

BNP infighting claims 43 lives in 7 months

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

Since the fall of the Awami League regime in August last year, the BNP has been plagued by clashes between party factions, leading to the deaths of at least 43 leaders and activists.

Clashes occurred despite repeated warnings from the top leaders and calls for strict measures as the party began preparing to contest the next general election.

BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman, addressing a meeting of grassroots leaders via a video link on February 27, urged them to refrain from infighting.

However, since then, five BNP men have been killed during clashes in Rajshahi, Narayanganj, Bhola, Sirajganj and Chuadanga.

The latest incident occurred on March 19, when two Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) leaders and a Jubo Dal supporter were killed in Naryanganj, Sirajganj and Bhola.

The 43 killed since August 5 last year included 26 of the BNP, four of JCD, three of Jubo Dal, and the rest from BNP's affiliated organisations. A student and a rickshaw puller also lost their lives in Chandpur and Rajshahi in violence related to rivalry between groups.

At least 2,000 BNP men were injured in around 200 incidents in 50

For 16 years, my husband couldn't come home because he was accused in many cases, but he died at the hands of his own party men

Nahida Khatun, widow of a slain BNP activist

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PHOTO: SUZIT KUMAR DAS

Farm labourers manually pollinating onion flowers at Ambikapur in Faridpur Sadar upazila as excessive use of pesticides keeps bees away. The authorities have targeted 964 tonnes of harvest in the district this year. Farmers have planted onions on 1,854 acres of cropland. This photo was taken recently.

LAW PROTECTING WOMEN, CHILDREN

Advisory council clears amendments to fast-track trial

UNB, Dhaka

The advisory council yesterday approved several key decisions, including amendments to the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act to reduce the trial and investigation time for rape cases by half.

"We will try to ensure strict implementation of the law as soon as possible -- I have told them that the trial of rape cases should not only be speedy, but justice should be ensured and fair," said Law Adviser Asif Nazrul.

As per the draft, the investigation period for rape cases is being reduced from 30 days to 15 days and the time for completing the trial is being reduced from 180 days to 90 days, he said.

The council of advisors also approved amendments to Public Procurement Ordinance to enhance transparency and competition in government procurement and dismantle syndicates, said Shafiqul Alam, press secretary to the chief adviser, at a media briefing yesterday.

The provision that required rejecting tender proposals below 10 percent of the estimated cost has been removed.

Besides, the previous evaluation matrix, which often resulted in the same companies repeatedly securing contracts, will be replaced with a new capacity-based evaluation system.

Currently, 65 percent of tenders are processed online, and the advisory council decided to increase it to 100 percent.

The council also approved amendment to the law related to abandoned property management.

Besides, the government has declared an additional holiday on April 3 for Eid to facilitate public convenience.

An optional leave policy has also been introduced for indigenous communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts to observe their cultural and social events.

Kidnapping saga of 25 days ends in grief

Family paid Tk 25 lakh ransom but could not save 23yr-old victim

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *thakurgaon*

Police recovered the decomposed body of a man in Thakurgaon early yesterday, 25 days after he was kidnapped.

The victim, Muhammad Milon, 23, was a graduate of Dinajpur Polytechnic Institute, said Mamun or Rashid, inspector of the Detective Branch of Police in Thakurgaon.

Three arrested suspects -- Sejan, 25, Murad, 23, and Ratna Akter Eva, 19 -- had told police that the victim's body was dumped in an abandoned toilet pit behind Sejan's house at Maheshpur Bitbazar village in Thakurgaon upazila.

Quoting family members, police said the gang impersonating a woman on social media asked Milon to go to a place near Thakurgaon Polytechnic Institute on February 22. His phone was found switched off after he went there.

That night, someone called Milon's father and said his son had been kidnapped and demanded Tk 3 lakh for his release.

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PRICES OF ESSENTIALS

High season, govt steps bring relief

No plan to ban Awami League'

Yunus tells Crisis Group; regime leaders to face trial here'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus has said that the interim government has no plans to ban the Awami League, but individuals within its leadership accused of crimes, including murder and crimes against humanity, will be tried in Bangladeshi courts.

He said the government has not ruled out referring AL leaders to the International Criminal Court in The Hague, following a UN fact-finding mission that reported

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PRODUCT (KG/LTR) | PRICES ON MAR 12 | PRICES ON MAR 19 | DECREASE

| Product (kg/ltr) | Prices on Mar 12 | Prices on Mar 19 | Decrease |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|----------|
| Soybean oil | Tk 174-184 | Tk 157-168 | 9.22% |
| Palm oil | Tk 146-155 | Tk 145-153 | 1% |
| Potato | Tk 20-30 | Tk 18-30 | 4% |
| Sugar | Tk 118-125 | Tk 115-120 | 3.29% |
| Eggs (4 pieces) | Tk 40-45 | Tk 38-45 | 2.35% |
| Ginger | Tk 100-220 | Tk 100-200 | 6.25% |
| Local onion | Tk 35-50 | Tk 30-50 | 5.88% |

SOURCE: TCB

SUKANTA HALDER

Prices of essential commodities in Dhaka's markets have dropped over the past week, bringing much-needed relief to low- and middle-income families.

According to traders, consumers are benefiting from the ongoing production season of certain commodities, various government measures, and enhanced market monitoring.

A visit to several kitchen markets in the capital, including in Pallabi's Duaripara, Mirpur-1, Farmgate, and Karwan Bazar,

yesterday revealed that the prices of soybean oil, palm oil, potatoes, local onions, sugar, eggs, and various vegetables have come down.

However, the prices of broiler chicken, a major source of protein for the masses, have risen.

Mohammad Ali, a wholesale and retail trader at Mirpur-1 kitchen market, explained that the drop in prices of several essentials was due to higher supply and lower demand. "This has brought some relief to consumers. When prices are high,

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An injured Palestinian boy receives treatment at the Indonesian Hospital in Beit Lahia yesterday following Israeli overnight airstrikes in the northern Gaza Strip.

Government employees to enjoy 9-day Eid holiday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has declared a public holiday on April 3 through an executive order to ensure smooth travels for Eid-ul-Fitr celebrations.

The advisory council made the decision at a meeting yesterday, meaning the official Eid holiday is now effectively from March 28 to April 3.

March 28 marks Shab-e-Qadr, a public holiday and is also Friday.

March 26 is a public holiday for Independence Day, making March 27 the only working day before the extended Eid holidays. Offices will reopen on April 6 as there is a two-day weekly holiday on April 4 and 5.

After assuming office, the interim government extended the Eid holidays from three days to five days.

Eid-ul-Fitr is expected to be celebrated on either March 31 or April 1, depending on the sighting of the moon in the country's sky.



Thousands flee as Israel restarts Gaza ground ops

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Bangladesh and the quest for a digitized judiciary

P10



BdREN

Family

Jubo Dal leader shot dead in Gulshan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Criminals shot a Jubo Dal leader dead in front of Gulshan Police Plaza in the capital last night.

The incident took place around 9:00pm on the northern side of the road near the shopping mall.

The brother-in-law of victim Sumon, 35, said that he owned an internet service providing firm and that he was a member of the Banani unit of Jubo Dal.

Sumon was seen in an altercation with several others near the shopping mall. At one point, the criminals shot him and left the scene.

On information, police rescued Sumon and took him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, where doctors declared him dead around 11:00pm, said Maruf Ahmed, sub-inspector of Gulshan Police Station.

He said that efforts were underway to gather more information about the incident.

Sumon, who hails from Mithapukur upazila in Rangpur, lived with his wife and two children in Mirpur's Bhashantek area.

His ISP Priyojon's office was in Mohakhali's TB Gate area.

Top EU diplomat hails Trump offer to help Ukraine get air defences

AFP, Brussels

The EU's top diplomat Kaja Kallas on Thursday welcomed US President Donald Trump's agreement to help Kyiv obtain additional air defence systems, including in Europe, as its fights Russia's three-year invasion.

"I very much welcome the announcement by President Trump that the US is trying to find additional air defences for Ukraine," Kallas told reporters upon arrival for talks by EU leaders in Brussels.

"This is extremely important," said Kallas, who is pushing EU member states to meet a Ukrainian request for two million shells, worth five billion euros (\$5.4 billion) -- having scaled back a more ambitious proposal that included air defences and missiles.

Trump made the air defence commitment in a call with Volodymyr Zelensky on Wednesday, in which the Ukrainian leader asked for help in sourcing "Patriot missile systems" in particular, according to a US readout.

"President Trump agreed to work with him to find what was available particularly in Europe," the readout said.

The offer was a rare signal from Trump that he could help bolster Ukraine's defences as he pushes for a peace deal with Russia.

Ukraine currently has seven US-made Patriot air defence systems, provided by the United States, Germany and Romania.

Kidnapping saga of 25 days ends in grief

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However, the gang soon raised the amount to Tk 25 lakh, the officer added.

Milon's father filed a complaint with Thakurgaon Police Station the next day.

Milon's parents arranged the money by selling properties, and on March 9, they boarded the Dhaka-bound Ekota Express train from Thakurgaon Railway Station as per the instruction of the kidnappers.

"While the train was in Senua area of Piroganj, they threw a sack containing the ransom and two sets of Milon's clothes out of the window," police said, quoting family members.

Muhammad Milon

The kidnappers confirmed receiving the money but did not release Milon, said Inspector Rashid quoting the family.

On March 10, the Detective Branch began investigating the case.

Detectives arrested the suspects on Wednesday night. In primary interrogation, they admitted killing Milon three days after abducting him.

Police are looking for others involved in the crime, he added.

Meanwhile, locals yesterday set Sejan's house on fire.

They also kept Thakurgaon intersection blocked for almost an hour in the afternoon, demanding punishment of Milon's killers.

Police recovered Tk 4.97 lakh from Murad.



Students of Chattogram Polytechnic Institute blocked road and railway near Gate-2 intersection in the port city's Sholoshahar area to press home their six-point demand, including the cancellation of the 30 percent promotion quota for craft instructors in the junior instructor post. The blockade caused travellers to suffer.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

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BNP infighting claims 43 lives in 7 months

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districts, according to an analysis of monthly reports of Aina o Salish Kendra (ASK) and The Daily Star's findings from media reports.

In seven districts, local authorities had to impose section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure barring public gatherings. The army was also called in to restore order.

According to statements of the police and local leaders, the key factors behind the violence included dissatisfaction with committee posts and competition for control of local businesses.

The BNP has taken disciplinary action against more than 1,000 leaders and activists on charges including extortion, encroachment, and infighting. Over 400 of them have been expelled, while at least 20 have been suspended, according to data from the BNP's central office.

BNP leaders say the infightings are damaging the party's image, giving its opponents a weapon ahead of the national polls.

"We have taken strict measures, but we still fear that such incidents will continue in the run-up to the general election," said a BNP standing committee member, who preferred anonymity.

Another standing committee member, Salahuddin Ahmed, questioned the credibility of the data on the deaths and injuries. Some incidents might have happened and those are undesirable, he said.

"Political rivalries do exist in a large political organisation. As the elections approach, this kind of competition and rivalry can be seen among the supporters of various candidates," he told The Daily Star recently.

BNP VS BNP
According to the data from ASK and media reports, nine BNP men were killed in August, 11 in September, one

in October, six in November, six in December, three in January, three in February, and four until March 19.

Nearly 493 activists were injured in December and 491 in September. Clashes were reported at least 41 times in December and January each.

Rafiqul Islam, 50, a former organising secretary of Titudah Union BNP in Chuadanga, was killed, and six others were injured in a clash between two BNP factions on March 8.

Rafiqul owned a small shop, and his wife Nahida Kahtun worked at a local clinic. On March 9, Nahida filed a case, accusing 36 people, including the union BNP president and general secretary.

"I want justice from Tarique Rahman. I saw my husband get killed right in front of me. It happened in broad daylight with many people watching, and they even cheered after he died," Nahida said.

"For 16 years, my husband couldn't come home because he was accused in many cases, but he died at the hands of his own party men," she lamented.

After the incident, the local BNP expelled the union BNP president, general secretary, and joint general secretary.

Political analyst Prof Dilara Choudhury said that the BNP is not the only one responsible for such incidents, and the poor law and order situation in the country is to share the blame.

"The BNP is doing what it can, but the government also has a responsibility. What has the government done so far?" she asked.

TARIQUE'S DIRECTIVE IGNORED
In meetings on February 22 and 27, Tarique warned his party colleagues of strict action if they undermined party discipline.

Despite his directives, factional clashes broke out in eight districts, leading to the deaths of five party men and a rickshaw puller, and over 150

injured.

The rickshaw puller, Golam Hossain, 48, died after being stabbed by BNP men who mistook him for a member of their opponent group in Rajshahi city's Dorikhorbona area on March 11, locals said.

"At the hospital, they first refused to admit him. I begged them to start treatment, but a female BNP leader told them not to. I pleaded with the police, with everyone. I told the doctor, 'Look at his face—he is not a criminal'. Only then did they admit him. If they had done it an hour earlier, he might have survived," Golam's wife Pori Banu said over the phone.

"I want justice, but where do I go? The police refused to take my complaint. We are poor—does justice exist for us?"

WHAT GRASSROOTS LEADERS SAY

Two BNP leaders were killed in factional clashes over dominance in Chuadanga in October last year and this month.

Contacted, Chuadanga's Darshana Upazila BNP President Abdul Hasnat said, "There are some evil people in the party who are committing these crimes defying party directives."

In Narsingdi, a Sramik Dal activist and a Jubo Dal activist were killed during clashes in December and January.

Narsingdi BNP Member Secretary Monjur Elahi said, "These incidents are not political. The party will not take responsibility for conflicts that arise from personal interests."

In January, the local administration imposed section 144 twice in Sathkhira after at least 10 people were injured in BNP factional clashes.

Satkhira BNP Member Secretary Abu Zahid Dabli acknowledged that internal conflicts were a major challenge for the party as the election approached.

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High season

FROM PAGE 1

we must answer many questions from buyers and sometimes even face harsh comments."

In the same market, shopper Mizanur Rahman mentioned he bought soybean oil for Tk 165 per litre yesterday, down from Tk 170 just 10 days ago. Similarly, he purchased potatoes at Tk 25 per kg eight days ago, but the price dropped to Tk 20 per kg yesterday.

He was also able to buy four eggs for Tk 40, which was Tk 4 less than before.

"The market situation is much better now compared to the week before Ramadan. If the government can sustain this trend, it will bring significant relief to the people."

Meanwhile, data from the state run Trading Corporation of Bangladesh also shows that prices have come down over the past week.

The price of a one-litre bottle of soybean oil decreased by 9.22 percent, palm oil by one percent, potatoes by four percent, local onions by 5.88 percent, local garlic by 25 percent, ginger by 6.25 percent, sugar by 3.29 percent, and a set of four eggs by 2.35 percent.

On March 19, the price of a litre of soybean oil ranged from Tk 157 to Tk 168, compared to Tk 174 to Tk 184 a week ago. One litre palm oil sold for Tk 145 to Tk 153, compared to Tk 146 to Tk 155 a week earlier, the data showed.

However, the price of broiler chicken has increased by 2.56 percent, and is now being sold for Tk 190 to Tk 210 per kg.

Potatoes were being sold for Tk 18 to Tk 30 per kg, whereas a week ago, the price ranged from Tk 20 to Tk 30. Additionally, the price of sugar per kg was Tk 115 to Tk 120 on March 19, compared to Tk 118 to Tk 125 a week ago.

Abul Hashem, a wholesaler in Dhaka's Moulvibazar, reiterated that the supply of soybean oil, palm oil, and sugar has increased, while demand has decreased, resulting in reduced prices.

Hashem, also the president of Bangladesh Sugar Traders' Association, said the government had reduced customs duties and taxes on soybean and palm oil imports in two phases, as well as for sugar imports.

Since October 17, the interim government slashed VAT on imports of soybean and palm oil twice to five percent from 15. It also removed VAT entirely at the production and trading stages of the highly import-based commodities. As a result, import cost of edible oil fell from around Tk 18 to Tk 7 per kg, according to stakeholders.

The National Board of Revenue on October 17 also reduced the specific duty for refined sugar imports by 25 percent to Tk 4,500 per tonne to encourage imports and bring down the prices in the domestic market.

The cut in the specific duty for import of refined sugar came a week after the NBR halved the regulatory duty on sugar imports to 15 percent from 30 percent.

Meanwhile, the Directorate of

WORLD HAPPINESS REPORT Bangladesh slips 14 spots

STAR REPORT

Bangladesh slipped 14 spots in the World Happiness Report 2025 and is now ranked 134th out of 147 countries.

According to the 13th annual World Happiness Report, released to mark the UN's International Day of Happiness, Bangladeshis are happier than only 13 of the ranked countries.

Bangladesh was ranked 129th last year.

The report surveyed people worldwide between 2022 and 2024. The happiness ranking is based on a three-year average of individuals' self-assessed life satisfaction, as well as GDP per capita, social support, healthy life expectancy, freedom, generosity, and corruption levels.

Finland was ranked as the world's happiest country for the eighth consecutive year, with locals and experts crediting its grand lakes and strong welfare system for boosting national well-being.

Nepal (92) was the happiest country in South Asia, followed by Pakistan (109), India (118), and Sri Lanka (133).

Afghanistan, plagued by a humanitarian catastrophe since the Taliban regained control in 2020, once again ranked as the unhappiest country in the world.

The United States fell to 24th place, its lowest ranking since the report was first published in 2012, when it had recorded its highest ranking at 11th place.

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87.5pc people left without basic services

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of the population, or 23.6 million people, remain food insecure in Bangladesh.

Inclusive development also did not take place in areas like good health and well-being as maternal mortality and infant mortality rates were still high in a few districts.

Discrimination is also found in the area of education as quality and inclusive education cannot be given equally to males and females and in rural and urban areas.

Dalit and Adivasi populations are trapped in traditional occupations due to entrenched caste-based discrimination, stigma and limited access to education and skill development, restricting their participation in broader job markets, he said.

The government has taken up the reform initiatives but the representatives of ethnic groups, religious minorities and women are not kept prominently in the reform committees, said Bhattacharya, a distinguished fellow at the CPD.

Reto Renggali, ambassador of Switzerland in Bangladesh, said, the Voluntary National Review (VNR) of the SDGs is not only a document,

but it also helps to understand the situation.

Mustafizur Rahman, a distinguished fellow at the CPD, said every year, the international communities criticise the poor progress of SDG 17, which pertains to strengthening the means of implementation and revitalising the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

As much as 60 percent of the time has passed and only five to six years are remaining for the implementation of the SDGs, he added.

Lamiya Morshed, principal coordinator for SDG Affairs of the Chief Adviser's Office of Bangladesh government; Saibun Nessa, partnership manager and senior programme adviser of Gender, diversity and advocacy HEKS/EPER Bangladesh; Pallab Chakma, executive director of Kapaceeng Foundation; Huma Khan, senior human rights adviser of UNRCO-Bangladesh; and Stefan Liller, resident representative of the United Nations Development Programme Bangladesh, also spoke.

Yunus explained that if political parties seek a limited number of reforms prior to polls, then the elections will be held in December. If a larger reform package is desired, then elections will take place by June next year.

"We have no reason to change the election dates," he added, emphasising that the upcoming elections will be free and fair.

He also shared that the Consensus Building Commission began talks

State must move away from excessive surveillance Says TIB

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has turned into a surveillance-based society, said Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman yesterday.

Citing a United Nations report on surveillance, he said such practices violate fundamental human rights if not aligned with international standards.

He also said the state must move away from excessive surveillance, while speaking at a press conference organised by Human Rights Forum Bangladesh (HRFB) at the MIDAS Convention Centre in Dhaka.

The UN report calls for the dissolution of two institutions -- Rab and NTMC -- and recommends restricting the activities of DGFI, which, he emphasised, should function solely as a security

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As raindrops suddenly start to fall, a father quickly lifts a shopping bag over his daughter's head, shielding her from the drizzle. The duo was on their way home after finishing shopping, when they were caught off-guard by the sudden shower. The photo was taken in the Hatirpool area yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

CONSENSUS COMMISSION LDP backs majority of reform proposals Jamaat submits feedback

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In the first-ever individual dialogue with political parties on state reform proposals, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) agreed to 120 out of 166 proposals sent to political parties by the National Consensus Commission (NCC).

LDP President Col (Retd) Oli Ahmed shared this at a dialogue with the commission at the LD Hall of the National Parliament complex yesterday.

Of the 166 proposals, the LDP agreed with 120, disagreed with 42, partially agreed with two, and found two "unclear."

Among 70 constitutional reform proposals, the party supported 51, disagreed with 16, partially agreed with one, and found two unclear.

For judicial reforms, the LDP endorsed 22 out of 23 proposals and partially agreed with one. Meanwhile, it backed all 20 anti-corruption proposals.

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ACC to probe graft allegations against GM Quader

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has found preliminary evidence against Jatiyo Party Chairman GM Quader for money laundering under various names, bribery in the nomination process of the reserved women's parliamentary seats, and "position trading" within the party.

ACC Director General Akhtar Hossain said as sufficient evidence has been found in a covert investigation, ACC has decided to initiate an open inquiry and take legal action.

He disclosed this information at a press briefing held at the ACC headquarters yesterday.

Akhtar Hossain said after the 2018 national elections, Tk 18.10 crore was taken as bribes for MP nominations from JP in reserved women's seats, and allegedly, the primary beneficiary was then acting chairman GM Quader.

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The Palestine Solidarity Committee, Bangladesh rallied in front of Jatiya Press Club yesterday. They demanded an immediate stop to the genocide taking place in Gaza, violating the recent ceasefire deal between Israel and Palestine.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Justice Khizir Hayat removed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Justice Khizir Hayat has been removed from the office of High Court Division for "misconduct and incapacity" under the recommendation of the chief justice led Supreme Judicial Council (SJC).

He is one of the 12 HC judges, who were barred from judicial proceedings since October 20 last year, SC sources said.

President Mohammed Shahabuddin removed Justice Khizir Hayat under article 96(6) of the constitution on Tuesday, according to a notification issued by the law ministry on Wednesday. The restriction was imposed after demonstrators, mostly students, demanded the removal of "pro Awami League fascist judges" on the SC premises on October 16.



We Deeply Mourn

Mr. Khan Mohammed Ameer (Biltu), one of the most successful and prosperous industrialists of independent Bangladesh, and the founding chairman of Padma Group of Companies, passed away at the age of 82 on Sunday 16 March 2025 at 8:02 AM while undergoing treatment at the United Hospital in the capital (Inna lillahi wa Inna ilaihi rajiu).

On behalf of the family of the deceased and the Padma Group of Companies, we express our gratitude and thanks to all the kind-hearted individuals, banks, insurance companies, business houses and financial institutions who sent condolences on the passing of Mr. Ameer, a patron of artistic painting and renowned photographer, and to those who attended the funeral and expressed their prayers, remembrance and deep condolences to the family.

The Kulkhan will be held today 21 March 2025 at 4:00 PM at the late's residence in Dhaka, House No. 14, Road No. 48, Gulshan 02. We request all the friends, relatives, and well-wishers of the late to attend the event.

The family of the late and all the officers and employees.

 Padma Group of Companies

AK Enamul Haque new DG of BIDS
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prof AK Enamul Haque has been appointed as the director general of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) on March 20.

He succeeded Binayak Sen. Prior to joining BIDS, Enamul Haque was the deputy vice chancellor of UCSI University Bangladesh Branch campus.

He is an environmental economist with extensive experience in teaching and research within the field of climate change, agriculture, and urban issues in developing countries with a focus on South Asia in general and Bangladesh in particular.

State must move

FROM PAGE 3
intelligence agency, not one that infringes on people's rights.

"Similarly, military authority (wing) within Ansar VDP must be abolished," he said.

If tekharruz aman stressed the need for justice and accountability, saying those in leadership during the Awami League's tenure must be held responsible.

He highlighted the

New party 'Jonotar Dol'

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fascism or give space to any form of injustice."

The party promises equal rights and opportunities for all citizens, regardless of ethnicity, religion, or profession.

If elected to power, the party will also enforce a uniform education system for all, grounded in teaching ethics. In

addition, the party will enforce mandatory military training for younger generations.

Their foreign policy strategy will be to establish friendly relations with true allies and ensure diplomatic relations with neighbouring countries, reflecting equality and mutual benefit.

They will also

promote a bicameral parliament and a US-style parliamentary democracy.

Its short-term goal is to get as many seats as it can, but in 10 years it wants to lead the government.

A network of workers from 74 NGOs attended the programme and pledged their support to the party.

Govt halts intake to grades

FROM PAGE 5
necessary arrangements to complete the education of currently enrolled students, after which primary schools will only offer education up to class five.

"The chief adviser has given policy approval for this decision. Our primary schools lacked sufficient infrastructure and manpower, which resulted in the poor implementation of lower secondary education," he added.

Since 2013, the government approved the introduction of lower secondary classes in government primary schools on a trial basis. In 2016, it even announced plans

to extend primary education up to class eight, but the initiative was never fully implemented.

In May 2024, the then Awami League government decided to expand primary education up to class eight and make it free of cost.

Md Akikur Rahman passes away
CITY DESK

Md Akikur Rahman, sponsor director and a member of the executive committee of the board of directors of Southeast Bank PLC, died yesterday. He was 80.

Akikur Rahman was born on February 15, 1945, at Sunarpura in Nabarun, Sylibet, said a press release.

He had been associated with Southeast Bank since its inception as a sponsor director. He also served as the vice chairman of the bank from 2023 to 2024. He was the chairman of RAR Investment Limited and the Dorking Muslim Community Association, UK.

LDP backs majority

FROM PAGE 3
he said.

The NCC will hold talks with Khelafat Majlis and the Bangladesh Labour Party tomorrow, followed by Rastrosangskar Andolan on Sunday.

Meanwhile, Jamaat-e-Islami, led by Secretary General Mia Golam Parwar, submitted its feedback yesterday. With this, 16 parties have responded, while 22, including BNP and National Citizen Party (NCP), are yet to submit their views.

Parwar said Jamaat held multiple discussions before finalising its submission, which includes recommendations for ensuring free and fair elections through a proportional representation system.

The commission yesterday said they are awaiting feedback from BNP and NCP.

Speaking at the commission's office in Parliament, Prof Ali Riaz said BNP assured them it would submit its feedback within the next couple of days.

Regarding the NCP, he added, "If we receive their opinions, we will engage with them after Eid."

The party expressed a soft stance on proposals it had differing opinions on and assured full support for the ongoing reforms,"

he said.

Following the filing of a case, police arrested Rafiqul, who later confessed to his crimes before a magistrate.

The tribunal framed charges against him on May 15, 2019.

Rafiqul later admitted to killing the girl after raping her, citing previous enmity

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তারিখ: ২০/০৩/২০২৫ খ্রি

দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি ২১/২০২৪-২৫

এতদূরা সম্পৃষ্টি কাজের অভিভাসসম্পন্ন ঠিকাদার/সরবরাহকারীদের অবগতির জন্য জানানো যাচ্ছে যে, ২০২৪-২৫ অর্ধবছরের কর্পোরেশনের প্রক্রিয়াল শাখার e-GP এর OTM প্রক্রিয়া দরপত্র আহবান করা হচ্ছে। যার টেক্সার আইটি নিম্নে দেয়া হল। কাজের নাম, দরপত্র খোলা তারিখ অন্যান্য শর্তগুলী সহজে বিস্তারিত দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি এসিসি'র ওয়েবসাইট www.scc.gov.bd ও e-GP এর ওয়েবসাইট www.eprocure.gov.bd এ দেখা যাবে।

e-GP Tender ID No.

1090469, 1090799.

তারিখ: ১০/০৩/২০২৪
সিলেট সিটি কর্পোরেশন

GD-728

61pc of child-related ACC

FROM PAGE 3

remains far below target, with only 40 percent of children under five registered nationwide. The rate is even lower in urban areas (32.5 percent), though informal settlements report a higher rate of 75 percent, exposing stark disparities in access, he shared.

"While some progress has been made, significant challenges remain, including gaps in health data, policy shortcomings, and weak implementation, all of which affect child well-being and development in Bangladesh," said Zafar.

He also highlighted the alarming rise in child fatalities due to drowning, increasing suicidal tendencies (particularly after the pandemic), and traffic accidents.

"The lack of available data from both official and non-governmental sources makes it difficult to assess the true extent of these problems," he added.

On gender equality, he pointed to three major issues impacting children—gender parity, child marriage, and gender-based violence.

"Children, particularly those engaged in child labour and domestic work, are disproportionately affected. While Bangladesh has made strides in political empowerment, it lags in economic participation, and focusing on the struggles of hijras and the gender-diverse population.

Speakers at the forum

also called for simplifying birth registration, incorporating the rights of Dalit women and children,

addressing the needs of children of sex workers, and

focusing on the struggles of hijras and the gender-diverse population.

Meanwhile, ACC has also

filed three separate cases

against Awami League

advisory council member

Amir Hossain Amu,

his daughter, Sumaiya

Hossain, and his sister-in-law, Syeda Haque Merry, for

illegally acquiring assets worth Tk 38.39 crore, said

ACC DG Akhtar.

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Siam and Heme team up for 'Ityadi's' Eid special song

Film star Siam Ahmed and TV actress Jannatul Sumaiya Heme teamed up for a romantic duet in the special Eid-ul-Fitr episode of *Ityadi* this year. This is their first collaboration, though it is in the form of music rather than acting.

The song's lyrics have been penned by Kabir Bakul, with composition and music arrangement credited to Imran Mahmudul.

Last year, *Ityadi* introduced Tasnia Farin as a singer in a duet with Tahsan. Following that success, production house Fagun Audio Vision expects this new track to resonate with audiences.

As per tradition, Hanif Sanket's Eid special *Ityadi* will air on Bangladesh Television (BTV) the night after Eid day, following the 8pm news.



Blackpink members surpass BTS on Billboard charts with solo hits

Blackpink members have outpaced BTS on the Billboard charts with a series of record-breaking solo releases. Jennie's *Like Jennie* recently debuted at No 3 on the Billboard Global Excl US chart and No 5 on the Billboard Global 200, marking a major milestone.

Lisa followed with *FKCK Up the World*, debuting at No 14, while Jennie's *Extra!*, featuring Doechii, landed at No 13 and 18. Jisoo's *Earthquake* reached No 22, and Lisa's *Born Again*, featuring Doja Cat and RAYE, debuted at No 12.

For five consecutive weeks, Blackpink soloists have dominated the global charts. Their ongoing success fuels anticipation for the *Blackpink 2025 World Tour*, set to begin on July 5, covering Asia, Europe, and North America.



NEWS

ACC sues Saima Wazed

FROM PAGE 12

East Asia Regional Office.

She is also accused of coercing member banks of the Bangladesh Association of Banks into depositing Tk 33.05 crore into the accounts of Shuchona Foundation.

ACC Deputy Director Tahasin Munabil Haque filed the cases at the ACC's Integrated District Office 1 in Dhaka.

Saima is the lone accused in one of the cases, while the other also implicates former BAB Chairman Nazrul Islam Mazumder.

WHO APPOINTMENT

According to the statement of the case related to Saima's appointment to WHO's regional office, Saima allegedly fabricated credentials in her application for the post in 2023.

The ACC alleges that she falsely claimed to be engaged in teaching and reviewing educational manuals at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU), currently Bangladesh Medical University, despite having no such involvement.

Four children raped in 3 days

FROM PAGE 12

22-year-old woman to an OCC after she filed a case accusing a man of raping her, said Muhammad Raju, officer-in-charge of Hatirjheel Police Station.

The complainant alleged the man raped her several times last year, promising to marry her, the OC said, adding that police were looking for the accused.

In Bandarban, four men were sent to jail yesterday on charges of forcing an 8th grader to a tobacco farm in Alikadam and gang-raping her on March 14 when the girl was returning home.

The perpetrators also allegedly filmed the incident.

The victim filed a case on Wednesday and police arrested the four accused the same day, said Alikadam Police Station Officer-in-Charge Mirza Zahir Uddin.

In Patuakhali, a suspect in a gang-rape case was sent to jail on charges of raping a college student. The accused, Sakib Munshi, 19, is the son of Mamun Munshi, former president of Pangashia Union BNP under

Saima Wazed

In her application, Wazed reportedly listed her position at the medical university, saying she was an "Honorary Specialist/Expert at BSMMU (2022 Present), providing technical expertise on autism spectrum disorder and mental health, and reviewing manuals for the care and management of developmental disorders".

However, upon investigation, BSMMU authorities confirmed that she never held such a position or participated in any academic or research activities related to manual development.

The ACC has charged her under sections 420, 468, and 471 of the Penal Code, along with section 5(2) of the Prevention of Corruption Act of 1947, for allegedly misrepresenting her qualifications to secure the WHO role.

SHUCHONA FOUNDATION The second case alleges that Saima and Nazrul Islam Mazumder colluded to misuse their power and exert undue influence over member banks of BAB, compelling them to contribute Tk

33.05 crore from their corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds to Shuchona Foundation, where Saima was the chairperson.

In May 2017, 17 banks were forced to donate Tk 21 crore from their CSR funds, according to the charges. A total of 20 banks ultimately contributed the Tk 33.05 crore.

Further inquiries into the foundation's records show that no documentation was available regarding how the collected funds were spent.

The statement of the case, filed under section 5(2) of the Prevention of Corruption Act and section 109 of the Penal Code, says that no physical office of Shuchona Foundation was found during an enforcement operation conducted by the ACC headquarters on January 29.

Since the organisation had no physical existence, the ACC suspects that the money was embezzled through forged records, which will be thoroughly examined during the investigation.

Scuffle breaks out at NCP event

FROM PAGE 12

Dumki upazila, police said. The other accused, Sifat Munshi, 20, and Imran Munshi, 19, were still on the run as of last night.

The 17-year-old victim is the daughter of a man killed in police firing during the July uprising.

Sakib, Sifat, and Imran forcibly took her to a secluded place near the Munshibari area when the girl was on her way to her maternal grandparents' house after visiting her father's grave on Tuesday.

Then, Sakib and Sifat allegedly took turns in raping her, while Imran filmed the scene, according to a case filed by the victim on Wednesday evening. Police arrested Sakib on the same night and produced him before a court that sent him to jail yesterday.

Meanwhile, BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman yesterday talked to the victim over the phone and promised her all sorts of support when a BNP delegation visited her at a hospital yesterday.

[Our correspondents from Gazipur, Bandarban, and Patuakhali contributed to the report.]

A stacked Eid for KEYA PAYEL

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

Keya Payel, a rising star in Bangladesh's showbiz industry, is proving herself to be a versatile talent, balancing both modelling and acting with ease. Over the years, she has built a reputation for capturing the audience's attention, quickly solidifying her place among the newer generation of actors.

This year, Keya has taken on an intense schedule, fully immersed in back-to-back shoots for multiple Eid dramas. With numerous projects set to air this festive season, her workload has become almost rigorous. "I'm constantly in front of the camera, taking on new roles, working with new stories. It's a challenge, one I enjoy thoroughly," Keya shared with The Daily Star in between takes on one of her current film sets.

One of the anticipated dramas for this Eid is *Hello Guys*, directed by Mohiuddin Mahim. "The title might change," she noted, highlighting the fluid nature of the production process. Musfiq R Farhan, a frequent collaborator of hers, is another leading star in this project rooted in contemporary issues, making it relatable for today's audience.

Her previous projects, particularly those aired during Valentine's Day, were met with critical acclaim. It was the success of those performances that led to her booking an almost continuous flow of Eid projects. "After Valentine's Day, my filming schedule filled up quickly, but this is what I love," she explained.

Keya has already completed filming for another drama, *Tumi Jake Bhalobasho*, alongside Farhan Ahmed Jovan. The duo will also appear together in *Bantir Biye*, a drama where Keya explores a unique character.

However, the highlight of her Eid projects might be *Baji*, a big-budget production where she stars, once again, opposite Musfiq R Farhan. "The storyline of *Baji* is remarkable. It's different, and I'm confident that the audience will be captivated," Keya shared.



When asked about the appeal of this year's projects, Keya reflected, "The scripts this Eid have been really strong, and the characters I play are well developed. I've been able to work on some truly interesting dramas."

A versatile performer, Keya's strength lies in her ability to mould herself into the wide array of characters that come her way. "I love acting. It's not just work for me—it's a passion. Every character brings something new, and that's what keeps it exciting," she expressed.

On the question of having a preferred co-star, Keya dismisses any notion of favouritism. "There's no specific actor I prefer working with. We're all part of the same family, and each collaboration brings something unique to the table," she said.

"Everyone in this industry is giving their best. We share a sense of commitment to the work, and that's what makes the productions stand out," she noted.

Regarding her long-term aspirations, Keya's vision is clear. "I want to create characters that the audience will remember. The love and recognition from fans is something I cherish, and I want to keep growing as an actor," she said.

During Eid this year, Keya will dedicate time to her family in Dhaka. "I'm usually busy throughout the year with shoots, but Eid gives me a few days off. I'll spend that time with my family," she shared.

Besides her on-screen work, Keya enjoys travelling whenever she finds the time. "I love to explore new places. I always plan my trips meticulously," she said, highlighting the rare moments when she can step away from the hustle of her acting career.

As the conversation turned back to Eid dramas, Keya reflected on the anticipation that surrounds projects coming out during this time of year.

"There's something special about Eid dramas. The audience looks forward to them, and I feel a responsibility to give them my best," she concluded.

Srijit Mukherji's upcoming film takes cues from Angelina Jolie's life

Filmmaker Srijit Mukherji has confirmed that his upcoming Bengali film, *Killbill Society*, is inspired by the life of Hollywood actress Angelina Jolie.

According to Telegraph India, Jolie once revealed that, at 22, she had considered hiring a hitman to take her life, fearing the impact of suicide on her loved ones. However, the hired killer convinced her to rethink her decision.

Srijit took to X to confirm that interview inspired him. He said, "This real-life incident is the inspiration behind *Killbill Society*."

Killbill Society, the sequel to *Hemlock Society* (2012), hits theatres on April 11. Parambrata Chattopadhyayas Mrityunjay, alongside Koushani Mukherjee as Poorna.

WHAT'S THE HAPS?

'Macbeth' (Mime Adaptation)

To mark the 102nd birth anniversary of legendary French mime artist Marcel Marceau and World Mime Day 2025, Swapnadal is set to present a special performance of *Macbeth*.

This pioneering production, directed by Zahid Repon and adapted by Juyena Shabnam, merges Shakespeare's tragedy with Bengali mime traditions, offering a groundbreaking interpretation of the literary classic.

Date: Saturday | March 22, 2025

Time: 7:30pm

Venue: Experimental Theatre Hall, Bangladesh Shilpkala Academy (BSA)



Trump Organization announces new India office project

AFP, Mumbai

The Trump Organization and its local real estate partners have announced a new commercial tower project in India as the US president's family business seeks to tap demand in the world's most populous country.

India is already home to four Trump-branded residential complexes, making it the largest market outside America for his family business, with more projects on the slate.

Indian partner Tribeca Developers announced on Wednesday that it would develop a new "Trump World Center" in the western Indian city of Pune in partnership with real estate firm Kundan Spaces.

The project, expected to generate sales exceeding \$289.6 million, will span more than 1.6 million square feet and feature "two iconic glass towers with over 27 floors of office space", a statement said.

"This new development marks The Trump Organization's first foray into commercial real estate in India and will join the extensive portfolio of Trump residential properties in

region," it said.

Eric Trump, executive vice president of the Trump Organization and the US president's second son, said in the statement that India had "embraced the Trump brand" with "remarkable enthusiasm".

"After our successful collaboration on several iconic residential projects, we are proud to launch our first commercial development in India," he said.

The US president is not involved in managing the family company but the Trump Organization's foreign business dealings have prompted criticism of possible conflicts of interest.

Eldest son Donald Trump Junior visited India in 2018, when the Trump Organization's local partners promised dinner with him to anyone who bought into a luxury development outside the capital New Delhi.

India's office market saw robust growth in 2024, with leasing activity across the top seven cities seeing a nearly 23 percent year-on-year increase, according to estimates by real estate management firm JLL.

They also noted that, in general, "people are too pessimistic about the kindness of their communities," and that "the return rate of lost wallets is much higher than people expect."

Greenpeace hit with \$660m in damages in US pipeline suit

AFP, Washington

A jury in North Dakota on Wednesday ordered Greenpeace to pay hundreds of millions of dollars in damages in a closely watched lawsuit brought by a US pipeline operator, raising serious free speech concerns.

The verdict delivers a stunning legal blow to the environmental advocacy group, which Energy Transfer (ET) accused of orchestrating violence and defamation during the controversial construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline nearly a decade ago.

ET, which denies any intent to stifle speech, celebrated the verdict. The jury awarded more than \$660 million in damages across three Greenpeace entities, citing charges including trespass, nuisance, conspiracy, and deprivation of property access.

"We would like to thank the judge and the jury for the incredible amount of time and effort they dedicated to this trial," the company said.

Bangladesh slips

FROM PAGE 2

Nordic countries all remained among the top 10 happiest, with Denmark, Iceland, and Sweden trailing Finland, which slightly extended its lead over runner-up Denmark.

Meanwhile, Costa Rica and Mexico entered the top 10 for the first time, ranking sixth and tenth, respectively.

This year, the authors of the happiness report highlighted new evidence indicating that engaging in acts of generosity and believing in the kindness of others are significant predictors of happiness—more so than earning a higher salary.

They also noted that, in general, "people are too pessimistic about the kindness of their communities," and that "the return rate of lost wallets is much higher than people expect."

US welcomes

FROM PAGE 12

"We condemn any instances of violence or intolerance directed toward members of minority communities in any country," Tammy Bruce said.

She added that the US is closely monitoring the situation in Bangladesh and emphasised that Washington has taken note of the interim government's efforts to maintain stability.

"That's what we're watching. That's what we expect. And that will be what continues," she added.

Tarique, seven others cleared

FROM PAGE 12

Sobhan Sanvir and Sadaat Sobhan, Tarique's personal secretary Mia Nur Uddin Apu, former BNP lawmaker Qazi Saleemul Huq Kamal, and East-West Property Development Ltd Director Abu Sufian.

Judge Mohammad Abu Taher of the Special Judge's Court-3 of Dhaka passed the order in presence of two accused—Saleemul Huq and Abu Sufian—at the courtroom, said a court staffer.

In the judgment, the judge wrote that the prosecutors failed to prove

the charges of bribery against the accused.

On October 4, 2007, the Anti-Corruption Commission Deputy Assistant Director Abul Kashem filed the bribery case.

However, Tarique and Saleemul Huq were later accused in the case.

The ACC said the eight men accused in the case were involved in receiving and giving bribes so that Sanvir did not face charges for killing Humayun Kabir Sabbir whose body was found outside a building in Bashundhara residential area on July 5, 2006.

Huthis will be 'annihilated'

Says Trump; Khamenei says US strikes must stop

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump said Yemen's Iran-backed Huthi rebels "will be completely annihilated," warning Tehran against continuing aid for the group amid an ongoing US military campaign against them.

"Iran must stop the sending of these supplies IMMEDIATELY. Let the Huthis fight it out themselves. Either way they lose, but this way they lose quickly," Trump posted on his Truth Social platform.

The Republican referenced reports that Iran "has lessened its intensity on Military Equipment and General Support" for the Huthis, though added "they are still sending large levels of supplies."

"Tremendous damage has been inflicted upon the Houthi barbarians, and watch how it will get progressively worse -- It's not even a fair fight, and never will be. They will be completely annihilated," his post continued.

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei yesterday said that deadly US strikes on the Huthi rebels in Yemen were a "crime that must be stopped".

The United States said its strikes on Yemen targeted and killed several top Huthi officials, while the Huthi-run health ministry said they left dead 53 people and wounded nearly 100.

Thousands flee as Israel expands ground ops

Hamas fires at Tel Aviv in first riposte to Gaza 'massacres'

AFP, Gaza City

Israel bombarded Gaza and pressed its ground operations yesterday after issuing what it called a "last warning" for Palestinians to return hostages and remove Hamas from power.

Hamas said it fired rockets at Israeli commercial hub Tel Aviv yesterday in its first military response to the growing civilian death toll from Israel's resumption of air and ground operations in Gaza.

Israel said it had closed off the territory's main north-south route as troops expanded the ground operations they resumed on Wednesday.

Gaza's civil defence agency said 504 people had been killed so far in the Israeli assault, including more than 190 children. Its previous death toll was at least 470.

The armed wing of Hamas, the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, said it fired rockets at Tel Aviv in response to Israel's "massacres" of Gaza civilians.

The Israeli army said it intercepted one projectile fired from Gaza and that two others struck an uninhabited area.

After weeks of stalemate, Israel resumed its air campaign early Tuesday with a wave of deadly strikes that drew widespread condemnation.

The offensive shattered a relative calm that had pervaded in the war-torn Palestinian territory since a ceasefire took hold on January 19.

At the Indonesian Hospital in



» Israel army bans traffic on Gaza's main north-south route
» UN official bemoans 'endless' suffering in Gaza
» Gaza civil defence says 504 killed since Israel resumed strikes

northern Gaza, grieving families knelt by the bodies of their loved ones enveloped in blood-stained white shrouds.

"We want a ceasefire! We want a ceasefire!" one of them, Mohammed Hussein, told AFPTV, appealing for the international community to stop the killing.

"We are defenceless Palestinian people," he added.

Yesterday, the Israeli army banned traffic on the territory's main north-south artery.

Palestinians were seen fleeing south along Salaheddin Road near the Nuseirat refugee camp atop donkey-drawn carts piled high with belongings.

"Over the past 24 hours, IDF soldiers have begun a targeted ground operation in the central and southern Gaza Strip in order to expand the security zone between the northern and southern parts," army spokesman Avichay Adraee said on X.

Movement along Salaheddin Road between the north and south of the Gaza Strip is prohibited "for your safety," he said.

The first stage of the ceasefire expired early this month amid deadlock over next steps.

Israel rejected negotiations for a promised second stage, calling instead for the return of all of its remaining hostages under an extended first stage.

That would have meant delaying talks on a lasting ceasefire, and was rejected by Hamas as an attempt to renegotiate the original deal.

The head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) on Thursday deplored "an endless unleashing of the most inhumane ordeals" on the people of Gaza since Israel resumed its military offensive.

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called Israel's latest strikes on Gaza a "catastrophic crime" and said the United States "shares responsibility".

The overall death toll in Gaza since the start of the Israeli offensive stands at 49,617, according to the Hamas-run territory's health ministry.



Palestinians react near the bodies of victims of Israeli overnight airstrikes in the northern Gaza Strip, at the Indonesian Hospital in Beit Lahia, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Europe meets over Ukraine peace plans

Trump floats US takeover of Ukraine nuclear plants

AFP, London

Senior military figures and European leaders yesterday gathered to thrash out plans for long-term peace in Ukraine, as the United States and Russia prepared for fresh talks on ending the war.

Around 30 military leaders from countries keen to help police any lasting ceasefire in Ukraine were to meet north of London, while on the other side of the Channel, EU leaders headed to Brussels.

The flurry of European activity comes with lingering concern about the United States' commitment to backing security on the continent, and fears of future Russian aggression against Baltic and Nordic countries.

Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelensky and Russia's Vladimir Putin both held talks with their US counterpart Donald Trump this week, and have indicated they are prepared to halt attacks on energy infrastructure for 30 days.

But there has since been no let-up in strikes and both countries reported a barrage of new drone strikes overnight, as questions remained about the exact details of any lasting peace deal.

Trump, who has spooked European and Nato allies by his overtures to Putin and lukewarm commitment to European security, suggested on Wednesday night the United States could take over and run Ukraine's power plants.

Putin, for his part, has made an end to further Western military support for Ukraine a red line for Russia agreeing to a long-term truce.

Zelensky, who is due to address EU leaders in Brussels, has said that will make Ukraine vulnerable to further attack and warned against making concessions that would embolden Moscow.

Despite Trump going cold on support for Ukraine, the United States is looking at acquiring additional air defence systems for Kyiv to counter Russia's ballistic missiles.

"This is extremely important," said the EU's top diplomat Kaja Kallas, who is pushing member states to meet a Ukrainian request for two million shells worth five billion euros (\$5.4 billion).



Indian forces kill 30 Maoist rebels

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Indian security forces yesterday killed at least 30 Maoists in two separate gun battles inside forests in Chhattisgarh state's Bastar region, senior police officials said.

While 26 Maoists were killed in Bijapur district, four Maoists were gunned down in Kanker by a joint team of the BSF and District Reserve Guard (DRG) personnel of the state police.

The bodies of 26 Maoists besides firearms and explosives were recovered from the spot, Inspector General of Police, Bastar Range, Sundarraj P said.

A policeman was also killed in the gunfight, he added.

Another encounter took place in the morning in a forest along the border of Kanker and Narayanpur districts when a security team was out on an anti-Maoist operation, Kanker Superintendent of Police Indira Kalyan Elesela said.

The bodies of four Naxalites and automatic weapons were recovered after the action, he said.

WE DEEPLY MOURN

Md. Akikur Rahman

1945-2025

Honorable Sponsor Director, Southeast Bank PLC. breathed his last on 20 March 2025 (Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un). We are deeply shocked at his death and express our heartfelt condolences and sympathy to the members of the bereaved family.

Md. Akikur Rahman was born on February 15, 1945 in a respected Muslim family of Sunarpura, Nabarun, Sylhet. He was associated with Southeast Bank PLC. since its inception as a Sponsor Director. He was a member of the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors of Southeast Bank PLC. He was the Chairman of RAR Investment Limited, United Kingdom. He was also the Chairman of Dorking Muslim Community Association, United Kingdom. He was the Managing Director of RAR Holding Limited. He was also the Vice Chairman of International Medical College and Hospital, Gazipur, Bangladesh.

We pray to the Almighty Allah to grant the departed soul eternal bliss in the best of the Heavens, Ameen.

Southeast Bank PLC.
a bank with vision

| ARMY HEADQUARTERS E IN C'S BRANCH, WORKS DIRECTORATE DHAKA CANTONMENT | | | | |
|---|---|--|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| INVITATION FOR TENDER | | | | |
| Dated : 18 March 2025 | | | | |
| MILITARY ENGINEER SERVICES | | | | |
| Notice no. 600/15/74/2024-2025/E-6 | | | | |
| Establishment of ADCC North in BAF Base Paharkanchanpur area- 1 st Revised | | | | |
| Selling of Tender will commence from 23 March 2025 (from 1200 hours to 1400 hours in Office Time). | | | | |
| Selling of Tender will close on 20 April 2025 (from 1200 hours to 1400 hours in Office Time). | | | | |
| Last date and time of submission of Tender 21 April 2025 upto 1200 hours. | | | | |
| Date and time of opening of Tender 21 April 2025 at 1230 hours. | | | | |
| Name & Address of the Office(s) | | | | |
| - Selling Tender Document Tender Selling & Information Centre of Works Directorate at GE (Army) Central Dhaka and AIHQ, E in C's Branch, Works Directorate, Dhaka Cant. | | | | |
| - Receiving Tender Document Tender Selling & Information Centre of Works Directorate at GE (Army) Central Dhaka. | | | | |
| - Opening Tender Document -Do- | | | | |
| a. MES enlisted contractors Class - 'A' | | | | |
| b. Contractors enlisted in other Govt, Semi Government & Autonomous Organization of similar capacity may also participate in tenders having security clearance from DGFI. | | | | |
| Brief Description of Works | | | | |
| Lot No | Identification of Lot | | Location | Price of Tender Document (Taka) |
| a. | Construction of 1 x Underground Operational building including ancillary works for Establishment of ADCC North in BAF Base Paharkanchanpur area. | | BAF Base, Paharkanchanpur, Tangail. | 30,000.00 |
| | | | | 61,64,000.00 |
| | | | | 18 (Eighteen) Months |
| 16. | Name of Official Inviting Tender Director of Works | | | |
| 17. | Designation of Official Inviting Tender Director of Works | | | |
| 18. | Address of Official Inviting Tender AIHQ, E in C's Branch, Works Directorate, Dhaka Cantonment Web address : www.army.mil.bd | | | |
| 19. | Contact details of Official Inviting Tender Army Headquarters, E in C's Branch, Works Directorate, Dhaka Cantonment Tel No. 9832880 Fax No : 8752880 | | | |
| 20. | The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject any or all tenders. | | | |

Bureaucratic inertia needs an urgent fix

Report indicates prevailing sense of stagnation within the administration

We are concerned about the prevailing sense of inertia and stagnation within the administration despite more than seven months passing since its formation following the mass uprising. According to a report by this daily, the public's expectations for swift and dynamic governance have yet to be met, for which multiple factors are responsible. While part of it was beyond the control of a non-political government with a short lifespan— inheriting as it did a deeply dysfunctional system riddled with obstacles—its failure to steamroll through them with tact and firmness is also largely to blame.

Reportedly, one of the most significant disruptions in the administration has been the frequent transfers. For instance, since August 5, the regulation wing of the public administration ministry alone has seen at least four additional secretaries being appointed and then transferred in quick succession. Such inconsistency undermines the continuity and on-the-job experience needed to ensure effective governance. Equally problematic has been the effect of contractual appointees, many of whom were brought back from retirement and seemingly have little incentive to push for change while long-serving officers, deprived of promotions due to their presence, continue to feel disconnected and demoralised. One statistic that perfectly captures this chaotic shake-up combining transfers, promotions and contractual appointments is that, out of the 81 secretaries, 25 were appointed during the previous government while 56 by the current administration, including 17 on contract. This overhaul has not had the outcome intended.

Critical reforms that could have been implemented with mere administrative directives remain stalled. Our correspondent spoke to a dozen bureaucrats, ranging from deputy secretary to secretary in five ministries, who acknowledged that the lack of order, coordination, motivation, or accountability is having an effect on even routine tasks. For example, despite an Advisory Council directive on January 30 to review the quota system, no proposal has been presented to the cabinet to date. Similarly, the transfer of the Land Registration Office from the law ministry to the land ministry, a move that could improve efficiency, remains unaddressed. The absence of strong and regular engagement from top officials has also contributed to this inertia. Reportedly, Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus has held only one secretary-level meeting and visited the Secretariat only once since taking office. In such a vacuum, officials have defaulted to a passive stance.

This needs to change. The interim government was entrusted with stabilising the country and setting the stage for long-overdue reforms, especially in the administrative system. Allowing bureaucratic apathy and inactivity to persist will only erode public confidence in it. The authorities must take steps to ensure that all departments and offices are held accountable regularly, and that mechanisms are implemented to ensure that officials at all levels work collaboratively to serve citizens.

From flowing lifelines to dry beds

Authorities must prioritise river protection

It is alarming that at least 79 of the 1,156 government-listed rivers in Bangladesh have either dried up or are in the process of doing so. According to a recent study by the Rivers and Delta Research Centre (RDRC), all these rivers are heavily silted and either fully or partially dry up during the lean season, primarily due to upstream water diversion. As a result, livelihoods, agriculture, and local biodiversity are under threat.

It is no secret that under the previous government, encroachment—particularly by influential quarters—became rampant, with little legal action taken against those responsible. The RDRC study has found that large portions of several rivers have vanished in recent years due to unchecked encroachment. So, we urge the authorities to take steps to protect these rivers by enforcing strict measures against encroachers, reducing pollution, preventing erosion, and restoring their ecosystems. A broader plan is also needed to facilitate and promote water transportation, which experts say is crucial for river conservation.

River transportation offers several other complimentary advantages as well. For instance, the study highlights that waterways are the most economical means of transport, with rivers and canals covering 24,000 km across the country. Road transport costs range from Tk 2.81 to Tk 3.51 per tonne per kilometre, while rail transport costs Tk 1.96 per tonne per kilometre. In contrast, water transport costs only Tk 1.12 per tonne per kilometre. Given this cost advantage, the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) should introduce more riverine routes and encourage their use to reduce pressure on roads and railways.

However, even these measures may not be enough. Dams and upstream water diversions have altered the natural flow of our rivers, making it increasingly difficult for millions of Bangladeshis to fish, farm, and transport goods. As water availability in these rivers becomes increasingly unpredictable, entire communities that depend on them are struggling to survive. Beyond human impact, wildlife in these regions is also suffering due to habitat destruction, further disrupting the natural balance.

Therefore, the government must adopt a more proactive approach in engaging with upper riparian countries—particularly India—to protect our interests through effective diplomacy. For years, Bangladesh has failed to secure its rightful share of transboundary water, and this urgently needs to change. Strengthening water diplomacy is essential not only for the sustainable management of the country's rivers but also for ensuring their very survival.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Namibia becomes independent

On this day in 1990, after 106 years of German and South African rule, Namibia became independent.



EDITORIAL

Why Tulsi Gabbard's statements on Bangladesh matter



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H.M. NAZMUL ALAM

US Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard's recent remarks on Bangladesh are not only irresponsible but also unfair and baseless. As the chief of US national intelligence, her words carry significant weight, making it imperative that they be backed by credible evidence and diplomatic prudence. Instead, Gabbard's comments reflect a broader pattern of propaganda, particularly one emanating from India, that seeks to malign Bangladesh's reputation on the global stage. This is not merely a diplomatic faux pas but an act with severe repercussions for Bangladesh's global standing.

Diplomacy is not just about power but also responsibility. As former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan once said, "To live is to choose. But to choose well, you must know who you are and what you stand for." As a senior intelligence official, Gabbard should recognise that her statements about Bangladesh carry consequences. A responsible diplomat does not make sweeping generalisations about another nation without substantial proof. Ethics in international relations demand fairness, respect, and factual accuracy—qualities evidently absent in her remarks.

Gabbard's approach to Bangladesh can be analysed through the lens of international psychology. States that perceive themselves as superior often develop a patronising attitude towards smaller nations, a phenomenon best described by political scientist Noam Chomsky. "The powerful do what they want, while the weak suffer what they must." This mindset drives nations to interfere in the affairs of others under the pretext of human rights concerns, when in reality geopolitical motives often lie beneath the surface.

Her comments mirror a long-standing psychological pattern where Western and larger states adopt a paternalistic role towards smaller, developing nations. Psychologist Alfred Adler's theory of superiority and inferiority complexes explains this well: powerful nations often assert dominance over others, under the guise of guidance or correction, to reinforce their own self-image as global leaders. Bangladesh, having



As a senior intelligence official, Tulsi Gabbard should recognise that her statements about Bangladesh carry consequences.

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

fought against extremism with great success, does not need unsolicited and factually incorrect judgements from a foreign intelligence head.

As historian Edward Said noted in his seminal work *Orientalism*, the West has long held a distorted and condescending view of the East, shaping narratives to maintain ideological dominance. Tulsi Gabbard's statements reflect this enduring bias, where Bangladesh is unfairly categorised despite its strides towards progress and stability.

Gabbard's words are not just an oversight but a strategic move in the broader game of influence. By painting Bangladesh as a breeding ground for extremism, she indirectly strengthens India's long-held geopolitical ambitions in the region. This aligns with what Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci called "cultural hegemony," where dominant forces manipulate discourse to maintain control over the international order. The theme of labelling independent nations as "unstable" or "extremist" has been used repeatedly by powerful

Bangladesh as a hub of Islamist extremism, this section, which also includes some media platforms, has repeatedly sought to undermine Bangladesh's independent political and social trajectory.

The timing of her remarks is also suspect. The interim government in Bangladesh is actively working to rebuild democratic norms and restore stability after years of authoritarianism. By raising unfounded allegations at this juncture, Gabbard inadvertently or deliberately provides fodder for forces that seek to destabilise Bangladesh.

Responsible statesmanship requires basing assertions on verified facts, not political expediency. As Aristotle aptly put it, "The least initial deviation from the truth is multiplied later a thousandfold." If Gabbard had credible evidence of systemic persecution in Bangladesh, it should have been presented through proper diplomatic channels instead of being aired in a sensationalised interview.

Former US Secretary of State Colin Powell, reflecting on the Iraq War intelligence failures, famously

admitted, "What we know now, we should have known then." This acknowledgment of past mistakes highlights the dangers of acting on misinformation, something Gabbard should take into account before making unverified claims.

Bangladesh's track record in protecting minorities speaks for itself. The country's constitution guarantees religious freedom, and its leadership has consistently condemned communal violence. The occasional incidents that do occur are neither state-sponsored nor reflective of the nation's broader ethos.

History is rife with examples of how unverified allegations have led to disastrous consequences. The 2003 invasion of Iraq, justified under the pretence of "weapons of mass destruction," remains one of the most egregious cases of misinformation being used as a tool for political manoeuvring. Philosopher George Santayana's warning remains relevant, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

Gabbard's statements, if left unchallenged, could create an international perception that justifies unwarranted interventions, sanctions or diplomatic hostilities against Bangladesh. This is not just about national pride, it is about protecting the country's sovereignty against an emerging pattern of disinformation.

Gabbard, and politicians like her, should practise greater prudence when assessing another country. Reckless comments based on flawed narratives do not help Bangladesh, the US, or the cause of global peace.

The international community must demand higher standards of integrity and objectivity from political figures entrusted with global security. Engaging in constructive dialogue, rather than relying on baseless rhetoric, is the way forward.

Bangladesh has fought hard against extremism and has made commendable progress in religious inclusivity. Unsubstantiated allegations from foreign officials should not be allowed to dictate the narrative of a nation that has time and again proven its commitment to peace and progress. It's high time that international leaders remembered the words of Voltaire, "Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities." Let's resist the politics of misinformation and stand firm against the forces that seek to tarnish Bangladesh's reputation for their own strategic gains.

Are school buses the answer to our traffic woes?



Debra Efroymson
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DEBRA EFROYMSON

We're all familiar with the sight: rows of cars parked outside schools to drop off and pick up students across Dhaka. And we all suffer from the consequent congestion, noise, and danger to all those who are not in cars. Clearly, our system of allowing and even encouraging the elite to drive their children to and from school in their own automobiles is contributing to our urban misery. But what is the solution?

The answer that is on many people's minds is school buses. Buses, after all, can transport large numbers of children in the space occupied by only about two cars. There is logic to this solution, or at least the appearance of it.

Where's the problem? First of all, school buses only operate on the days that schools are open, and then only twice a day. The rest of the time they are parked somewhere. This is an incredibly inefficient use of space and money. In the US, the government spends \$21 billion a year just on transporting children to and from school by bus. The

investment in school buses would be much better spent on improving the overall public transit system so that not just students but everyone could benefit, and the buses would be moving throughout the day. (I'm kidding; they would mostly be stuck in traffic caused by all the cars.)

Secondly, why do we assume that children are travelling great distances to school? In most cases, children should attend a neighbourhood school that is within walking or cycling distance. If no school is available, then other schools should be encouraged to build satellite schools. It is a waste of children's time to be stuck in a bus for hours every day.

Children benefit in many ways when they travel to school actively, that is, by foot or bicycle: they are more prepared to learn when they arrive in school; they concentrate better and fidget less. In addition to the cognitive benefits are the physical ones, of gaining much-needed exercise, and the social benefits when they travel to school

with friends or family. Not only do they benefit, but streets are less congested, polluted, and dangerous when there are fewer cars and more people on foot and bicycle.

Certainly, asking children to walk or cycle to school on the current Dhaka streets may seem cruel. But if we cannot provide a positive environment for children to travel actively and safely to school, then we are failing as a city and should take measures to fix the problems, rather than allowing the elite to retreat into their steel boxes and everyone else to suffer.

The problem, though almost uniquely bad in Dhaka, is certainly not limited to our capital city. Faced with the unacceptable situation of child injury and death on the roads, New York and California both invested funds in improving the physical environment for walking and cycling. The states thus achieved, respectively, a 44 percent and 75 percent decline in injuries and crashes involving children. Paris is creating 300 "School Streets" that are accessible, cooler, and greener, and include bicycle networks, children's games, and street furniture. Barcelona, in addition to its superblocks and School Streets, is also organising a BiciBus in different neighbourhoods, in which around 50 children and parents cycle to school together. The BiciBus is a variation on the popular Walking

School Bus, whereby children are organised to walk to school safely together.

But we needn't look so far away. In India, on average, 45 children die on the roads each day. That is an outrageous figure. Rather than simply accept it as the cost of modernity, the Indian government is working to make streets safer.

One such example is the "250 meters of happiness" project in Delhi, launched in collaboration with government and other agencies and led by HumanQind, a non-profit design foundation. The project enables children to take the lead in planning safe, attractive, and stimulating environments to travel actively to school. The redesigned street includes a segregated cycle way, tree plantation, an outdoor gym, learning aids, play spaces incorporated into the footpath, and spaces for vendors. While in the past, cars were parked on the footpath and children and their guardians walked in the street, the footpaths have been reclaimed for people.

Whether it's the Walking School Bus, the BiciBus, School Streets, or 250 meters of happiness, there are plenty of great international examples of ways to improve the traffic situation around schools while making children's—and everyone else's—lives better. And all are far more affordable and practical than school buses.

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF FORESTS

Let's begin a discourse of resistance against forest fires



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PAVEL PARTHA

There is no singular definition of a forest. The process of defining and identifying forest areas is inherently tied to the politics of power and authority. The state, the forest department, multilateral banks, donor agencies, corporations, and forest-dependent communities all perceive forests differently and define their relationship with them in distinct ways. However, institutionally, a forest is defined as a collection of numerous trees, their species, and wildlife. According to The United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), forest biodiversity refers to the assemblage and relationships of all trees, animals, and microorganisms within a forest, as well as their ecological processes and functions.

Although Bangladesh has a relatively small land area, its forests are remarkably diverse. They include mangroves, coastal swamp forests, deciduous sal forests, hill evergreen mixed forests, rainforests, swamp forests, reed forests, rural forests, and sacred groves. According to numerous indigenous narratives worldwide, civilisation itself was born from the forest. While countless species, including humans, depend on forests for food, shelter, medicine, and survival, the neoliberal system continuously disregards these contributions. The unilateral commercialisation, exploitation, and occupation of forests began with the shipbuilding, timber, and pharmaceutical industries. To sustain profit-driven commerce, various colonial controls were imposed on forests in Bangladesh and across Asia.

Bangladesh's forests and genetic resources are continuously subjected to distress and threats. Already, rural forests, sacred groves, swamp forests, and reed forests across the country have been ruthlessly destroyed. Over the past 20 to 25 years, an unchecked trend has emerged, with forests being deliberately set on fire. Although natural forest fires do not occur in Bangladesh, large swathes of forestland and rare genetic resources are lost every year due to "planned arson." The state has yet to take a strong stance or systematic action against forest fires. There is still no ecosystem-based policy, planning, or management framework to address this issue. Environmental organisations, political parties, and citizens remain largely silent on the issue of forest fires. Such neglect and indifference allow the country's "lungs" to burn without question. Each year, acts of ecocide occur without accountability. Every year, March 21 is observed as International Day of Forests. This year's theme is "Forests and Food." This article seeks to remind us of the unbearable suffering caused by forest fires in Bangladesh and calls for justice for the forests.

The Lawachara wildfire incident
The largest wildfire in the history of Bangladesh's natural forests occurred on

June 14, 1997. This devastating ecocide was triggered by a gas exploration survey conducted by the American company Occidental Petroleum Corporation. The flames consumed vast areas of Moulvibazar's Sreemangal-Kamalganj region, including Magurchara and Lawachara. In 1996, a 1,250-hectare portion of the 2,740-hectare West Bhanugach Reserved Forest was declared the Lawachara National Park. Lawachara is home to 460 species, including 167 species of plants, four amphibians, six reptiles,

ablaze in broad daylight.

The Bhawal Sal Forest fires

In 1886, Frank B Simson in the book *Letters on Sports in Eastern Bengal* described hunting adventures in the Bhawal Sal Forest. Spanning nearly 65,000 acres in Gazipur, the Bhawal Sal Forest today is frail, shrinking, and plagued by encroachment and pollution. The last recorded sighting of a tiger in the Bhawal Sal Forest dates back to 1940. After Bhawal was declared a national park in 1973, it became home to 220 species of plants, 13 species of mammals, nine reptiles, five amphibians, and five species of birds. Every winter, the Bashtoil Sal forest near Bhawal is deliberately set on fire. The land of the burnt forest is then repurposed for housing, hotels, factories, and other construction. Just before the International Day of Forests in 2023, large areas of the Sal forest in the Goshinga-Patka region of Sreepur, Gazipur, were reduced to ashes by fire. Similar incidents of arson occurred in March of both 2022 and 2021. In

encroached upon. At the beginning of this month, a wildfire raged through Rangtia for an entire week.

The Modhupur Sal Forest fires

Modhupur has stood as a prime example of the various forms of oppression and exploitation that can be inflicted upon a forest. In 1950, jhum cultivation was forcibly banned in the Modhupur sal forest area. In 1955, the name of the forest was changed to "Woodlot Garden." 1962, it was declared a national park, and barbed wire fences were erected. From 1989 onwards, invasive trees and rubber gardens replaced the natural forest. Commercial pineapple and banana plantations were later established. The forest department planned to implement an eco-park project in the sal forest, enclosing it with a 61,000-foot-long wall. Meanwhile, Bangladeshi settlers began to occupy forest lands. Since 2000, various parts of the Modhupur Sal Forest have been set on fire every year to clear the land, which is later used for cultivation.

assessed in a one-dimensional manner, focusing only on the area burned and the volume of timber lost. When a complex ecosystem like the Sundarbans is scorched, can its damage truly be measured merely by cubic feet of lost timber or land area affected? A natural forest is certainly not a timber plantation, a decorative botanical garden, or a zoo.

The Rema-Kalenga Wildlife Sanctuary fires

After the Sundarbans, Rema-Kalenga in Habiganj is the largest natural forest in Bangladesh. It was declared a wildlife sanctuary in 1982. In 2023, the authorities of the Hatimara Tea Estate set fire to the forest land they took a lease of intending to expand their tea plantation. They also cut down nearly 140 ancient trees altering the classification of the land.

The fire burned down large portions of the Rema-Kalenga Wildlife Sanctuary, killing many wild animals.

Building a discourse of resistance against forest fires

According to Bangladesh's existing forest laws, environmental laws, and the Wildlife (Conservation and Security) Act 2012, setting fire to natural forests is a punishable offence. Yet, we have never heard of any exemplary trials or punishments. Despite signing the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity and the Paris Climate Agreement, the state has failed to prevent fires in natural forests. Although the Tree Conservation Act 2016 was drafted, it has yet to be approved. In 2021, Bangladesh signed the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use to end global deforestation yet the state remains unaware of the extent of forest and tree loss due to fires. Although Article 18(A) of the Constitution declares the protection of forests and genetic resources as a state responsibility, we are yet to see effective measures to safeguard forests from fires.

Natural forests do not catch fire spontaneously; such incidents are often caused intentionally. Firstly, the forest department and state authorities must recognise and address this issue. Negligence is unacceptable—each incident of fire must be responsibly addressed. Every fire should be investigated, and those responsible must be brought under the law. Following a fire, the forest department should organise visits involving all relevant stakeholders. Based on the input from the community and others, a forest management plan can be developed. Immediate efforts must be made to extinguish the fire during such incidents, with active involvement from the community. Assessing the damage should prioritise the natural and cultural aspects of the forest.

To establish short, medium, and long term forest management, the forest department and related authorities must cultivate a culture of public dialogue about the country's forests, ensuring that the opinions and suggestions of citizens from all classes, professions, genders, and ethnic groups are understood and considered. The commercial narratives about forests must change. The traditional knowledge and forest management practices of forest dwellers, forest-dependent communities, and indigenous peoples are now universally recognised. Their vision and expertise must be regarded as the core strength of the state's forest management. Let a new public discourse emerge to protect natural forests, rooted in the knowledge and narratives of the people, involving everyone.



A burnt part of Rangtia Sal forest, captured on March 19, 2025

PHOTO: PAVEL PARTHA

246 birds, 20 orchids, 20 mammals, and 17 species of insects. Since the 1997 ecocide went unpunished, many forest grabbers across the country, including in Lawachara, became emboldened to grab forestland by setting fires. This rainforest is one of the primary habitats of the hoolock gibbon. However, multinational mining operations, American projects, railway and road construction through the forest, corporate hotels and resort businesses have collectively pushed this forest to the brink of collapse. On April 24, 2021, while implementing a forest department initiative, a fire broke out in a section of Lawachara, resulting in extensive damage. In 2023 as well, a fire was deliberately set in Lawachara. On February 26, 2025, nearly two acres of forest were set

2023, a fire also devastated the Sakhipur Sal forest.

The Rangtia Sal Forest fire

Rangtia, located in Jhenaigati upazila of Sherpur, is one of the country's significant sal forests along the border. One of its distinctive features is the presence of various types of flax. This forest is home to approximately 250 species of plants. Ten rare and distinct species of medicinal plants whose roots are traditionally used as medicines grow in this forest. With the dominance of the neoliberal market, Rangtia eventually transformed into a site for China clay and stone mining. Streams, hills, and forests were ravaged in the pursuit of stone trade. The Rangtia Sal Forest houses many sacred trees, holy sites, and groves. However, most of them have been

The Sundarbans fire incidents

According to forest-dependent communities, local residents, the forest department, and media reports, the Sundarbans have experienced nearly 25 fire incidents between 2002 and 2024. Approximately 72 acres of forest have been directly burned. On March 22, 2002, a fire broke out in the Katka Wildlife Sanctuary in the Sharankhola range of Bagerhat. On March 25, 2004, a fire destroyed three acres of forest in the Chandpal Range. On December 27, 2004, nine decimals of forestland were burned in the Aruarber area. In the past two decades, many such fires ravaged this forest.

Whenever fire incidents occur in the Sundarbans, we see the forest department making irresponsible statements in the media. When a fire burns parts of a forest, the damage is

TRIBUTE TO SYED MANZUR ELAHI

A life dedicated to nation-building



Ramendu Majumdar
is a renowned actor, stage director and theatre producer. He is
also managing director at Expressions Limited.

RAMENDU MAJUMDAR

"Take me home, this is your job," were the last words of Syed Manzur Elahi to his son Nasim and daughter Munize, who were holding his hand at a Singapore hospital on March 12. Nasim embraced me beside his father's grave and told me weeping, "I performed my job, but couldn't bring him back alive."

The huge turnout at Manzur Elahi's namaz-e-janaza at Gulshan Central Mosque as well as at Banani graveyard proved that he was much more than a business icon—he was our national hero. He not only created job opportunities for thousands by building commercial brands, but served the nation in different capacities throughout his illuminating life. He happened to be the only person who was appointed twice as an adviser in the former caretaker governments of 1996 and 2001.

On February 26, 1942 in Kolkata, he lost his father, Sir Syed Nasim Ali, the then chief justice of undivided Bengal high court, at the age of 5. His elder brother, Justice SA Masud, who became the chief justice of Kolkata High Court later, served as Manzur's guardian. After completing BA (Hons) at St

He was probably the most respected business person in our country, who never compromised with ethics, honesty, and patriotism. Even on his deathbed, he advised his children to place the country above everything else.

I remember one day, while I was chatting with him, Nasim entered the room with two CVs of candidates for the position of independent director for their company,



Syed Manzur Elahi (February 26, 1942 -
March 12, 2025)

other easy going. Without looking at the CVs, Manzur Elahi advised Nasim to go for the hard nut. It was always better for the company to have people who would give hard time to the management in the board meetings, Manzur added.

Though he was a highly successful business person, he preferred not to be known as a businessman, but as a person who wanted to serve the nation through different organisations and institutions. He was one of the founders of East West University where his classmate Dr Farashuddin was the key person. He stood by his wife Nilofer Manzur, who established Sunbeams, a renowned English medium school. He was the president of the Dhaka University Alumni Society and served in the trustee boards of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Transparency International, Freedom Foundation, Manusher Jonno Foundation, and so on. He was a patron of our Theatre School and Theatre group.

He chaired many professional policymaking bodies like the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Bangladesh Association of Banks, Bangladesh Employers' Association, and Central Depository Bangladesh.

He took the lead in founding the Mutual Trust Bank and Pioneer Insurance Company. From my professional association with Mutual Trust Bank for about a decade, I found the key management very happy with the ideal working environment and the board never interfered with the working of the bank, which was very unusual for private banks. It was possible for Manzur Elahi and persons

like Samson H Chowdhury and others who were on the board.

I remember one day Manzur Elahi called me at his office at Dhaka Chamber Building, where I too had our agency's small office. He wanted to make their banks' calendar based on the theme of honesty to counter the corruption in society. The approach had to be positive as nobody would like to hang a calendar with negative images. It was a hard task, but we could come out with nice visuals.

That was the beginning of Mutual's theme-based calendars mostly on paintings. Thanks to the art connoisseur Anis A Khan being the managing director, MTB calendars became collectors' choice after the Bangladesh Tobacco Company's theme calendars.

Manzur Elahi became lonely in a way after his wife passed away during the COVID pandemic. His son and daughter would go out for their work and he had nothing to do in the empty house. So, he would come to the office every day for some time though he was not that involved in business as before. He told me that he would spend his time in the office sipping tea, reading newspapers, and meeting people. I used to go from Banani to his office in Gulshan from time to time and spent quality time with him. Incidentally during my last visit, Nasim was also with us and while I was about to leave, Nasim asked us to stand together and took a photo with his mobile. Could Nasim have imagined that we would never meet again? Of course, we will meet in the other world, which hopefully will be serene and peaceful. Goodbye, my great friend, for the time being!

asking for his father's opinion. Both were women with a background in finance. Nasim mentioned that one was a hard nut and the



LAW VISION

Bangladesh and the quest for a digitised judiciary

There are some risks in incorporation of legal tech into the judiciary too, i.e. data privacy and security concerns, discrimination, bias etc. But certain risks associated with legal tech tools can be effectively avoided through prudent design, procurement, and regulation, but other risks necessitate continuous watchful oversight and ethical application along with robust regulation.

RAISUL SOURAV

The judiciary of Bangladesh is heavily loaded with negative tags including of high backlog, severe delays, huge costs, corruptions, inconsistency, absence of transparency, less conviction of perpetrators and so forth. The insufficient and unplanned use of technologies in the justice system makes the scenario even worse. As a result, the present justice system needs a major transformation from age-old colonial fashioned delivery of justice to adoption of cutting edge technologies to make its services more people oriented.

The utility of legal tech has already been proved in many jurisdictions, and it has become an integral part of modern judiciary. In 2020, for instance, when the court systems became paralysed due to the COVID19 lockdowns worldwide, technologies were extensively applied as a means to combat the pandemic restrictions, opening new doors for access to justice. Bangladesh also similarly witnessed the blessing of legal tech at that moment. The promulgation of the *Adalat Kartik Tottho-Projukti Bebohar Ain*, 2020 was one step forward towards the integration of legal tech in the courts. However, little progress has been seen after that.

Presently, there are some usages of legal tech in the judiciary, i.e., the Supreme Court (SC) website providing cause list, judgments and orders (<https://www.supremecourt.gov.bd>), a Government web portal disseminating e-cause list for all subordinate courts (<https://causelist.judiciary.gov.bd>), a Government website circulating subordinate court's decisions (<https://decision.bdcourts.gov.bd>), an online monitoring tool to collect and analysis data from subordinate courts (<https://mcsc.supremecourt.gov.bd>).

gov.bd). Similarly, bail orders can be accessed and verified through the 'Bail Confirmation Online Manual', an online knowledge base platform for the judges (faq.bdcourts.gov.bd). The Government's a2i project has created supporting app such as Judicial Monitoring Dashboard (My Court App), while introducing a platform (www.judiciary.gov.bd) to provide information relating to judicial services including inheritance calculator, judipay, e-filing, e-certified copy etc.

Nonetheless, the abovementioned efforts to digitise the justice sector, although praiseworthy, are not sufficient to overcome the present barriers because of certain limitations within the system. Some of the above initiatives were merely ad hoc project-based, that lost their functionality after the end of the project. Besides, the century-old colonial procedural laws, such as the Codes of Civil and Criminal Procedure, Civil and Criminal Rules and Orders etc. do not directly call for digital intervention in the court proceedings.

However, the digitisation process comes with several impediments. Allocation of low budget and inadequate investment is one of the main challenges to the digitisation of judiciary. Furthermore, lack of properly trained court staff to operate the legal tech tools, absence of adequate supervision and monitoring by the Supreme Court, unfamiliarity with the new systems of the judges, lawyers and staff, necessary training and technical knowledge gap among the lawyers, judges and staff, habitual preference of handling court procedures manually etc contribute to linger the proper digitisation of the judiciary.

Similarly, there are some risks in incorporation of legal tech into the judiciary

too, i.e. data privacy and security concerns, discrimination, bias etc. But certain risks associated with legal tech tools can be effectively avoided through prudent design, procurement, and regulation, but other risks necessitate continuous watchful oversight and ethical application along with robust regulation.

As specific recommendations, it is submitted that mandatory e-filing system, video/virtual courtroom, video/remote appearance of accused from prison, arrangement of distance hearing, advanced systems for digital record of evidence of witnesses, application of AI in specific court functions, collaboration and exchange of document electronically with other agencies on digital data sharing and exchange projects can accelerate the process of digitisation of judiciary.

Notably, in 2025, a High Court Division (HCD) bench launched a WhatsApp based slip receiving system. Under the new system, motion, extension of time, and application slips will have to be scanned and sent to a designated WhatsApp number within stipulated time. Earlier this year another HCD bench introduced paper free filing of cases.

To conclude, it can be said that the integration of legal tech in all stages of proceedings and across all courts will promote transparency and accountability, make the complex process of litigation easy, effective, fast, affordable and thereby facilitate the overall court services to the people, and make the judiciary truly a people's institution.

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LAW AND SOCIETY

Meaningful reforms and popular sentiments

KANAK KANTI KARMAKAR AND PRITOM KANTI KARMAKAR

Recently, after numerous reports of horrifying rape incidents had gone viral, few fundamental thought-provoking issues became the discussion points of the country. However, it is unfortunate that populism has once again taken the front seat in these discussions. The government authorities have suggested that law enforcement agencies have to complete investigation of rape cases within 15 days and trial in 90 days. Moreover, it is also being said that the accused cannot be granted bail on the pretext of not completing the trial within 90 days. If there is any negligence on the part of the administration, specific provisions for punishment will be added to the law. Currently, according to the section 20(3) of the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act 2000 (WCRPA), the trial of rape cases has to be completed by 180 days.

Firstly, let us analyse the proposal regarding finishing the investigation within 15 days. DNA test, among others, often plays a pivotal role to prove rape. However, there is a very limited number of labs in our country where such DNA tests can be done effectively. Consequently, it takes several months to collect the test reports and lay specific charges on the perpetrator accordingly.

Before establishing the required number of labs and other technical supports, it would be counter-productive to mandate that investigations have to be finished within 15 days and trial in 90 days.

Furthermore, it is being argued that the accused in these cases cannot be granted bail. As a non-bailable offence, bail is not to be claimed as of right in rape cases; however, the scope of granting bail should not be closed off as there may also be situations where the wrong person is accused due to faulty police investigations or personal vengeance.

Another populist idea that has recently emerged is that a rape accused cannot be represented by a lawyer. But the Constitution of Bangladesh, in general, clearly mentions the right of an accused to consult and be defended by a legal practitioner of his/her own choice under Article 33(1). Therefore, the right to legal representation is the fundamental right of a person that cannot be taken away by an Act of parliament.

Additionally, demands for the death penalty have to be critically analysed too, because indeed, only severe penalty such as death is not the solution. We need to channel our efforts to improve the criminal justice system as a whole, starting from filing of complaints, through trials, and finally with sentencing. Furthermore, we need to channel our efforts to supporting the victims too. Focus on only punishments deflect our attention away from the victims. We need to build in a system where the victims' vulnerabilities are attended upon.

Finally, it is a significant political moment for us to materialise meaningful reforms within our legal system. To this end, a major challenge is to navigate the popular sentiments. On many occasions, it is in fact the popular uprising that make us pay attention to where reforms are required. However, curating reforms requires commitment to sustainability, meaning, and rights-oriented goals.

The writers are Lecturer, Department of Law & Justice, North East University and student, Stamford University, respectively.



LAW REFORM

Emergency provisions in Bangladesh constitution

MD. NAFIS ANOWAR SANTO

A common feature of almost every democratic Constitution in the world is the inclusion of detailed provisions concerning proclamation of emergency to overcome an imminent threat to the life of nation by war, external aggression, armed rebellion, internal disturbances, natural catastrophes, and economic breakdown. The concept of emergency, from the viewpoint of constitutional law, means the suspension of and restriction over certain fundamental rights of citizens in order to deal with an extraordinary situation when the security of the State is threatened or the national interest is in peril.

The Constitution of Bangladesh did not originally contain any provision for the declaration of an emergency. As such there was no provision in the Constitution concerning the suspension of the enforcement of fundamental rights under any circumstances. Perhaps the repeated misuse of the powers of emergency by Pakistan, during the days when Bangladesh was part of Pakistan, discouraged the framers of the 1972 Constitution from including in it such powers. Later, a new Part IXA titled 'Emergency Provisions' was inserted by the Constitution (Second Amendment) Act, 1973. This Part contains only three Articles: Articles 141A, 141B and 141C.

The President may, with the prior counter signature of the Prime Minister, declare

emergency in his satisfaction, if there exists a grave emergency that threatens the security or economic life of Bangladesh or any part of it, whether by war, external aggression, or internal disturbance. A proclamation of emergency may be made even before the actual occurrence of war, external aggression or internal disturbance if the President is satisfied that there is imminent danger thereof.

According to the provisions of Article 141B, if the President declares a state of emergency, certain fundamental rights shall automatically be suspended including those guaranteeing freedom of movement, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, freedom of thought and speech, freedom of profession or occupation, and rights to property. This means that the enjoyment of those fundamental rights remains restricted during the emergency period, and no citizen can demand the benefit of those rights until the proclamation of emergency is revoked by a subsequent proclamation.

A declaration by the President under Article 141C suspends enforcement of such fundamental rights as are mentioned in the declaration. Thus, this Article violates the Article 44 of the Constitution which deals with the enforcement of fundamental rights. Furthermore, under Article 102 of the Constitution, an aggrieved person cannot approach the court even when their fundamental rights are violated.

Since Article 141B empowers the executive to take any action, it can utilise

this power even to violate fundamental rights contained in the Constitution. The rules made and actions taken cannot be challenged on the ground that they are inconsistent with fundamental rights. This power of executive goes against the balance of power among the judiciary, executive and legislature.

During the period of emergency, the Parliament can make any law which is

Emergency provisions were inserted in the Constitution of Bangladesh to protect the State in time of war or external aggression or internal disturbance or to protect the security or economic life of Bangladesh. Later, these provisions were misused.

inconsistent with the fundamental right as contained in part III of the Constitution. Thus, the Article 26 which limits the State's power to make any law inconsistent with fundamental rights is violated. The law made cannot be questioned in any court. Thus, the Parliament exercises an unfettered power in making laws at the time



of emergency without any fear of judicial interference.

Emergency provisions were inserted in the Constitution of Bangladesh to protect the State in time of war or external aggression or internal disturbance or to protect the security or economic life of Bangladesh. Later, these provisions were misused.

To prevent the abuse of emergency powers, a specific definition of 'internal disturbance' should be inserted into our Constitution. The detainee should be given all reasonable legal opportunities to immediate and regular access to a lawyer, family members and an unbiased medical board. The Supreme Court can order the payment of compensation to the person arrested illegally or intentionally at the time of emergency as in the case of *Bilkis Akther Hossain v Bangladesh and others*, (1997).

In times of emergency, the Judiciary has played some crucial roles in protecting citizen's liberty and property rights. In the case of *Nurunnahar Begum v Government*

of Bangladesh, (1977) it was observed that the satisfaction required by the Emergency Powers Rules of 1975 was an onerous responsibility, which was to be viewed with scrutinising eye so that the liberty was not put into jeopardy even at the time of emergency.

In the case of *Pirjada Syed Sharifullah v Bangladesh*, (2009), the High Court Division held that the President's Ordinance making power during state of emergency must closely conform to the Constitution and his satisfaction as to the existence of circumstances necessitating the proclamation of Ordinance is subject to judicial review.

There is no provision in our Constitution for summoning a special or emergency session of the Parliament to monitor and control the emergency situation. This should be introduced in the Constitution. During a state of emergency, a high-powered 'judicial review board' can be established by the government to justify its functions relating to law and order. During a state of emergency, the writ of *habeas corpus* remains suspended. This writ should not be suspended in any situation. The Constitution does not specify how long an emergency will remain in force once Parliament approves it. Thus, provisions should be made in the Constitution to fix a certain maximum period of emergency.

The writer is LLM Candidate, University of Dhaka.

HAMZA'S INFLUENCE GROWS as Bangladesh adapt to chilly Shillong

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh team have safely touched down in Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya, as they gear up for their AFC Asian Cup Qualifiers opener against India.

The team took off yesterday morning and, after a four-hour layover in Kolkata, landed in the hilly northeastern city in the afternoon.

"Everyone is safe and sound [after the journey]," team manager Amer Khan told The Daily Star over the phone.

"The players have now been at rest as there is no schedule of practice or other activities today [Thursday]," he added, noting that the squad has checked into the Vivanta Hotel.

Before departure, Amer had expressed optimism about the team's preparation, particularly after the inclusion of Hamza Choudhury, whose presence, he believes, has brought fresh energy to the squad.

"I think the atmosphere has changed with the inclusion of Hamza. It is an



additional inspiration, and it will help us make a good result," he said.

Tapu Barman, speaking ahead of the team's flight, was full of praise for

Hamza and the defender emphasised the importance of arriving early to acclimatise to Shillong's chilly conditions. "I think Hamza is a top player who is

highly physically fit, but I think we may take a bit of time to cope with Shillong's weather. That's why we are going there a bit earlier. We also have some final sessions in Shillong, and I think it will help us adjust among ourselves and to the weather before the match," he explained, making it clear that Bangladesh's mindset is set on securing a victory against India on March 25.

Meanwhile, head coach Javier Cabrera is still keeping his cards close to his chest regarding the final 23-man squad. Despite having 20 days of training under his belt, the Spaniard has travelled with 24 players, leaving out forward Piash Ahmed Nova, winger Arif Hossain, and defender Taj Uddin.

According to Amer, Cabrera will make his final call on the squad the day before the match.

With the clock ticking down, Bangladesh are keen to make the most of their time in Shillong as they brace for the crucial clash against the hosts.

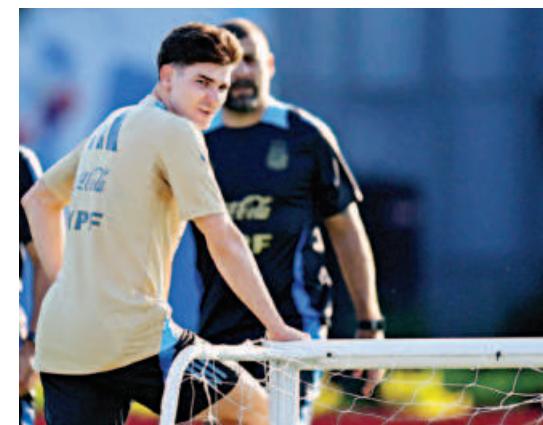


PHOTO: REUTERS

Alvarez aims to shine as Argentina face Uruguay

Having scored 23 goals in 44 competitive matches this season, Atletico Madrid's Julian Alvarez will be looking to lead his club form into Argentina's World Cup qualifier against Uruguay at the Centenario Stadium in Montevideo tomorrow (5:30 AM, Bangladesh Time). Argentina will be without several key players, including Lionel Messi, due to injuries. The reigning world champions currently lead the CONMEBOL qualifying standings with 25 points after 12 games.



'Relieved' Japan first to qualify for 2026 World Cup

AFP, Saitama

Japan became the first team to qualify for the 2026 World Cup after second-half goals from Daichi Kamada and Takefusa Kubo gave them a 2-0 win over Bahrain on Thursday.

The runaway Asian Group C leaders failed to sparkle on a chilly night in Saitama until Crystal Palace forward Kamada pounced for the opener in the

With three games left to play, Australia are in pole position to qualify out of Group C with Japan. Two goals in two minutes helped the Socceroos secure a 5-1 thrashing of Indonesia as Dutch legend Patrick Kluivert was well beaten in his first game in charge yesterday.

Even though South Korea conceded a goal with 10 minutes left in their 1-1 draw at home against Oman, they are still on course for the 2026 World Cup. South Korea still lead Asian qualifying Group B with 15 points and have three matches left to play.

66th minute.

Kubo added another in the 87th minute as Japan punched their ticket to next year's tournament in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

It will be their eighth straight World Cup appearance.

"I'm relieved that we could qualify at home in front of our supporters," said Kubo, before he and his team-mates addressed fans at Saitama Stadium and doused coach Hajime Moriyasu with water.

"This here is not our goal -- we want to compete against strong teams at the World Cup."

Australia's 5-1 home win over Indonesia earlier in the evening mean Japan would have clinched their place even with a draw.

But Kamada and Kubo made sure they did it in style in front of an expectant crowd of just under 60,000.

Japan's players sprinted onto the pitch at the final whistle and celebrated with the home supporters.

"We know this isn't normal and we had a lot of trouble qualifying last time. We're relieved and happy," said Kamada.

Japan have been in unstoppable form in the Asian third round of qualifiers and went into the game having won five and drawn one of their games so far.

Ban lifted but Shakib's future remains uncertain

SPORTS REPORTER

Shakib Al Hasan has successfully overturned his bowling ban and is once again allowed to bowl in competitive cricket, however, the uncertainties surrounding his international future are still very much present.

Shakib was handed a bowling ban by the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) in last year's December following a one-match stint for English County side Surrey.

The 37-year-old's first two attempts to clear his action in Loughborough and Chennai were unsuccessful but the all-rounder finally successfully passed an independent reassessment of his bowling in Loughborough University earlier this month.

But just because his ban has been lifted does not mean all doubts about his future with the Bangladesh cricket team has cleared up.

Shakib's international future was thrown into uncertainty before the ban, as he was unable to return to the country to play his farewell Test in Mirpur against South Africa in October last year due to security concerns linked with his involvement with the ousted Awami League regime.

He was not picked for the away assignment against Afghanistan in the UAE and the tour of West Indies was subsequently excluded from the Champions Trophy squad, which was announced a month after Shakib's bowling ban was imposed.

Chief selector Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu had explained Shakib's exclusion from the Champions Trophy by saying, "when structuring the squad, we couldn't justify including him solely as a batter."

During the India tour last year, Shakib had said that he had already played his last T20I in the T20 World Cup held earlier that year, would like to retire with the Mirpur Test against the Proteas and then call time in ODIs with the Champions Trophy.

But after his Test and ODI swansong plans did not pan out, there has been no clear indication from the all-rounder about whether he is done with the Bangladesh team or not.

"He's been out of cricket and for someone to be in contention for the national team, the selectors may have to watch him play there [Dhaka Premier League]," a BCB official said on condition of anonymity.

Even after the bowling ban, Shakib could've played as an

all-rounder in the ongoing IPL as it is a BCB-run domestic competition and had initially signed up for Legends of Rupganj before withdrawing his name the very next day.

"We haven't communicated with him. Although we built our team around him, since our games are nearing the end, we are thinking whether we should bring him or not," a Legends of Rupganj official said regarding their confusion on taking Shakib back in.

Due to Shakib's political history as a former MP from Awami League, it's also uncertain whether he can return to Bangladesh and play competitive cricket.

"If he can arrive in the country, then he will be able to physically attend the transfer procedure. So, till now the lifting of the ban doesn't mean anything," another Rupganj official said.



BFF approves increased budget of Tk 61.80 for 2025

SPORTS REPORTER

The executive committee of the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) approved a proposed budget of Tk 61.80 crores on Thursday for the current year, about four-and-a-half months after the BFF's annual general meeting refused to approve the proposed expenditure.

The BFF secretariat proposed a draft expenditure of Tk 61.52 crores in October 2024 for the upcoming year but it was refused by the delegates who cited the ambiguity and lack of transparency of the income and expenditure relating to the budget

and asked for another general meeting to approve the budget.

Tk 28 lakhs has been increased from October's proposed budget which had a Tk 14 crores deficit. However, BFF media committee chairman Amirul Islam Babu could neither disclose the total expenditure nor reveal the BFF's sources of income in which case, the deficit may increase or decrease.

Instead, Babu informed that the BFF is planning to organise a city school football tournament with the involvement of several Dhaka-based English-medium schools from April 12 at the Fortis FC ground.



Captains of all 10 Indian Premier League (IPL) teams pose during a photoshoot that took place near the iconic Gateway of India in Mumbai on Thursday. Pat Cummins, skipper of Sunrisers Hyderabad, was the odd one out, being the only overseas captain in the IPL 2025 season, which gets underway with the game between Kolkata Knight Riders and Royal Challengers Bangalore at Eden Gardens on Saturday.

What to WATCH

T SPORTS

DPL
Mohammedan vs
Dhanmondi SC
Live from 9:00 am

Sony Sports 5 and
PTV
3rd T20I
Live from 12:15 pm

SONY SPORTS 2
World Cup Qualifier
England vs Albania
Live from 1:45 am
(Saturday)

PHOTO: X

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TK 21CR BRIBERY CASE Tarique, seven others cleared

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday acquitted BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman, former state minister for home Lutfozamn Babar and six others in connection with a Tk 21 crore bribery case.

Tarique has now been acquitted of most of the criminal cases filed against him during the army-backed government in 2007 and 2008 and the Awami League regime.

A graft case in which he was sentenced to nine years in prison has not been dismissed yet, his lawyer Zakir Hossain Bhuiyan told The Daily Star.

He was sentenced to jail in several cases, including the ones filed over a grenade attack on an AL rally. After the fall of the AL regime last year, Tarique was acquitted in five cases.

The six others acquitted in the bribery case are Bashundhara Group Chairman Ahmed Akbar Sobhan alias Shah Alam, his two sons Shafiq



SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

ACC sues Saima Wazed 'for abuse of power, fraud'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission yesterday filed two cases against Saima Wazed Putul, daughter of ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina, multiple ACC sources confirmed.

In one case, Saima is accused of abusing power and having recourse to fraud and forgery to secure the position of regional director at the World Health Organization's South-



SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

87.5pc people left without basic services

Finds the National SDG Report 2025

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

About 87.5 percent, or 15 crore, of Bangladesh's citizens do not have access to all eight basic services such as clean drinking water, basic education, and sanitation facilities, according to a recent study.

The other basic services include hygiene facilities, clean fuel and technology, basic information services, basic mobility in rural and urban contexts, and basic waste collection services, according to the National SDG Report (VNR) 2025.

The study was prepared by the Citizen's Platform for SDGs in collaboration with the government and the UNDP, with support from Switzerland. Towfiqul Islam Khan, a senior research fellow at the Centre

for Policy Dialogue (CPD), presented the study findings at a programme held at the Bangladesh China Friendship Conference Centre in Dhaka.

The progress in implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is

- 15cr with no access to 8 basic services
- Food security a concern for large segment
- 71.2pc have access to safely managed drinking water

still low in many areas although only six years are left to reach the target, the study found.

For instance, the gender gap persists though it has been decreasing in certain cases. Disparities exist between rural and urban areas and regions, such as Chittagong Hill Tracts, are prone to vulnerability.

Many vulnerable groups are not counted in official statistics, while the gains in poverty reduction are rather fragile.

Food insecurity is still persistent, dealing a blow to the zero-hunger commitment.

Despite significant economic growth over the past decade, more than 26 percent

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

Four children raped in 3 days

STAR REPORT

Police arrested a 65-year-old man in Gazipur yesterday on charges of raping a three and a half years old girl.

Besides, three children were raped in the capital on Tuesday and Wednesday, according to cases filed with Mugda Police Station.

In Gazipur, suspect Yunus Ali, a labourer from Kurigram, was held hours after her mother filed a case yesterday afternoon, said Abdul Halim, officer-in-charge of Joydebpur Police Station.

According to the case, the girl was alone in the house during the incident. When she started screaming, locals broke in and caught Yunus, reads the case statement.

The girl was admitted to a hospital for treatment, and there was evidence that she had been raped, said Abul Bashar, sub-inspector of Joydebpur Police Station.

In the capital, the three girls, aged between 12 and 15, were admitted to a one-stop crisis centre after their parents, residents of Mugda area, filed three rape cases on Wednesday night, police said.

Sazedur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Mugda Police Station, said all the accused -- Jabbar, Siam Ahmed and Pintu Ranjan Das -- were arrested.

Jabbar is accused of raping a 12-year-old girl before Iftar on Wednesday when she was alone at her house. Pintu faces charges of raping a 13-year-old girl and Siam of raping a 15-year-old girl.

Meanwhile, police on Wednesday sent a

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Scuffle breaks out at NCP event

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

A scuffle broke out between members of the National Citizen Party (NCP) and activists of the Students Against Discriminations (SAD) during a meeting in Barishal yesterday evening.

The district unit NCP had organised the meeting, followed by an iftar, to welcome NCP Convener Nahid Islam, who was visiting Barishal with other central leaders.

Held at the Amrito Lal Dey Auditorium in Barishal Club, the event began with discussions among NCP leaders, activists, and local dignitaries after iftar.

However, a group of SAD activists entered the venue and demanded a separate discussion with Nahid, according to witnesses.

As a central leader attempted to restore order using the microphone, a heated exchange quickly escalated into pushing and shoving, the witnesses said.

According to them, the situation briefly calmed but flared up again when Nahid was about to

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3



Battery-run rickshaws being taken away from the streets in the capital's Shantinagar area yesterday. Police said that the running of such three-wheelers is prohibited on thoroughfares of the city.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN



PRAYER TIMING MARCH 21

| Fazr | Juma | Asr | Maghrib | Esha |
|-------------|-------|------|---------|------|
| AZAN 4:46 | 12:30 | 4:45 | 6:10 | 7:45 |
| JAMAAT 4:56 | 1:15 | 5:00 | 6:25 | 8:15 |

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

SEHRI, IFTAR TIMING

| RAMADAN | MARCH | SEHRI | IFTAR |
|---------|-------|-------|-------|
| 20 | 21 | | 6:10 |
| 21 | 22 | 4:44 | 6:11 |
| 22 | 23 | 4:43 | 6:11 |

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WE MOURN

We mourn the loss of renowned ophthalmologist Dr S M Munirul Huq, Senior Consultant & Surgeon, Bangladesh Eye Hospital & Institute Ltd. on Sunday March 9th at Evercare Hospital in Dhaka. He dedicated his life to advancing Eye care in Bangladesh. Dr. S. M. Munirul Huq was Professor of Ophthalmology, Holy Family Red Crescent Medical College, Dhaka, Bangladesh. He was former Chief Consultant and Director of Lions Eye Hospital, Dhaka and Bangladesh Country Representative of Sight Savers, UK. He took active interest to organize Lions Eye Bank at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, Dhaka. He obtained Fellowship of Royal College of Surgeons of Glasgow (FRCS) in 1989. He also obtained Fellowship of the College of Ophthalmologists of UK in 1989. He obtained Fellowship of American College of Surgeons in 2013. In 1991, he established his own dedicated Eye clinic with advanced equipment, thinking well beyond traditional eye care treatment and creating the platform for many to follow. He has authored several textbooks on Ophthalmic surgery and was involved in Postgraduate teaching. His generosity knew no bounds, his compassion touched countless lives, and his tireless dedication inspired all who knew him. Though he is gone, he will never fade. His legacy is woven into the lives he touched, his spirit etched into the hearts of those who loved him. He is survived by his wife, daughter, son, son in law, daughter in law and 3 grandsons.

US welcomes interim govt steps for citizen safety

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The United States has said that it welcomes measures taken by Bangladesh's interim government to ensure safety and security for all citizens.

Tammy Bruce, spokesperson for the US Department of State, made this remark during a press briefing yesterday.

She was responding to questions regarding recent comments made by US Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard about "Islamist extremism in Bangladesh" and alleged efforts to establish an Islamist caliphate.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 6