, Dhaka
5	Invitation Ref No.	CSD-1(Equip)69(9)/2025-82
6	Date	17/03/2025

KEY INFORMATION

7	Procurement method	Open Tendering Method
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FUNDING INFORMATION

8	Budget and source of funds	Own source
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PARTICULAR INFORMATION

9	Tender publication date	Date
10	Tender last selling date	Not applicable
11	Tender closing date and time	Date 08/04/2025 Time 02:15pm
12	Tender opening date and time	08/04/2025 02:30pm
13	Name & address of the office(s)	Address
- Receiving tender document	BB website and hard copy of Tender Security	
- Opening tender document	Common Services Department-1, 6th Floor, Annex-2 Building, Bangladesh Bank, Head office, Dhaka.	

INFORMATION FOR TENDERER

14	Brief eligibility of tenderer	Tenderers having 5 years overall business experience and minimum specific experience as Supplier in supply of similar Goods of at least 3 (three) contract(s) of similar nature successfully completed within the last 3 (three) years.			
15	Brief description of goods or works	Supply of 300 (three hundred) PCs Original HP Black Print Cartridge (76A) for HP Laser Jet Pro M404dn Printer of Bangladesh Bank, Head Office.			
16	Lot No.	Identification of lot	Location	Tender security amount (Tk)	Completion time in weeks/months from the date of contract signing/Award of Contract
1	Original HP Black Print Cartridge (CF276A) for HP LaserJet Pro M404dn Printer	CSD-1	Tk. 1,00,000.00	8 weeks	

PROCURING ENTITY DETAILS

17	Name of official inviting tender	Swapan Kumar Goswami
18	Designation of official inviting tender	Director
19	Address of official inviting tender	Common Services Department-1, Bangladesh Bank, Head Office, Dhaka.
20	Contact details of official inviting tender	Tel: 9530148 Fax: 9530120 E-mail: swapan.goswami@bb.org.bd
21	The procuring entity reserves the right to reject all Tenders or annul the Tender proceedings.	

Swapan Kumar Goswami

Director

Phone: 9530148

E-mail: swapan.goswami@bb.org.bd

GD-696

ব্যক্তিগত ও প্রার্থিত সেবা পেতে হয়েন নির্বাচন করা হচ্ছে।
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স্বাস্থ্য ও পরিবার কল্যাণ মন্ত্রণালয়

স্বাস্থ্য সেবা বিভাগ

টেমো, মহাখালী, ঢাকা-১২১২

www.temo.gov.bd

স্বারক নং-৪৫,৯,০০০,০০১,১১,০৮,২৫-২৪৮

তারিখ: ১৭/০৩/২০২৫

নিয়োগ বিজ্ঞপ্তি

স্বাস্থ্য ও পরিবার কল্যাণ মন্ত্রণালয় যানবাহন ও যাত্রাপাত্র রক্ষণাবেক্ষণ সংস্থা (টেমো), মহাখালী, ঢাকা-১২ এর নিম্নোক্ত পদসমূহে সরাসরি নিয়োগ দেওয়া হচ্ছে।

ক্রমিক নং	পদের নাম ও বেতন ক্ষেত্র (জ. ব. ক্ষেত্র, ২০২৫ অনুমোদী)	সর্বেক্ষ যোগসূত্র	পদের সংখ্যা	বিজ্ঞাপিত্ব যোগসূত্র ও অভিজ্ঞতা
১	হিসাবকরক টাঃ ১১০০-২৬৫৯০/- (গ্রেড-১০)	৩২	১	(ক) কোন স্থানীয় বিষয়বিদ্যালয় হইতে বাগিজ্য বিষয়ে অনুন্ন হিতীয় শ্রেণী বা সমমানের সিজিপি-তে মাত্রক বা সমমানের ডিপ্তি; এবং (খ) কম্পিউটারে MS Office এ কাজ করিবার দক্ষতা;
২	চেকার কিপার টাঃ ৯,৩০০-২২,৪৯০/- (গ্রেড-১৬)	৩২	১	(ক) কোন স্থানীয় বোর্ড হইতে উচ্চ মাধ্যমিক সার্টিফিকেট বা সমমানের প্রীকার্য উত্তীর্ণ; এবং (খ) যানবাহন মেরামতকারী প্রতিষ্ঠানে চেকার রক্ষণাবেক্ষণে অনুন্ন ০৩ (তিনি) বৎসরের বাস্তবকর্ম অভিজ্ঞতা; এবং (গ) কম্পিউটারে MS Office এ কাজ করিবার দক্ষতা।
৩	জুনিয়র মেকানিক টাঃ ৯,৩০০-২২,৪৯০/- (গ্রেড-১৬)	৩২	০২	(ক) কোন স্থানীয় বোর্ড হইতে মাধ্যমিক স্কুল সার্টিফিকেট বা সমমানের প্রীকার্য উত্তীর্ণ এবং (খ) কোন স্থানীয় ইনসিটিউট হইতে সংশ্লিষ্ট বিষয়ে অনুন্ন ০৩ (তিনি) মাসের ট্রেড কোর্সে উত্তীর্ণ; এবং (গ) ওয়েস্টিং কাজে অনুন্ন ০৩ (তিনি) বৎসরের বাস্তবকর্ম অভিজ্ঞতা।
৪	জুনিয়র ইলেক্ট্রিশিয়ান টাঃ ৯,৩০০-২২,৪৯০/- (গ্রেড-১৬)	৩২	০২	(ক) কোন স্থানীয় বোর্ড হইতে মাধ্যমিক স্কুল সার্টিফিকেট বা সমমানের প্রীকার্য উত্তীর্ণ; এবং (খ) কোন স্থানীয় ইনসিটিউট হইতে সংশ্লিষ্ট বিষয়ে অনুন্ন ০৩ (তিনি) মাসের ট্রেড কোর্সে উত্তীর্ণ; এবং (গ) ওয়েস্টিং কাজে অনুন্ন ০৩ (তিনি) বৎসরের বাস্তবকর্ম অভিজ্ঞতা।
৫	ওয়েবার টাঃ ৯,৩০০-২২,৪৯০/- (গ্রেড-১৬)	৩২	০১	(ক) কোন স্থানীয় বোর্ড হইতে মাধ্যমিক স্কুল সার্টিফিকেট বা সমমানের প্রীকার্য উত্তীর্ণ; এবং (খ) কোন স্থানীয় ইনসিটিউট হইতে সংশ্লিষ্ট বিষয়ে অনুন্ন ০৩ (তিনি) মাসের ট্রেড কোর্সে উত্তীর্ণ; এবং (গ) ওয়েস্টিং কাজে অনুন্ন ০৩ (তিনি) বৎসরের বাস্তবকর্ম অভিজ্ঞতা।
৬	ডাইভার কাম-মেকানিক টাঃ ৯,৩০০-২২,৪৯০/- (গ্রেড-১৬)	৩২	০১	(ক) কোন স্থানীয় বোর্ড হইতে মাধ্যমিক স্কুল সার্টিফিকেট বা সমমানের প্রীকার্য উত্তীর্ণ; এবং (খ) কোন স্থানীয় ইনসিটিউট হইতে সংশ্লিষ্ট বিষয়ে অনুন্ন ০৩ (তিনি) মাসের ট্রেড কোর্সে উত্তীর্ণ; এবং (গ) হালকা যানবাহন চালনার ডাইভারিং লাইসেন্স সহ যানবাহন মেরামত কাজে অনুন্ন ০৩ (তিনি) বৎসরের বাস্তবকর্ম অভিজ্ঞতা।
৭	জুনিয়র বাইডি রিপিয়ারার টাঃ ৯,৩০০-২২,৪৯০/- (গ্রেড-১৬)	৩২	০১	(ক) কোন স্থানীয় বোর্ড হইতে মাধ্যমিক স্কুল সার্টিফিকেট বা সমমানের প্রীকার্য উত্তীর্ণ; এবং (খ) কোন স্থানীয় ইনসিটিউট হইতে সংশ্লিষ্ট বিষয়ে অনুন্ন ০৩ (তিনি) মাসের ট্রেড কোর্সে উত্তীর্ণ; এবং (গ) সংস্কারণ কাজে অনুন্ন ০৩ (তিনি) বৎসরের বাস্তবকর্ম অভিজ্ঞতা।
৮	অফিস মহাকারা-কাম- কম্পিউটার মুদ্রাকরিক টাঃ ৯,৩০০-২২,৪৯০/- (গ্রেড-১৬)	৩২	০১	(ক) কোন স্থানীয় বোর্ড হইতে অনুন্ন হিতীয় বিভাগ বা সমমানের জিপিএ তে উচ্চ মাধ্যমিক সার্টিফিকেট বা সমমানের প্রীকার্য উত্তীর্ণ; (খ) কম্পিউটার ব্যবহারে দক্ষতা; এবং (গ) কম্পিউটার মুদ্রাকরণ সর্বনিম্ন গতি প্রতি মিনিটে ইরেজিতে ২০ শব্দ এবং বাংলায় ২০ শব্দ

আবেদন করার নিয়মাবলী

১. অনলাইন আবেদন ফরম এবং প্রীকার্য অংশগ্রহণের ফেরে নিয়মবিত্ত শর্তাবলী অবশ্যই অনুসরণ করতে হবে।
২. ক. ০১ মার্চ ২০২৫ তারিখে প্রীকার্য বয়স ১৮-৩২ বছর হতে হবে।
৩. কোটা সংক্রান্ত বিষয়ে সরবরাহের সর্বশেষ জারিকৃত প্রজ্ঞাপন করা হচ্ছে।
৪. সরকারি, আধা-সরকারি ও সার্বভৌমিক প্রতিষ্ঠানে চাকরির প্রার্থীদের অবশ্যই যথাযথ কর্তৃপক্ষের অনুমতিপ্রাপ্ত সর্বশেষ নথর করতে হবে।
৫.

'We will win against India and progress'

SPORTS REPORTER

A few years ago, the thought of seeing English Premier League midfielder Hamza Choudhury don the Bangladesh national football team jersey seemed like a distant dream. However, that is no longer the case as the Sheffield United star touched down in Bangladesh yesterday to represent the red and green in the Asian Cup Qualifiers.

Bangladesh are set to kick off their campaign against hosts India in Shillong on March 25, and Hamza is poised to make his much-anticipated debut.

The 27-year-old, along with his family members, reached his ancestral village -- Snanghat of Bahubal upazila, Habiganj -- yesterday afternoon after landing at Sylhet Osmani International Airport amid huge enthusiasm among football fans and its stakeholders. Officials from Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF), Sylhet DSA, Civil Aviation, and people of Sylhet greeted Hamza with flowers.

For Hamza, this was not just another quiet visit to his ancestral home. Now, with his heart set on representing Bangladesh, his return carried an added sense of purpose.

Hamza, who once played for the England U-21 team, was overwhelmed upon his arrival as many enthusiastic



PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

media personnel, YouTubers, and others gathered to welcome him.

"It feels incredible. My heart is pumped," he told the media in front of Sylhet Osmani International Airport, his words barely audible over the deafening chants of his name.

The energy was electric, but with so many eager faces around him,

Hamza could only answer a handful of questions. Yet, in those brief moments, his determination and optimism shone through.

"Inshallah, we will win. I've spoken with coach Javier [Cabrera] about many things. Inshallah, we will win and progress," Hamza said in his Sylhet dialect.

As the sun set, the celebrations

continued in Snanghat, where hundreds more gathered to welcome him at his ancestral village. In a short but heartfelt address, he looked out at the sea of faces and simply said, "You all have come here to see me; Bangladesh Zindabad."

Hamza will spend some time in his village today before heading to Dhaka at night to join the national team camp at the InterContinental Hotel. There, he will meet his new teammates on Wednesday morning, take part in an official photoshoot, meet the press, and interact with captains and coaches from the proposed English medium school football tournament before getting some much-needed rest.

As Bangladesh's Spanish head coach, Javier Cabrera, mulls over training plans for Wednesday -- whether indoors or outdoors -- one thing is certain: the team will board their flight to India on Thursday morning with renewed energy and belief.



training camp in Saudi Arabia.

His words reflect the aspirations of an entire nation, which is eager to reach new heights with a player like Hamza now in the squad.

Al Amin was in top form during the first leg of the Bangladesh Premier League, scoring seven goals -- an impressive performance that saw coach Javier Cabrera include him in the preliminary squad for the first time.

IOC set to include boxing in 2028 Olympics

AFP, Costa Navarino

Boxing is set to be among the sports at the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics after a new governing body was selected, IOC chief Thomas Bach said on Monday.

Bach said the IOC's Executive Board approved including boxing on the 2028 programme after his organisation recognised World Boxing to oversee the sport at the Olympics, ending years of divisions over the way the sport is run.

The decision still needs to be rubber stamped by a full IOC Session of about 100 members later this week, but that is expected to be a formality.

The IOC stepped in to organise the boxing tournaments at the Tokyo Olympics in 2021 and the Paris Olympics last year after breaking with the Russian-led International Boxing Association over financial, governance and ethical concerns.

Bach had warned that boxing's national federations needed to find a new and "reliable" international partner if it wanted to be included at the 2028 Games.

Last month, the IOC provisionally recognised World Boxing as the body to oversee the sport at future Games.

"I am very confident that the session will approve it so that all the boxers of the world then have certainty that they can participate in the Olympic Games LA 2028 if their national federation is recognised by World Boxing," Bach said on Monday.

Meanwhile, IOC members will elect Bach's successor on Thursday.

SPORTS REPORTER

An opportunity to play in the upcoming Pakistan Super League (PSL) beckons for young sensation Nahid Rana but before issuing him a No Objection Certificate (NOC), the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is pondering about Rana's workload management and the national team's upcoming Zimbabwe series.

PSL franchise Peshwar Zalmi picked Rana up from the draft ahead of this year's PSL, slated to begin on April 11. Rana has also applied for a NOC for the tournament, BCB sources confirmed yesterday.

While BCB is awaiting PSL's supporting letter before issuing the NOC, there are some other factors that board is considering.

Zalmi play their last league game on May 7 before the qualifier and eliminator rounds. The final of the PSL is slated to be played on May 18. Meanwhile, Zimbabwe arrive on April 15 with the first Test slated to begin on April 20 and the second one on April 28 in Sylhet and Chattogram respectively.

Even though the Test series is not part of the World Test Championship cycle, due to the schedule clash with PSL, the board is pondering whether to give Rana NOC for one phase of the



PSL instead of the entire tournament.

How the PSL franchise would manage Rana's workload is also an important issue. The speedster has so far played two out of Abahani's five matches in the Dhaka Premier League

as part of a workload management scheme.

BCB high-ups had previously confirmed after the last board meeting that they would be more selective about handing out NOCs, prioritising growth and benefit for the player. While PSL has those positive traits, the board remains hesitant in Rana's case.

Rana is not the only Bangladeshi picked up for the next PSL as Zalmi also drafted in Rishad Hossain while Karachi Kings roped in Liton Das.

When the matter of Rana, Liton and Rishad's PSL appearance was brought up, Bangladesh skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto was in favour of them taking part and gaining experience from foreign franchise tournaments.

"I think they should of course play in these kinds of franchise cricket but it will wholly depend on the cricket board, coach and captain and other factors. But I think that if our players start featuring in these kinds of franchise tournaments, they will gather experience and learn to take that sort of responsibility," Shanto said.

For now, a PSL stint remains on the horizon for Rana, but it is an important decision for the board to maintain the bowler's agencies.



Newcastle end 'years of hurt'

AFP, London

Eddie Howe hailed his Newcastle history makers as they ended 56 "years of hurt" with a 2-1 win against Liverpool in the League Cup final on Sunday.

Goals from Dan Burn and Alexander Isak put Newcastle in dreamland at Wembley, with Federico Chiesa's strike in the closing minutes coming too late to save the Premier League leaders.

It was Newcastle's first major trophy since the 1969 Inter-Cities Fairs Cup and their first significant domestic prize since lifting the FA Cup 70 years ago.

"I've been emotional all day to be honest, which is very unlike me around the game day," he said. "But we just knew what was at stake today for all the people here, all the people back in Newcastle and we just wanted to do them proud."

"We were desperate to try and win the trophy after all the years of hurt. We are breaking new ground, I thought we were magnificent today."



BARCA 'HAPPY' TO RECLAIM LALIGA TOP SPOT

Barcelona battled back from two goals down to beat Atletico Madrid 4-2 and land an important blow in the Spanish title race on Sunday. Lamine Yamal struck in the 92nd minute and Ferran Torres scored his second goal in the 98th to help take the Catalans back to the top of the table. Barca have 60 points and a game in hand after last week's postponement of their home game with Osasuna. They are level on points with Real Madrid, who won 2-1 at Villarreal on Saturday. "I am happy and proud of this team," Barcelona coach Hansi Flick told a press conference. "They never give up... It's a great three points and we are happy to be top." Atletico remain third on 56 points from 28 games. With goals from Julian Alvarez on the stroke of halftime and substitute Alexander Sorloth's brilliant close-range finish in the 70th minute, Atletico went 2-0 up in the contest before Robert Lewandowski and Torres struck late in the game sparked a fightback at the Metropolitano stadium.

PHOTO: REUTERS

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COVID-19 VACCINE ACC to probe Tk 22,000cr 'graft' scheme Official says Beximco, others involved

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission has launched an investigation into an alleged Tk 22,000 crore corruption scheme involving Beximco Pharma's Vice-chairman Salman F Rahman and former health minister Zahid Maleque over the procurement of Covid-19 vaccines.

A four-member probe team, led by Deputy Director Afroza Haque Khan, was formed after initial evidence of irregularities and graft was found in intelligence inquiries, ACC Director General Md Akhtar Hossain told reporters at its headquarters yesterday.

Other team members are Assistant Director Bilkis Akter, deputy assistant directors Md Jewel Rana, and Kazi Hafizur Rahman. They already started collecting relevant documents, sources said.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1



COMMUNAL HARMONY... A monk distributes tokens to fasting individuals who have gathered for the iftar offered at the Dharmarajika Buddhist Monastery in Bashabo Sabujbagh, Dhaka. For more than a decade, these monks have been serving impoverished fasting Muslims during Ramadan, setting an inspiring example of interfaith harmony. The photo was taken on Sunday afternoon.

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA



Conspiracy unfolding against BNP, Bangladesh Warns Tarique

UNB, Dhaka

BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman yesterday warned that a new conspiracy is unfolding by a vested group against the BNP, the country's democracy, and the very existence and sovereignty of Bangladesh.

"Those of us involved in politics have been talking about a plot for the past few days. A plot is once again unfolding. We are not saying this merely as political rhetoric or to attract people's attention. Genuinely, a serious conspiracy is gradually being hatched against Bangladesh's existence, sovereignty, and democracy," he said while virtually addressing an iftar event.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

ATTACKS ON JULY UPRISERS DU suspends 128 students

A CORRESPONDENT, DU

Dhaka University yesterday suspended 128 students over their alleged involvement in attacks on protesters during the student-led mass uprising from July 15 to August 5 on the university campus.

The decision was made at a syndicate meeting based on the report of a fact-finding committee formed to investigate the attacks.

A new probe committee has also been formed to further scrutinise the initial report to finalise a decision regarding the punishment of the students.

The committee, led by syndicate member Professor Tajmeri SA Islam, includes DU Faculty of Arts Dean Mohammad Siddiquur Rahman Khan, Sir AF Rahman Hall Provost Kazi Mahfuzul Islam Supon, DU Proctor Saifuddin Ahmed and others.

The suspension is not being considered a punishment, but a "measure" to ensure further investigations are conducted without interruption, according to Kazi Mahfuzul Islam Supon, convener of the fact finding committee.

"The number of attackers mentioned in the fact finding report is more than 128. The syndicate decided to suspend 128 DU students initially. A new probe committee has been formed to scrutinise the fact finding report. The final decision on their punishment will come after the new committee submits its report," Supon told The Daily Star.

On March 13, when the fact finding committee handed over the report to the DU vice chancellor, Supon had told reporters that 122 DU students were found to be involved in the attacks.

The suspended students are reportedly affiliated with the banned student organisation Chhatra League. However, their names and identities could not be immediately confirmed.

Asked about the involvement of teachers, DU Proctor Saifuddin Ahmed said a separate committee is investigating their role in the attack.

Further action will be taken once their report is submitted.

Putin, Trump to discuss Ukraine Kyiv launches drone attack on Russian energy site

AFP, Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin and US counterpart Donald Trump will speak by phone today, as one US official expressed hope the two could agree a Ukraine ceasefire within weeks.

Trump said earlier "a lot of work" had been done between the United States and Russia on settling the three-year Ukraine conflict, and that there was a "very good chance" hostilities would end.

Putin said last week he agreed with the idea of a ceasefire but warned he had "serious questions" about how it would be implemented that he wanted to discuss with Trump.

Kyiv has agreed to the ceasefire, while its European allies have criticised Putin for not committing to an unconditional and immediate halt in fighting, with the UK accusing the Russian leader of "dragging his feet".

"There is such a conversation being prepared for Tuesday," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters including AFP ahead of the Trump-Putin call, without commenting on what the two leaders would discuss.

Trump said the two would discuss "land" and power plants: an apparent reference to the Moscow-controlled Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant in south Ukraine.

Russia occupies swathes of southern and eastern Ukraine.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 6



Hamza Choudhury soaks in the adulation of fans at the Osmani International Airport in Sylhet, en route to his ancestral home in Habiganj, after his long-awaited homecoming yesterday. Hamza, a Bangladeshi born English footballer who plays for Sheffield United in England, is set to make his Bangladesh debut in the Asian Cup Qualifiers against India in Shillong on March 25.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

We will win
against India
and progress:
Hamza

P11

Prime Bank

PRAYER TIMING MARCH 18

Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN 4-49	12-45	4-30	6-09	7-45
JAMAAT 4-59	1-15	4-45	6-24	8-15

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

SEHRI, IFTAR TIMING

RAMADAN	MARCH	SEHRI	IFTAR
17	18		6:09
18	19	4:47	6:10
19	20	4:46	6:10