

Special law proposed to shield journos

Reform commission recommends stock market listing of medium, large media companies

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Media Reform Commission has proposed sweeping changes to ownership and supervision in the sector, along with measures to ensure journalists' safety and proper wages.

In its report submitted to Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus yesterday, the commission recommended a dedicated law to safeguard journalists.

It suggested the repeal of restrictive provisions in the anti-defamation law and the proposed Cyber Security Act, and amendments to the Official Secrets Act, which many argue hinder press freedom.

Additionally, the commission called for the establishment of an independent regulatory body to oversee the media. It suggested that defamation-related charges against journalists be handled by this body rather than through conventional legal channels.

It also recommended reforming the process of announcing newspaper circulation, increasing the rate of government advertisements for newspapers, and abolishing all types of advance taxes and 27.5 percent corporate tax on the newspaper industry.

"A review of audited accounts of various newspapers shows that even if a company makes a small pre-tax profit, it incurs a significant loss after paying taxes. If the high corporate tax rate and the practice of collecting advance taxes continue, many established newspapers will shut down within the next few years," the commission said.

Kamal Ahmed, chief of the commission, spoke to the media at a press conference after submitting the report to the chief adviser at his official residence Jamuna.

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- PROPOSALS
 - ‘One house, one media’ policy
 - Separate regulatory body
 - Repeal of restrictive laws



TITAS UNDER ONSLAUGHT... A syndicate of illegal soil traders has constructed a road-like embankment, obstructing the natural flow of the Titas river in Brahmanbaria's Akhaura upazila. They have also carved out roads through farmlands and the river to facilitate the transportation of illegally extracted soil from the riverbed. Story on page 5.

PHOTO: MASUK HRIDOV

CONSENSUS COMMISSION Some proposals may weaken future govts

BNP flags concern

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP has raised concerns that implementing some recommendations from the National Consensus Commission could weaken future governments by granting undue power to unelected individuals.

Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir outlined the party's views on the reform recommendations at a press

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MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA and SAJJAD HOSSAIN

AL BAN DEBATE

BNP sniffs ploy to delay the polls

to disrupt the electoral process.

BNP leader Hasnat Abdullah recently alleged a conspiracy was afoot to bring the AL back into politics at the behest of India. A proposal for accommodating a "refined Awami League" was made to them at a meeting in the cantonment.

Hasnat's remarks touched off a political maelstrom.

While the BNP supports holding AL leaders accountable for misrule and misconduct, it opposes any attempt to

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Consensus holds key to path forward
Says crisis group chief about Bangladesh

PORIMOL PALMA

The key function for the interim government is now to build consensus among political parties and ensure everybody is carried along in the process and elections, said Comfort Ero, president of the International Crisis Group.

"If there isn't a fair, level playing field, if the key issues to guarantee free and fair elections are not settled, then the outcome will be a disputed election. So, you want to avoid that kind of scenario," she told The Daily Star in an interview on Friday during her visit to Bangladesh.

The ICG, a global think-tank headquartered in Brussels, has put Bangladesh in the spotlight after the July

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Comfort Ero

‘No question of seeing the army as foe’
Won’t stand any move to bring back AL: NCP

STAR REPORT

National Citizen Party Convener Nahid Islam yesterday said the people would never allow another 1/1 to happen.

"On August 3 [2024] at the Shaheed Minar, we declared that the Awami League and its 15-year-long fascist rule originated from the 1/1 political settlement. Because of that settlement, Sheikh Hasina and her party came to power."

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Russian attacks kill seven in Ukraine

REUTERS

Russian attacks killed a family of three late on Friday in the southeastern Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia and four more people in the country's north and east, officials said.

Zaporizhzhia regional governor Ivan Fedorov said on social media the city had been struck more than 10 times, with a 14-year-old girl and her parents killed in the attacks and 12 people wounded, including an infant.

At the scene, rescue teams sifted through piles of debris amid the din of a buzzsaw, and could be seen carrying away at least one body.

"Russian terrorism continues to destroy families all over Ukraine," First Deputy Prime Minister Yulia Svyrydenko wrote on X on Saturday in response to the attack.

Prosecutors in the northeastern Sumy region said late on Friday that Russian forces dropped at least six guided bombs on the village of Krasnopillia, killing two people and injuring at least two.



Media Reform Commission Chairman Kamal Ahmed, along with other members, handing over their report to Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus at the State Guest House Jamuna yesterday.

PHOTO: CA PRESS WING

Special law proposed to shield journos

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"We hope that the interim government and the future elected government will implement these recommendations," he said.

Prof Yunus said, "We want to swiftly implement the reform proposals that can be completed now. For that, I would like the reform commissions to promptly present the recommendations that can be quickly implemented."

Despite the presence of constitutional guarantees, institutions, and laws, media freedom in Bangladesh has not been ensured due to inadequate law enforcement and institutional inefficiency, according to the 12-member Media Reform Commission, which was formed on November 18 last year.

A significant portion of the media has become biased as a result of investments by political and business interests, leading to a decline in public trust and overall media credibility, according to the commission report.

The report emphasised that responsible media is indispensable for establishing democracy and a pluralistic society.

To improve media standards, the commission recommended strengthening the role of supervisory institutions and developing an internal accountability system within the media.

"Political will, from political parties and institutions, including the ruling government, is needed to uphold the constitutional and civil rights to freedom of expression and free access to information," the report said.

OWNERSHIP
Kamal said that the media did not reach its current state overnight. It is the result of long-term changes and practices that have severely impacted the independence of journalism.

"We have observed that a major issue in Bangladesh is the infiltration of black money into the media industry. Additionally, the problems in media ownership have become a significant challenge," he said.

Against this backdrop, the commission proposed that medium and large media companies issue shares to the public and be listed on the stock exchange.

It also said that founding directors, individuals, institutions, companies, or family members should not be able to have more than 25 percent of the shares. Employees should get 5 percent of the shares.

The commission recommended an ordinance to ban cross platform ownership, where the owner of a television channel cannot own a newspaper, or vice versa.

It said such ownership is prohibited in the US. In the UK, a law prohibits the owner of a television channel from holding more than 20 percent of shares in a local newspaper. In India, a bill on this issue is awaiting parliamentary debate.

The commission recommended a "one house, one media" policy, where no single company, group, individual, family, or entrepreneur should own multiple media outlets.

"Measures must be taken to ensure transparency in media ownership so that people can make informed choices. Additionally, this will discourage the infiltration of black money into the media," said the

Bodies of four Rohingyas found, 25 rescued

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near the shore immediately joined local fishermen in a rescue operation, successfully saving 25 people, he said.

Although the sunken boat was later recovered, neither the missing BGB member nor any other individuals could be found, he added.

REPORT

SEPARATE REGULATOR

The reform commission recommended the formation of an independent "Bangladesh Media Commission" replacing the Press Council and a Broadcasting Commission. This will bring all types of media under the supervision of a single institution, and ensure accountability and freedom of press.

The Bangladesh Media Commission, as a regulatory body, will determine the qualifications and disqualifications of publishers and editors to ensure that those convicted of criminal offences or loan defaulters cannot become owners/editors of media outlets.

This commission will set graduation as the minimum educational qualification for journalists, develop a code of conduct for them and ensure its implementation.

It will recommend licences for broadcasting media (TV and radio) and online portals, and ensure compliance with their terms.

The commission will provide redress for complaints from individuals, institutions, or groups harmed by false or motivated news.

PROTECT JOURNALISTS

Besides a separate law to ensure the safety of journalists, the reform commission recommended reviewing cases against journalists under the Penal Code, Information and Communication Technology Act, Digital Security Act, Cyber Security Act, and Contempt of Court Act.

Based on the review, appropriate steps must be taken for the submission of final reports by the police or the withdrawal of cases by the relevant government prosecutors, the commission said in its report.

All criminal defamation laws, like in sections 499, 500, 501, and 502 of the Penal Code, 1860, and section 29 of the Cyber Security Act, 2023, should be repealed, the report said.

It said the provisions of the proposed Cyber Security Ordinance that have raised concerns among journalists and rights activists, and section 5 of the Official Secrets Act, 1923, should be amended to emphasise national security and include legal protections for investigative journalism.

WAGES

The commission recommended that the minimum entry-level salary for journalists be aligned with that of Grade 9 officers in the Bangladesh Civil Service.

Since the cost of living in Dhaka is high, a "Dhaka allowance" may be added to the salaries of journalists staying in the capital, Kamal said.

Journalists outside Dhaka should be promoted to staff correspondent after working as a correspondent (retainer) for three years.

OTHER PROPOSALS

Currently, newspaper circulation is considered for enlistment on the government's media list.

The reform commission proposed that circulation be replaced by number of copies sold as the criterion for enlistment.

It said the advertisement rate for newspapers, which had not raised for a decade, should be increased now and then annually in line with inflation. Government and autonomous

organisations should also promptly pay the dues owed to newspapers for published advertisements.

Customs duties on newsprint imports for the newspaper industry should be reconsidered, the report said.

The circulation numbers of English newspapers should not be compared with Bangla newspapers when determining government advertisement rates, according to the reform commission. Therefore, the maximum and minimum advertisement rates for

English newspapers need to be rationalised.

Arrangements should be made for easy-term, low-interest loans for the media, the commission added.

Additionally, it said a review of applications for private TV station licences shows that the process was not transparent or competitive. The issuance of these licences was primarily based on political considerations and, to some extent, business connections.

The government's policy has a provision that TV station licences will be issued for an initial period of five years and renewed after reviewing their proper operations. "In this context, all licences issued over the past decade and a half need to be reviewed," said the reform commission.

It also recommended having an acceptable and reasonable television rating point (TRP) system. Fees must be paid for the broadcast of government announcements and advertisements on television.

The government should direct cable operators to complete digitisation within one year so that television channels can generate revenue.

The decline in radio listeners and the dramatic drop in advertising revenue have put FM radio broadcasting in an existential crisis.

The security deposit kept by the government against radio station licences should be returned, and the provision for keeping a security deposit, along with the annual renewal system, should be abolished. Arrangements should be made to allocate government advertisements to FM radio as well.

The reform commission said the policy for online news portal registration should be updated and the registration should be done by the proposed media commission.

It said since the registrations granted to online portals over the past decade were not based on any transparent and specific policy, but through the arbitrary exercise of government power, they need to be reviewed.

The annual renewal system for online portals after registration should be abolished and government advertisements on online portals should be allocated based on specific policies, ensuring transparency and fairness.

Kamal said the reform commission proposed the establishment of an independent Jatiya Sampachar Sanghstha, merging state-run BTV, Bangladesh Betar, and Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha.

BSS can play the role of the Jatiya Sampachar Sanghstha's news section, he said.

"The rescue operation was still ongoing," Ashiqur Rahman told this newspaper around 5:30pm.

Meanwhile, Teknai Upazila Nirbahi Officer Sheikh Ehsan Uddin said he had heard from locals that four bodies were recovered from the sea after the boat capsized.

"But I don't know any other details."

Local fishermen who participated in the rescue operation alongside the BGB said that after speaking to survivors, they came to know that some 40 to 50 people were on board when the boat capsized.

"So, what is key is to make sure that

BNP sniffs ploy to delay the polls

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impose an outright ban on the party, it said.

BNP leaders maintain that such decisions should be left to the people rather than being enforced through a government directive or political manoeuvring.

The party's standing committee member Salahuddin Ahmed said, "We cannot back any action that undermines national stability and unity. Politics should remain in the hands of politicians and must be conducted in the interest of the nation."

He also said the BNP believes the AL must face trial for genocide and crimes against humanity under article 47 of the constitution, which allows amendments to the International Crimes Tribunal Act.

"The court should decide whether the Awami League can continue participating in elections and political activities."

At the same time, Salahuddin slammed the government for initially considering legal amendments to prosecute the ALs as a party, only to backtrack later.

"Instead, the government opted to suppress the party's political activities using police force."

He said the people of Bangladesh had rejected AL's "fascist politics" through the July uprising. He accused the party of failing to show repentance or seek forgiveness for their crimes.

Stressing their party's commitment to a multiparty democracy and inclusivity, BNP leaders said endorsing a move to ban a party contradicts its core values. They

Virtually addressing an iftar event on Friday, he said doubts and suspicions have arisen in politics as minor issues are being turned into major ones, whether knowingly or unknowingly.

He stressed the need to prioritise the national election over local government

further warned that creating political turmoil and involving the military in such matters could destabilise the country ahead of the December election.

Speaking to this newspaper, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said, "It [the demand for a ban on the AL] is an attempt to create an anarchic situation in the country and ultimately delay the electoral process."

"By making such statements [like the army exerting pressure to bring the AL back], certain groups are trying to make the patriotic armed forces controversial and pit them against the people for an ulterior political motive ... It's very dangerous for the country's sovereignty and independence, which we can't support," he added.

BNP leaders accused the NCP of attempting to pressure the interim government by manufacturing political crises, one after another. The party believes taking such action (banning AL) through an executive order would set a bad precedent.

While BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman did not directly address the issue, he urged the interim government to avoid actions that might allow fugitive allies of the previous regime to regain influence in politics.

Virtually addressing an iftar event on Friday, he said doubts and suspicions have arisen in politics as minor issues are being turned into major ones, whether knowingly or unknowingly.

He stressed the need to prioritise the national election over local government

polls, warning, "The allies of the fallen autocrat still hold thousands of crores of taka looted from the state and the people. In such a situation, holding local polls before the national election would mean creating an opportunity to rehabilitate these fugitive fascists back into politics."

At the same event, Fakhrul urged caution: "We believe that at this moment, wherever we are, we must act responsibly. Those of us in politics, in different professions, connected to the government and the people -- we must all speak and act in a way that smoothens the path to democratic progress."

BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi further clarified the party's stance, questioning why the AL should be banned if it is led by individuals not involved in corruption or violence.

"If someone leads the Awami League without committing crimes, without being involved in student killings, without being involved in laundering money -- then why can't the Awami League participate in politics?"

"If swift justice is ensured and the criminals are prosecuted, and if the people then allow them to engage in politics, we have nothing to say."

The NCP leaders made their demand and allegations against the army after Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus stated that the interim government has no plans to ban the AL. However, he added that individuals within the party accused of crimes, including murder and crimes against humanity, would be prosecuted in Bangladeshi courts.

Some proposals may weaken future govts

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conference at the BNP chairperson's Gulshan office yesterday.

The party will submit its opinions on key recommendations to the National Consensus Commission today.

Instead of presenting the proposals directly, they are framed as leading questions. For example, the spreadsheet asks, 'Do you support implementing the proposals through a constituent assembly? Answer yes or no?' But the question of whether or not we agree on the concept of a constituent assembly should come first."

Fakhrul criticised the recommendation to establish new commissions, including a National Constitutional Council, arguing that the descriptions of these commissions' jurisdictions and functions indicate a clear intention to undermine and limit the powers of the executive and legislative branches as much as possible.

Reading from a statement at the press conference, Fakhrul said, "The state of the National Consensus Commission's spreadsheet, along with various statements from commission members and certain political parties, raises questions about whether these recommendations are part of a pre-planned initiative, making it difficult to determine if they truly serve the interests of democracy."

Referring to the recommendations of the constitution and electoral reform commissions, the party observed it is "evident that there is an unjustifiable attempt to appoint unelected individuals to state positions, which is unwarranted".

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"Only an elected government -- accountable to the people and committed to justice and good governance -- can successfully make meaningful reforms."

The primary responsibility of the interim government, he added, should be implementing necessary reforms through consensus, organising a free, fair, and credible national election as soon as possible, and handing over power to an elected government.

Fakhrul suggested, "A 'Charter of Reform' can be formulated based on political consensus, which an elected government can implement later."

"Therefore, we believe that attaching our opinions on the main recommendations [on the spreadsheet] will help avoid confusion."

Alleging that certain interim

you crystallise and coalesce everybody around that July Charter, and make sure that that is used as a guide to shape the reform initiatives going forward."

Asked how reconciliation among the political parties is possible, Ero said one has to deal with the roots of a conflict.

"Otherwise it festers, while grievances build up into another day as well. And there are lots of historical issues. You can't settle them all before the elections as well. But it's important that you know each side tries to extend your hand to the others."

The political rivalry in Bangladesh is too deep and entrenched, she said.

"But surely, the lesson from last year's violent tragedy is that if you don't address these fundamental issues, you lay the ground for further and probably worse violence. So this is why Bangladesh has an opportunity out of last year's tragedy, out of this national consensus reform initiative, to begin to address some of those."

Accountability of those who committed crimes and human rights violations needs to be ensured, but the justice process needs to be impartial, transparent and just, she said.</p

Teen killed in road crash

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Dinajpur

A teenage motorcyclist was killed after being hit by a sand-laden truck in Kaharol upazila of Dinajpur yesterday, triggering outrage among locals who set the truck on fire.

Hamza, 19, son of Sumon Ali, was from Dwipnagar village in Kaharol upazila.

According to locals, Hamza was returning home on his motorcycle when the accident occurred around 2:30pm at Gar Mallikpur village along the Dinajpur-Panchagarh highway.

A speeding truck loaded with sand struck his motorcycle from behind, killing him on the spot.

A team from the Kaharol Fire Service and Civil Defence rushed to the scene but faced resistance from protesters, preventing them from dousing the flames.



Workers unload large blocks of ice, stored in an unsanitary manner without any covers on the back of this truck. During Ramadan, demand for ice from hotels and restaurants usually increases. The photo was taken in the Fakirapool area yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Taking eyecare facilities

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from partial discounts on treatment costs.

Since its inception in 1974, a total 14,57,417 patients have been treated in the outpatient department and 88,758 patients have undergone surgeries. Also, a total 7,34,621 patients have been treated through 1,660 free eye camps and 93,666 patients have been operated on. Moreover, the hospital treated some 2,81,724 students through 901 school visits, and 20,668 pediatric patients through 49 pediatric camps.

"BNSB hospital's operation began with eye treatment camps in Moulvibazar. In 1986, with support from the Ministry of Health and various domestic and international donors, the hospital expanded into a full-fledged institution in Matarkapan area," said its junior public relation officer Dewan Ruhul Amin Chowdhury.

To reach remote patients, the hospital now operates primary care centres in Kulaura, Shayestaganj, and Nabiganj upazilas, with plans for further expansions.

The hospital is now a beacon of hope for eradicating blindness and providing medical services to the poor, helpless, and underprivileged communities.

It boasts a dedicated team of 14 experienced doctors, 32 nurses, and 140 full-time staff. Its advanced facilities are A-Scan, B-Scan, laser

treatment, one stop cataract clinics, diabetic and glaucoma units, an ocular microbiological laboratory, intraocular lens services, and specialised pediatric care.

Additionally, the hospital also conducts free eye camps, sight testing programmes in schools, and training sessions for schoolteachers, religious leaders, and healthcare workers.

Visiting the hospital recently, this correspondent found it crowded in outpatient and inpatient departments.

"My mother's physical condition prevents her to be taken abroad for eye treatment, so I brought her here. I am satisfied with the treatment facilities in this hospital," said Jasim Uddin, a resident of London, UK.

"My mother has successfully undergone cataract surgery here and she can now see clearly. I am taking her home today," said Asim Kumar Mallick.

Orbis International and BNSB hospital jointly initiated Sylhet division's lone specialised pediatric eye department at the hospital in 2004.

Dr Shah Aminul Islam, a senior consultant, said, "Our pediatric department

is technologically advanced. We treat a wide range of eye issues in children aged one day to 16 years old. People come not only from within Sylhet division but also from Netrakona, Brahmanbaria and Cumilla districts to avail our treatment facilities."

At present, the hospital operates with seven general cabins, 11 AC cabins, 31 general wards, a children's ward, and a camp ward for patients, said Abdul Hamid Mahbub, joint secretary of the hospital's 17-member executive committee.

The hospital was awarded the Disability Overcoming Award 2018 in recognition of its contribution.

In absence of specialised eye care facilities in the division apart from Sylhet Osmani Medical College Hospital, BNSB hospital's facilities to provide eye treatment to the ultra-poor and underprivileged people have been commendable.

Patients can register for specialist consultations for only Tk 100. The institution reinvests its earnings to support free and subsidised treatment for the poor and helpless, reaffirming its commitment to social welfare, said Dewan Ruhul Amin Chowdhury.

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Fire breaks out in Sundarbans

29 FIRES IN 19 YEARS

the nearest locality. While five fire service units were dispatched to the Sundarbans, only one unit managed to reach the site, while the other four could not. A pipeline has been laid for 1.5 kilometers to carry water from the Bhola River, but another 1.5km is needed to establish a connection.

Firefighters said that efforts to douse the fire with water would not be possible before Sunday morning. Aftab-e-Alam, the acting station officer of Sarankhola Fire Station in Bagerhat, said, "By Saturday evening, we managed to lay pipelines for 1.5 kilometers. Work was halted due to nightfall, and the remaining 1.5 kilometers of pipelines will be installed on Sunday morning before we begin spraying water."

Sakaria Haidar, deputy assistant director (DAD) of Bagerhat Fire Station, said, "Five fire units from Bagerhat, Morrelganj, Mongla, Sarankhola, and Kochua are working to extinguish the fire. Firefighters are actively engaged in the operation. So far, only the Sarankhola unit has reached the fire site."

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Workers at Planet Park, a children's amusement park, clean an airplane-themed ride ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr. The entire park is undergoing preparations to welcome the influx of visitors expected during the holidays. The photo was taken from Band Road in Barishal city yesterday.

House torched over rape attempt in Pirojpur

Man held on same charge in Ctg

STAR REPORT

Locals have set fire to an abandoned house of an elderly man who attempted to rape a 30-year-old woman after confining her to the house at Nagarbari in Pirojpur Sadar upazila, reports our local correspondent.

The accused -- Mojibur Rahman alias Benu, 72 -- is from Kathulia village in the upazila.

On Friday afternoon, he forcibly took the woman to the house and kept her confined, said locals.

Sensing the matter, one Tarikul Islam informed the matter to other locals. Later, Benu left the scene locking the door from outside.

"We rescued the woman after breaking open the door," said Tarikul.

Afterwards, agitated locals torched the house at night.

Md Abdus Sobahan, officer in-charge of Pirojpur Sadar Police Station, said a case in connection with the confinement was filed.

"We are trying to arrest the accused," he said.

Our Chattogram correspondent adds, police arrested a man on charges of molesting a seven-year-old girl and attempting to rape her in Boalkhali upazila on Friday night.

Police arrested Md Didarul Alam, 50, from his residence after the girl's mother filed a case with Boalkhali Police Station, said OC Golam Sarwar.

The girl somehow managed to flee and she informed her mother, who later reported the matter to police on Friday night.

A Chattogram court sent Didarul to jail after police produced him before it yesterday.

Illegal soil extraction chokes Titas river

MASUK HRIDOV, Brahmanbaria

A syndicate engaged in extracting soil illegally in Brahmanbaria's Akhaura upazila has carved out a road-like structure through the Titas river under Dharkhar union, where three road-like structures have been built across the river within a one-kilometre stretch from Dharkhar bridge towards the northeast.

As a result, agricultural activities and irrigation systems in the riverbank areas have been severely disrupted.

Affected local farmers submitted a written complaint with the Akhaura nirbahi officer citing illegal excavation in Bongoj village under Dharkhar union, where three road-like structures have been built across the river within a one-kilometre stretch from Dharkhar bridge towards the northeast.

Every night, the extracted soil is loaded onto trucks and transported to brick kilns and other locations, the complaint added.



Locals allege that an influential group led by Mir Ariful, alias 'Shooter Arif', along with his associates Nuruzzaman Shilon and Al Amin, has been illegally extracting soil from the river for years.

They claim the syndicate, backed by political connections with the Awami League and its student wing, has operated with impunity -- even after the recent political shift that saw the AL ousted from power.

Local sources said some 40-50 truckloads of soil are transported daily.

Despite operations conducted by district and upazila administrations from time and again, the syndicate remains undeterred.

During a recent visit, this correspondent observed three road-like embankments along the Bongoj-Akhaura regional road, with two of those

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

Television aims to make a comeback this Eid

Eid has long been a season of grand celebrations on television, with various programmes being aired across different channels. However, dramas remain the most prominent form of entertainment. From one-hour dramas and telefilms to special seven-day serials, channels put great effort into entertaining audiences during this festive period. As a result, shooting for Eid dramas is currently in full swing, and the schedules of star actors are packed.



SHAH ALAM SHAZU

Tawsif Mahbub is a beloved figure in television dramas, having starred in numerous productions over the years. He has acted opposite several leading actresses and has firmly cemented his place in the industry. He will appear in multiple dramas this Eid, including *Mon Divana* and *Prem Bhai*, among others making him one of the busiest actors of the season.

Jovan has steadily built a name for himself, starring in romantic and diverse roles. He has acted opposite many leading actresses, including Mehzabien Chowdhury, and will

once again share the screen with her in *Best Friend 2.0* this Eid. Additionally, he will appear in *Bantir Biye* and *Tumi Jake Bhalobasho*, both featuring Keya Payel as the leading lady.

Yash Rohan, known for his performances in both films and television dramas, has built a strong reputation, particularly excelling in romantic and serious roles. Keeping with tradition, he has several dramas lined up for Eid, including *Obujh Prem* alongside Naznin Niha, *Khush* with Tanjin Tisha, and *Bou er Biye* with Tanjim Saara Totini. He will also appear in two dramas with Keya Payel.

Emerging actor Arosh Khan is set to feature in multiple Eid dramas, continuing to build on his expanding career. Meanwhile, Totini and Keya Payel are two of the busiest actresses working for Eid, with each of them expected to appear in over six dramas—perhaps even more. Both actresses are filming daily to meet the Eid rush.

Meanwhile, veteran actors Dr Ejajul Islam and Faruk Ahmed, who rose to fame through Humayun Ahmed's timeless dramas, continue to be active in the industry. They will be seen in several productions this Eid.

This time around, Chanchal Chowdhury will return to television after a hiatus with the drama series *Mission Munshiganj*, directed by Animesh Aich and co-starring Ashna Habib Bhabna.

Every Eid, a record number of dramas starring Mosharraf Karim are broadcast, and this year will be no exception. The renowned actor is currently following an intense filming schedule to meet the demand for his projects.

Apurba's presence in Eid programming is always significant. This year, his much-anticipated web film *How Sweet* will be released alongside several television dramas.

FS Nayem, a familiar face across films, television, and OTT, is busy with Eid drama productions and hosting duties. Similarly, Niloy Alamgir, another popular actor, will appear in multiple Eid dramas, as he has done in previous years.

Mushfiq R Farhan has established himself as one of the busiest actors in the industry today. With an ever-growing fan base, he has built an impressive reputation by portraying a variety of roles. This Eid, he will be seen in several dramas, including *Baji*, where he stars opposite Keya Payel.

With an array of talented actors and engaging storylines, this Eid is geared up to be an exciting time for television audiences. Whether it's romantic, comedic, or dramatic, there will be something for everyone to enjoy.



NEWS

'No question of seeing the army as foe'

FROM PAGE 1

Speaking at an event at the Kara Convention Centre in the capital's Bakhshibazar, he said, "We have seen military interventions in Bangladesh caused by political vacuums. Such interventions have never benefitted democracy. But now, the people have risen. They want to reclaim their ownership of the state. Their ownership and rights must be restored."

He then said any attempt to rehabilitate the Awami League would be resisted.

"We hear of various plots and schemes to rehabilitate the Awami League. If any such attempt is made, it will be dealt with firmly. Not just the Awami League, but all of its fascist allies and beneficiaries must also be held accountable."

During the AL regime, he said the military, police, and bureaucracy became politicised and turned into tools of the ruling party.

"We have seen how the police were used against the people. But we are not against institutions themselves. We must rebuild and reform them. But the individuals involved in crimes must be brought to justice."

Nahid paid tributes to the martyrs of the July uprising and prayed for the recovery of those injured.

At another event at the Jatiya Press Club, NCP leader Sarjis Alam said his party had confidence and respect for the army.

"There is no question of seeing the army as an adversary.... We have always had respect for them. We believe that they will continue to stand by the people in the future just like they did during the uprising," he said.

He then added that there was a certain narrative that did not reflect the reality.

"There is no direct opposition between the army and the people, the National Citizen Party, or any other political group."

"If we have concerns or opinions regarding any particular institution, we will engage in logical discussion.... The most important point is, those of us who represent the forces of the uprising will never be in confrontations with the military," he said.

Sarjis' comments came after a Facebook post by NCP leader Hasnat Abdullah early Friday sparked public

debate and demonstrations over the question of banning the Awami League.

Hasnat wrote that there was an ongoing conspiracy to rehabilitate the Awami League as per India's plan. He claimed that a proposal for the "refined Awami League" was pitched to him and two others "at the cantonment" in the afternoon of March 11.

"We were asked to accept this proposal in exchange for a parliamentary seat-sharing agreement," wrote the chief organiser of the NCP around 2:00am.

Contacted, the Inter Services Public Relations Directorate on Friday night said it had no comment on the matter.

At yesterday's event, Sarjis said there was no talk of removing the army chief. "Certain rumours are being spread, but we have never made such a statement. We believe such a situation has not arisen, and we hope that it will not arise before the election. The mutual respect between the army and political parties has always existed, still exists, and will continue to exist."

Commenting on the national election, he said the NCP stated that it had no problem if the government could arrange the election in December, January, or February. "But there should be no uncertainty regarding the election date."

Meanwhile, NCP leader Nasiruddin Patwary at an event in Sylhet yesterday said Hasnat's statement should not have appeared on social media.

"We believe it was inappropriate," he said.

He then added, "We see certain individuals from the cantonment interfere in political matters. It is unacceptable. Such decisions should be made by politicians, and we urge government institutions to refrain from such involvement."

Referring to the AL, he said, the party responsible for the deaths and injuries of 2,000 people must be banned through judicial proceedings. "There is no scope for the Awami League to participate in the next election."

The students and masses will launch an unstoppable movement if there is support for AL's political participation -- be it from the cantonment or political parties, he

said.

"If anyone, even if it is the chief adviser, obstructs the process of banning the Awami League... we will fight against them," he added.

NCP DEMONSTRATION

The NCP yesterday demanded immediate measures to launch judicial proceedings for "Awami League's murders" during the uprising.

"The Awami League was ousted through a mass uprising. There is no example in the world where a political party that was ousted by an uprising was later given the opportunity to participate in the election," said Hasnat at a rally of the party in the capital's Shahbagh.

Akhtar Hossain, NCP's member secretary, said the AL's registration should be cancelled within the shortest possible time.

"Otherwise, the students and mass people will be compelled to take to the street again," Akhtar added.

Mahin Sarker, joint convener, demanded a proper investigation into the killings during the July uprising and a ban on AL.

Several other top leaders of NCP demanded the freezing of the bank accounts of AL leaders and their associates.

After the rally, the NCP activists marched to the Central Shaheed Minar.

Several other organisations also demonstrated on Dhaka University campus demanding a ban on the AL.

At the Raju Bhaskarjo, Warriors of July and Bangladesh Chhatra Odhikar Parishad held separate demonstrations, while another platform named "Gonohottakari Awami League Nishiddhokoron Andolon" held a mass iftar and sit-in programme.

The NCP also held programmes in several districts yesterday.

In Brahmanbaria, the district unit of NCP organised a protest march from the Municipal Mukta Mancha and to the Press Club, where a rally was later held.

In Savar, NCP leaders yesterday took out a procession calling for the prosecution of AL leaders for mass killings, the cancellation of the party's registration and a ban on its organisational activities.

They also formed a human chain in front of the National Memorial in Savar.

Potato farmers struggling

FROM PAGE 12

small farmers.

Haradhan Roy, a farmer from Parbatipur upazila of Dinajpur, said he is now selling his produce at Tk 15 per kg.

Last season, potatoes were sold at Tk 20-23 per kg at the field level in March, while in December, prices soared to Tk 70-90 per kg, he added.

Refaz Uddin, a farmer from Badarganj upazila in Rangpur, said,

"Farmers usually store their potatoes in cold storage to secure better prices later, but many have failed to avail the facility amid rising rents and space shortages."

Meanwhile, in Bogura, potato prices had increased slightly after cold storage facilities opened in the northern region at the end of February this year.

However, prices fell again by up to Tk 200 per maund as most storage facilities reached full capacity.

From mid-February to early March, potatoes were sold at Tk 500-650 per maund in the northern districts. However, with most cold storage facilities now closed, potato prices have fallen to Tk 450 per maund, farmers said.

They are also worried about how to store such a large quantity of potatoes at home.

Sakiul Islam, a farmer from Gobindaganj upazila in Gaibandha, said, "I have lost an average of Tk 15,000 per bigha. I was only able to store 135 sacks of potatoes in cold storage.

"As the cold storage facilities have closed, I still have about 100 maunds of potatoes at home. If I have to sell

these potatoes at Tk 450 per maund now, I will incur heavy losses."

He leased three acres of land for potato cultivation this season for Tk 3 lakh for one year. Out of the Tk 3 lakh, Tk 90,000 was a bank loan.

"Due to the losses, I can't repay the bank loan. Now, I'll have to borrow again to pay off the debt."

Naim Islam, a farmer from Joypurhat district, said about 30 percent of the farmers in his village still have potatoes at home. On the one hand, there is no space in cold storage, and on the other hand, market prices remain low.

Moreover, potatoes are starting to rot due to rising temperatures, he added.

Farmers in Munshiganj say the few buyers who approach offer as little as Tk 6-8 per kg, far below the farmers' production costs, which range between Tk 20-25 per kg.

Salim Mridha, a farmer from Munshiganj Sadar, expressed his frustration, saying, "We're in deep trouble. I'm trying to store them in cold storage, but I haven't been able to secure space yet."

Biplob Kumar Mohanta, deputy director of the Munshiganj Agricultural Extension Department, said they've advised farmers to hold off on selling and instead store their produce at home.

He believes that prices may increase in the coming month or two.

Samir Hossain Siam, agricultural marketing officer of Munshiganj, said that they have instructed cold storage owners to ensure that

small farmers are able to store their potatoes without issues.

"The storage cost has been set at Tk 6.75 per kg. If any cold storage owners charge more, we will take legal action."

Mostafa Azad Chowdhury Babu, president of the Bangladesh Cold Storage Association, said that so far, about 70 percent of cold storage facilities in the northern region have been filled, while 20 percent in Munshiganj are occupied.

However, many local farmers and political leaders from different parts of the country do not believe this information, he said.

Contacted, Emdad Ullah Mian, secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, said efforts have been made to provide farmers with alternative potato storage options alongside cold storage facilities.

"Initially, cold storage owners raised rental rates, but after negotiations, a fair and reasonable pricing structure was reached."

The official also said several export barriers have been removed to safeguard farmers from losses.

"As a result, potato exports this season have reached 26,193 tonnes—double the volume of the previous fiscal year—amounting to Tk 67.95 crore in value."

Jahangir Alam Khan, an agricultural economist, recommended the government buy a minimum of 10 lakh tonnes of potatoes from farmers.

Additionally, he suggested that 20 to 25 percent of the country's cold storage capacity should be reserved exclusively for farmers.

NCP to suggest lowering voting age to 16yrs

FROM PAGE 12

the NCP suggests setting it at 23 years instead.

Currently, the minimum age to run in parliamentary elections is 25.

Tushar added that the NCP has already begun discussions with political parties that have submitted reform proposals.

If the NCP submits its proposals today, discussions regarding the party's

position may take place after Eid.

In response to a journalist's question regarding the Awami League, Tushar said, "The Awami League is clearly an anti-national force and an agent of India. If they take to the streets in protest, we will not call it a movement. They will be doing so only to destabilise the country. In that case, the police will have the right to use force as necessary."

Tushar said that opinions on reforms were gathered by asking families of those killed or injured in the mass uprising about their vision for Bangladesh.

He mentioned that a mother of one of the martyrs expressed her desire for a Bangladesh where the police would not have the authority to shoot at protesters if her son took to the streets in a demonstration.

Reduce overreliance on groundwater

Govt must explore alternative fresh water sources

We are alarmed by the rapid decline in groundwater levels across the country, particularly in Dhaka, Gazipur, and the Barind region, due to excessive extraction. According to reports, residents on the city's outskirts are facing acute shortages of fresh water, primarily due to WASA's ineffective management of groundwater. The crisis is particularly severe in areas like Vakurta, Baherchar, Battoli Bazar, Balughata, and Bauta, where numerous pumps installed by WASA about a decade ago have contributed to the depletion of groundwater. As a result, around 20,000 hand-operated tube wells have dried up entirely. Residents of these areas now struggle to access water, with their tube wells yielding water only during the rainy season and remaining dry throughout the rest of the year.

The rapid decline in groundwater levels, however, is not confined to the above-mentioned areas—it has impacted numerous other regions across the country, making crop cultivation increasingly challenging. Clearly, this situation has arisen due to our excessive reliance on groundwater and the lack of attention to alternative water sources. A 2022 study analysed 40 years of data from 465 shallow groundwater monitoring wells of the Bangladesh Water Development Board. It examined groundwater usage and levels during the dry season and revealed that due to extensive water usage, the groundwater level in two-thirds of the country is declining. In many areas, including Dhaka, the groundwater levels have fallen by an average of one to three meters.

For instance, groundwater levels in Godagari, Rajshahi, which were previously recharged to 16-18 meters during the rainy season in the 1980s, have not surpassed 16 meters since 2010. Due to a lack of water, the Barind Multipurpose Development Authority (BMDA) has limited Boro rice cultivation this year in eight upazilas across three districts of the Barind region—Rajshahi, Chapainawabganj, and Naogaon. In Kaliganj, Gazipur, the groundwater recharge levels have dropped from 6 meters in 1990 to 3 meters since 2015. In Dohar, Dhaka, recharge decreased from 4 meters to 3 meters by 2015.

The question is, what can the government do now to recharge the groundwater levels across the country, especially in the capital, where 70 percent of the water supply comes from underground sources? Our water experts provided solutions long ago: minimise groundwater extraction and utilise water from nearby rivers instead. Unfortunately, two crucial projects—the Sayedabad Water Treatment Plant (Phase-3) and the Meghna River Protection Master Plan—aimed at reducing the city's excessive dependence on groundwater, have been stalled for nearly a decade. The government must prioritise and expedite their implementation. Furthermore, it should consider various other methods, suggested by experts, for artificial groundwater recharging. Without immediate action, groundwater levels in Dhaka's densely populated areas could plummet to 100 meters by 2050. Therefore, the government needs to take urgent action to address the issue.

Stop the genocide in Gaza

International community must enforce a new ceasefire deal

Our hearts are with the people of Gaza, many of whom have lost their children, loved ones, homes, and the dignity and right to live as human beings due to Israel's brutal and relentless massacre. Throughout Friday, March 21, protests against Israel's genocide in Gaza were held in streets across the world, and Dhaka's streets were no different. After the Jumma prayers, the four-coloured Palestinian flag flooded the premises of the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque. Ordinary people under the banner of "Aam Janata," as well as other groups, brought out processions demanding an end to Israel's onslaught in Gaza. There have been calls for the government to take diplomatic initiatives through the United Nations and others to stop this genocide.

Since Israel resumed its war against Hamas on March 18, more than 600 Palestinians have been killed, the majority of whom are women and children, according to reports by Al Jazeera. Children were killed across so-called "safe zones." Even hospitals have not been spared. The total death toll since Israel launched its war in October 2023, has risen to more than 61,700, according to Gaza's government media office. Meanwhile, the Israeli defence minister has threatened to annex parts of the Gaza Strip unless Hamas releases all Israeli hostages—whether living or dead. In fact, according to reports by the BBC and CNN, the Israeli minister said they would intensify nonstop strikes from the air, sea, and land and employ civilian and military pressure, including "evacuating the Gaza population to the south and implementing US President Trump's voluntary transfer plan for Gaza residents." Earlier in February, Trump had proposed to build a US-owned "Riviera of the Middle East" in Gaza by expelling 2.1 million Palestinians from the war-ravaged land.

There appears to be little hope for Gazans because Israel is carrying out the genocide with the full support of the Trump administration. While many world leaders, including US allies, have condemned Israel's actions, the Trump administration squarely blames Hamas for breaking the ceasefire deal that had brought relative calm to the Gaza Strip between January 19 and March 18. Unless a new ceasefire deal is agreed upon by Israel and Hamas, Gazans may not see an end to the massacre. Thankfully, mediators Egypt and Qatar have reportedly proposed to Hamas the re-establishment of a truce, an exchange of hostages, and the re-entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza, which has been blocked by Israel since March 2. It is urgent and crucial that a new ceasefire agreement be reached to stop the relentless killing in Gaza. We urge the international community to take urgent measures to make that happen.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Bangalees hoist the red-green-gold flag

On this day in 1971, Bangalees hoisted the green and red flag with the map of Bangladesh in gold inside the red disc almost everywhere. This was done in defiance of Pakistan's celebration of Republic Day on March 23.

EDITORIAL

Will the construction of roads paved with gold continue?



Kallol Mustafa is an engineer and writer who focuses on power, energy, environment and development economics. He can be reached at kallol.mustafa@yahoo.com.

KALLOL MUSTAFA

A common feature of mega infrastructure projects undertaken by the previous government was the extremely high construction costs. Due to planning flaws, irregularities, corruption, etc., Bangladesh had one of the highest highway construction costs in the world.

The White Paper on the State of the Bangladesh Economy, commissioned by the interim government, also highlighted the huge expenditure on highway construction. According to it, during the previous government's tenure, the construction cost of four-lane highways in Bangladesh averaged \$6.35 million per kilometre, which was 4.4 times higher than in India, 2.15 times higher than in Pakistan, 1.6 times higher than in China, and 3.7 times higher than in Turkey.

It was expected that things would change under the interim government, which came to power through a popular uprising. But in reality, the construction of "roads paved with gold" has not stopped even during this government's tenure. A recent *Prothom Alo* report shows that the construction of the Cox's Bazar-Matarbari two-lane road will cost Tk 476 crore per km.

The most expensive highway in the country so far was the expressway from Dhaka to Bhanga in Faridpur via the Padma Bridge. The 55-kilometer-long, four-lane highway cost Tk 11,440 crore to build. That is, the cost of constructing the expressway per kilometre was about Tk 201 crore, which was widely criticised.

It appears that the cost of the two-lane Cox's Bazar-Matarbari road, to be built during the interim government's tenure, will be more than double that of the most expensive four-lane Dhaka-Bhanga Expressway, built during the Awami League era. Muhammad Fouzul Kabir Khan, an adviser to the interim government, has also raised questions about this huge expenditure. At a seminar in Dhaka on February 25, while informing the audience that he had to approve the highway being implemented with a foreign loan, he also raised the question: "will this road be paved with gold or diamonds?"

What could be the reason for such a huge cost in constructing the road? According to *Prothom Alo*'s report, this huge cost cannot be

explained by the increase in the price of construction materials alone. One of the reasons for such a high cost could be non-competitive bidding and the conflict of interest of the lending agency.

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is providing the loan for the Matarbari coal power plant and deep-sea port project in Maheshkhali, Cox's Bazar. The road will be constructed under this project. The consultant hired to design the project is from Japan, the project financer. The conditions for



The cost of the two-lane Cox's Bazar-Matarbari road is likely to be more than double the cost of the country's most expensive highway from Dhaka to Bhanga in Faridpur via the Padma Bridge.

FILE PHOTO: STAR

the construction tender were prepared in such a way that contractors from countries other than Japan could not compete effectively. The estimated cost for constructing the 27.2 km long road was Tk 7,382 crore (which is also very high, at Tk 271 crore per km). However, the combined bid of the Japanese contractors stood at Tk 11,500 crore, which is 58 percent more than the estimated cost.

Normally, if a bid exceeds the estimated cost by more than 15 percent, re-tendering can be done. But that could not be accomplished due to JICA's objections. JICA stated that re-tendering just to reduce costs or select the lowest bidder is not in line with JICA's objections. JICA stated that re-tendering just to reduce costs or select the lowest bidder is not in line with JICA's objections.

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It is true that the loan agreement for the Matarbari project was signed during the previous government's tenure. However, the present government could have followed the recommendations and tried to address these disparities in the loan agreement.

than in India, China, or Europe.

Meanwhile, the interim government's Task Force Report on Re-strategizing the Economy and Mobilizing Resources for Equitable and Sustainable Development recommended avoiding such conflicts of interest. The report mentioned that Bangladesh secures infrastructure project financing from JICA, China, India, etc., under government-to-government (G2G) bilateral frameworks with limited tendering, which results in high project costs. Particularly, projects where feasibility studies, detailed designs, construction, and supervision are all managed by the lending country create conflicts of interest and tend to drive up construction costs.

A few examples of such projects include the railway bridge on the Jamuna River (JICA funded, with detailed design, supervision consultancy, and contractors from

The government could have told JICA—just because you are lending money for the road, we are not bound to agree to unfair conditions. Since the people of Bangladesh will have to repay the loan with interest, the government must have the authority to determine how the loan money is spent. Otherwise, if necessary, Bangladesh could construct the 27 km of road with its own funds, but it should not adhere to unfair conditions.

Similar initiatives need to be taken regarding ongoing projects under the Indian Line of Credit (LoC) as well. Several infrastructure construction projects in Bangladesh are being funded by Indian loans to facilitate transit with India. According to the terms of the Indian loan, 75 percent of the raw materials required for these projects must be purchased from India, and contractors must be hired from there. Moreover, there is a question about how essential these hugely expensive infrastructure projects are for Bangladesh at this time.

For example, as reported by *Samakal*, a 50-kilometre-long, four-lane highway is being constructed from Ashuganj River Port through Sarail, Kasba, and Dharkar in Brahmanbaria to Akhaura Land Port under the Indian LoC. This road, which is being constructed at a cost of Tk 5,791 crore, will connect Agartala in Tripura, India, with Ashuganj River Port. Additionally, the road from Mainamati in Cumilla to Dharkar will be upgraded to four lanes with Indian LoC funding at a cost of Tk 7,188 crore. This will make it easier to transport goods unloaded at Chittagong Port to Tripura and Assam. Although India will benefit from these two roads worth Tk 12,979 crore, there is a question as to what benefit Bangladesh will receive.

Bangladesh will also have to bear the cost of regular maintenance of the roads after construction. There is a question as to whether the huge expenditure being made to increase connectivity between Sylhet, Cumilla, and Chattogram will be recovered merely by transporting Indian goods.

One piece of good news is that the two countries have agreed to scrutinise projects under the Indian LoC that are still in the process of appointing consultants and contractors or preparing project proposals. However, it is not just the project list that needs re-evaluation—the terms of the project loans must also be reviewed.

If the interim government could genuinely reform the unfair terms of loans from various foreign lenders in accordance with the task force recommendations, its commitment and sincerity towards reform would be more evident to the people.

What will we do for the people of Gaza?



Yousef SY Ramadan is the ambassador of Palestine to Bangladesh.

YOUSEF RAMADAN

As the world observes the holy month of Ramadan, Gaza continues to suffer endless bloodshed under Netanyahu. More than 50,000 lives have been lost, with women, children, and the elderly among them, while over 100,000 have been wounded. Most of them lost a part of their body, an eye, a hand or two, a leg or both, suffering permanent disabilities that will affect them for the rest of their lives. Homes have been flattened with people still sleeping in their beds, hospitals have been removed from the face of the earth along with their patients, and mosques have been levelled with worshippers still praying inside. Even animals have not been spared by the most aggressive military force in modern history. The people of Gaza have been robbed of daily essentials such as food, water, medicine, and electricity. They have been systematically denied and deprived, robbing them of their dignity, peace of mind, and humanity.

Then comes his minister of defence, who is even more racist, parroting his master, saying: "Oh people of Gaza, the destruction that the air force has caused is just the beginning, and what is coming will be worse, and you alone will pay the price. You must return all the hostages and expel Hamas from Gaza, and then we will allow everyone to leave Gaza to any place in the world, for whoever wants to." This demand is both unrealistic and revealing, it acknowledges that after more than a year of warfare, Israel has failed to achieve its own objectives despite committing the most heinous massacre in the twenty-first century. Instead, it now seeks to coerce the Gazan population into achieving what its own military could not. The implication is clear—displacement

that was tired of endlessly killing innocent Gazans but has now returned with even greater ferocity, rejuvenated and ready to kill more innocent women and children. Netanyahu himself confirmed this with alarming impudence: "We resumed the war with all our strength, and this is just the beginning"—as if he was threatening a great power and not a tiny strip of land with the majority of its population being women and children.

Then comes his minister of defence, who is even more racist, parroting his master, saying: "Oh people of Gaza, the destruction that the air force has caused is just the beginning, and what is coming will be worse, and you alone will pay the price. You must return all the hostages and expel Hamas from Gaza, and then we will allow everyone to leave Gaza to any place in the world, for whoever wants to." This demand is both unrealistic and revealing, it acknowledges that after

remains their ultimate goal. They offer the people of Gaza permission to leave their own land and disperse themselves across the world as if it is a reward, as if the indigenous people of the land would abandon their homes.

This moment raises urgent questions, not just for Palestinians, but for the world. If the massacre of Palestinians is met with silence

The blood of our children forces us to call things by their actual names. A genocide continues in front of our eyes and we have normalised it, just as our enemy wanted. History will show us no mercy, nor will future generations, and most importantly, God will not forgive us for our silence.

today, then who will be next? The paralysis of the United Nations and the Security Council in the face of a single veto from the US sheds light on a troubling reality. International law is simply a tool to be discarded if its implementation is contrary to US interests.

The US, through its military and political support, has made itself complicit in Israel's actions. This is not merely an issue of Palestinian suffering, it is an indictment of a world order where one country gets to unilaterally decide who lives or dies, where power dictates justice,

and where the suffering of millions is reduced to a geopolitical calculation.

In this holy month, for nearly two billion Muslims and for conscientious people across the globe, this is a test of principle. If a collective voice is not raised now, what does that say about the mighty values we claim to uphold? The demand is not for war or violence, it is for moral clarity, for a loud and unequivocal rejection of a system that enables war crimes under the guise of security. We are tired of coded rhetoric. The blood of our children forces us to call things by their actual names. A genocide continues in front of our eyes and we have normalised it, just as our enemy wanted. History will show us no mercy, nor will future generations, and most importantly, God will not forgive us for our silence.

The support for Israel by the US, especially under the Trump administration constitutes not just an insult to Palestinians but explicit hostility to humanity itself. Diplomatic statements and carefully worded condemnations are no longer sufficient—history will judge our response, and future generations will ask whether we remained silent in the face of such undeniable injustice.

In closing, I extend my deep gratitude to the National Citizens Party for their statement of solidarity. Their support gives hope to the Palestinian people and strengthens their resolve in the struggle for freedom. It also reaffirms that advocacy for Palestine is not bound by borders and that Bangladesh continues to stand on the right side of history, generation after generation.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Bangalees hoist the red-green-gold flag

On this day in 1971, Bangalees hoisted the green and red flag with the map of Bangladesh in gold inside the red disc almost everywhere. This was done in defiance of Pakistan's celebration of Republic Day on March 23.



Why are night owls at greater risk of depression?

Mindfulness, total sleep quality, and alcohol consumption may help explain why people who stay up late have a greater risk of depression, according to a new study published in the open-access journal PLOS One by Simon Evans of University of Surrey, UK, and colleagues.

Previous research has shown that night owls who stay up late, called "evening chronotypes," have more depression symptoms than people who are early risers, or "morning chronotypes." In the new study, Evans and colleagues collected data from 546 university students using an online questionnaire. The data included self-reported information on the students' sleep patterns, mindfulness, rumination tendencies, alcohol use, and depression and anxiety levels.

The study confirmed that people with an evening chronotype were at a notably higher risk for depression and that the association could be explained by differences in mindfulness, sleep quality, and alcohol consumption. On average, evening chronotypes had poorer sleep quality, higher alcohol consumption, and acted with less mindfulness than morning chronotypes.

With those caveats in mind, the authors conclude that interventions aimed at mindfulness, sleep and alcohol use might have the potential to reduce depression risk, amongst young adults in particular.

The authors add: "With many young adults' experiencing poor mental health, these study findings are particularly important—many young adults tend to stay up late and the results point to how interventions could be implemented to reduce their risk of depression."

STAR HEALTH REPORT

Breast cancer remains the most common cancer among women worldwide. While medical science has made significant progress, the journey remains complex, particularly for younger women.

During a recent visit to Bangladesh, Dr Ma Jun, Consultant Medical Oncologist at the National Cancer Centre Singapore, and Dr Tan Si Ying, Consultant Surgical Oncologist specialising in breast surgery, shared valuable insights into the evolving landscape of breast cancer treatment, challenges faced by young women, and the importance of early detection.

Dr Ma Jun emphasised that understanding the subtype of breast cancer is critical in determining treatment. "We now classify breast cancer not just by how it looks under the microscope, but by whether it is hormone receptor positive, HER2 positive or triple negative," she explained. These classifications help determine whether a patient will benefit from chemotherapy, targeted therapy, or the increasingly used immunotherapy. Particularly in triple negative breast cancer, immunotherapy has become a promising addition.

For early-stage breast cancer, surgery remains the cornerstone of treatment. "Surgery is still considered curative in stages one to three," said Dr Ma. In contrast, for advanced stage four cancers, the goal shifts to disease control with systemic therapies, and surgery is often not required.

A notable concern in Bangladesh is the late presentation of breast cancer cases. Dr Ma highlighted a lack of awareness, cultural stigma, and limited access to screening facilities as major barriers. "Many women ignore early warning signs, and without national screening

programmes, cancers are often detected only when advanced," she noted.

Dr Tan Si Ying, who leads initiatives focused on young women with breast cancer in Singapore, added that younger patients face a distinctly different set of challenges. "The cancers tend to be more aggressive, and the psychosocial impact is much greater," she said. Younger women often face fears around fertility, body image, and the implications of



surgery on their personal lives, including marriage and motherhood.

Dr Tan also discussed advanced surgical options now available, including minimally invasive and oncoplastic techniques. "We work with patients to ensure both oncological safety and aesthetic outcomes," she explained. Reconstruction is often done in the same operation, reducing hospital stays and

emotional distress.

Fertility preservation is another vital concern for young patients. Dr Tan said, "We counsel women on options like egg freezing or ovarian suppression before chemotherapy, as treatment can lead to premature menopause." She stressed the importance of discussing fertility early in the treatment process, especially if chemotherapy is to begin quickly.

Genetic testing plays a growing role in managing breast cancer, especially for young patients and those with a family history. "Identifying BRCA gene mutations not only informs treatment but also helps in risk assessment for family members," said Dr Ma. In Singapore, those with positive BRCA mutations may be offered risk-reducing surgeries, which have shown to improve survival.

The doctors agreed that survivorship is an often-overlooked aspect of care. From managing side effects to returning to work, the path after treatment can be daunting. Singapore's healthcare system provides dedicated support, including psychological counselling and rehabilitation.

Public education remains key. In Singapore, campaigns target both adults and adolescents, promoting monthly self-examinations and school outreach programmes. "We created animated videos and digital content to raise awareness among secondary school students," Dr Tan shared.

Both experts urged for greater investment in awareness, screening, and multidisciplinary care in countries like Bangladesh. "Catching cancer early significantly improves survival," Dr Ma concluded. "And with the right support, even young women can live full, healthy lives after breast cancer."



BODY MASS INDEX Is BMI still useful as we age?

Body Mass Index (BMI) is widely used to assess weight status and define obesity. However, new research to be presented at the European Congress on Obesity (ECO 2025) suggests BMI may become less reliable with age. The study, conducted by researchers from Italy and Lebanon, including Professor Marwan El Ghoch, found that individuals with the same BMI can have vastly different body compositions depending on their age.

The team analysed 2,844 adults aged 20 to 79, all with BMI of 25 or above. Despite similar BMIs, older adults showed higher central fat and lower muscle mass in the arms and legs compared to younger participants. This "redistribution" of fat and muscle was most evident in middle-aged and older groups, particularly in the trunk region.

Professor El Ghoch explains that relying solely on BMI may be misleading, as it doesn't reflect age-related changes in fat and muscle distribution. These changes can increase the risk of chronic diseases without altering BMI. He calls for new, practical tools—such as the waist-to-height ratio and handgrip strength tests—to better assess body composition and health risks as people age. Long-term studies are needed to confirm these findings.



Neutropenic Fever: A silent emergency for bone marrow disorder patients

We have all experienced the familiar symptoms of fever—chills, aches, and warmth—but few truly understand its purpose. Fever is not a disease, but a signal: the body's immune system is responding to infection, with the hypothalamus raising the body's temperature to make it less hospitable to invaders.

Fever can appear in various forms—intermittent, remittent, continuous, or relapsing—each indicating different underlying causes. Among them, neutropenic fever is particularly alarming, especially for patients with bone marrow disorders or those undergoing chemotherapy.

Neutropenic fever occurs when a person with neutropenia (a dangerously low count of neutrophils, a type of white blood cell) develops a fever. It is a medical emergency as the body's immune defences are severely compromised.

Neutropenia may result from chemotherapy (common in leukemia treatment), bone marrow disorders like aplastic anaemia or myelodysplastic syndromes, infections, or side effects of certain medications.

A minor infection in such patients can rapidly become life-threatening. Those undergoing intensive chemotherapy, such as CLAG-M regimens for acute myeloid leukaemia (AML), or bone marrow transplants, are at particularly high risk, especially of invasive fungal disease (IFD) and serious infections like pneumonia or cellulitis.

Call to Action: Precaution is crucial

- **Immediate medical attention:** Fever of 38.3°C once, or 38.0°C sustained for over an hour, requires urgent evaluation (IDSA/NCCN guidelines).

• **Preventative medication:** Prophylactic antibiotics or antifungals are often prescribed.

• **Hygiene and isolation:** Frequent handwashing and avoiding crowded or sick environments is vital.

• **Regular monitoring:** Blood tests help detect early signs of neutropenia.

• **Dietary caution:** Avoid raw or undercooked foods that could carry harmful bacteria.

• **Family awareness:** Educate caregivers and patients on warning signs and the need for swift medical response.

• **Critical care readiness:** In severe cases, neutropenic fever may lead to sepsis, requiring ICU admission and life support interventions.

Given the weakened immune state of blood cancer patients, infections can escalate quickly. Early detection, strict hygiene, and rapid treatment are essential.

Neutropenic fever is a silent emergency, and with proper awareness and timely care, we can better protect vulnerable individuals—especially those fighting blood cancers—from its deadly consequences.

The article is compiled by Jannatun Nayma.
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WHO urges action as global tuberculosis services face crisis

On World Tuberculosis (TB) Day, observed on 24 March, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has issued an urgent call for investment to protect TB care and support services. TB remains the world's deadliest infectious disease, claiming over a million lives each year and devastating families and communities.

Global efforts have saved an estimated 79 million lives since 2000, but severe funding cuts now threaten to undo this progress. Rising drug resistance and ongoing conflicts across regions, particularly in Africa, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe, are worsening the situation.

Under the 2025 campaign theme Yes! We Can End TB: Commit, Invest, Deliver, WHO highlights the urgency of sustained action. "The world cannot abandon its commitments to end TB," said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director General.

Funding shortages are causing significant disruptions in high-burden countries, including shortages in health workers, diagnostics, surveillance, and drug supply chains. In 2023, only 26% of the US\$22 billion needed annually for TB prevention and care was raised.

WHO and its Civil Society Task Force have issued a joint statement calling for urgent, coordinated action, including securing domestic funding, safeguarding essential services, and improving monitoring systems.

WHO also launched new guidance to integrate TB and lung health into primary care, aiming for a more sustainable, comprehensive health approach.

Tackling traffic: Making the most of standstill time

TASHRIF AREFIN

For many in Bangladesh, traffic jams are an everyday reality—an inevitable part of modern urban life. While being stuck in traffic is often frustrating and draining, it does not always have to be wasted time. With a shift in mindset, those idle hours can be turned into opportunities for learning, entertainment, or simply unwinding.

One of the easiest and most accessible ways to make traffic bearable is by listening to a good podcast. Whether your interest lies in business, science, history, or personal development, podcasts offer a wealth of knowledge without any extra effort. Just plug in your earphones and you are set to learn on the go.

Educator and author Sadman Sadik, in his YouTube monologue Nijer Moto Kore Shomoy Katakate Parar Shadhinota, insightfully notes, "Right now, I am just a voice you're listening to, but the reason you're listening is because you can relate to some things with me... and that made you feel good." His words remind us that podcasts not only inform but can also provide comfort, making us feel a little less alone amidst the chaos.

Another enriching option is audiobooks. With countless titles available across genres, switching from traditional books to audio versions during



commutes can help you finish more books than you'd expect in a year.

However, listening to audio content is not always feasible—especially if you do not have headphones or a charged device. In such cases, if you are travelling with someone, consider engaging in meaningful conversation. A shared story, casual chat, or even brainstorming ideas can help pass the time and deepen connections.

If you are not behind the wheel, try mentally stimulating activities like Sudoku or crossword puzzles. These not only keep your brain active but also help divert attention from the gridlock and reduce stress.

Most importantly, practising mindfulness—such as deep breathing or simply observing your surroundings—can calm the mind. Rather than focusing on honking horns and delays, embracing a quiet moment can bring surprising peace.

Traffic jams may be unavoidable, but how we respond to them is entirely within our control. By using that time wisely—whether through learning, connecting, or relaxing—we can transform daily standstills into valuable moments.

This article was thought up by Tashrif Arefin while stuck in traffic!

Three cities recognised for public health leadership at 2025 Healthy Cities Summit

At the 2025 Partnership for Healthy Cities Summit in Paris, three cities—Córdoba (Argentina), Fortaleza (Brazil), and Greater Manchester (UK)—were honoured for outstanding achievements in preventing non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and injuries. The event, co-hosted by Bloomberg Philanthropies, the World Health Organisation (WHO), Vital Strategies, and the City of Paris, brought together leaders from 61 cities to share effective public health strategies.

Michael R Bloomberg, WHO Global Ambassador for NCDs and Injuries, highlighted that over 80% of global deaths are caused by NCDs and injuries, yet they are largely preventable. "Cities are showing that with leadership and political will, progress is possible," he stated.



The award-winning cities are part of the Partnership's Policy Accelerator, which supports policy development and implementation. Córdoba is transforming school food environments by banning sugary drinks and ultra-processed foods in schools by 2026. Fortaleza introduced its first legal framework for air quality monitoring, while Greater Manchester expanded smoke-free public spaces, including launching its first smoke-free park and resources to support NHS and other institutions.

Launched in 2017, the Partnership for Healthy Cities now includes 74 cities worldwide, collectively working to improve the health of 300 million people through targeted, impactful public health interventions.



Players of the BKSP women's hockey team run for joy following their 8-0 win against Kishoreganj in the final of the Brac Bank Women's Development Cup Hockey tournament at the Maulana Bhashani Hockey Stadium yesterday. BKSP dominated the 11-team tournament, winning all their matches and scoring 82 goals while conceding just one. Arpita Pal, captain of the team, emerged as the top-scorer of the tournament with 30 goals while Kishoreganj forward Fardia Akter Ratri was adjudged the best player for scoring 11 goals and setting up many more en route to the final.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Ratri hopes for more tournaments in women's hockey



Even though Kishoreganj lost the final of the Brac Bank Women's Development Cup Hockey tournament to a star-studded BKSP, Fardia Akter Ratri made her mark by scoring 11 goals and setting up many on her way to taking the team to the final. In an interview with The Daily Star's Atique Anam following the final, the forward spoke of the tournament and status of women's hockey in the country. The excerpts of the interview are as follows:

The Daily Star (DS): How was the feeling after you were adjudged the player of the tournament?

Fardia Akter Ratri (FAR): I was surprised because I didn't expect it. You know we didn't get to do much training ahead of this tournament.

DS: Do you think your 11 goals played a key role in taking the team to the final?

FAR: I didn't count the goals really. But I did score goals and created for others, which is why probably we were in the final. But we know BKSP would win the final because they have facilities and experienced players. Most of the players of the national team come from BKSP.

DS: Your experience of representing Bangladesh in international hockey must have helped.

FAR: I have played in the 2019 AHF Cup and then was the captain of the Five-A-Side World Cup in 2023. Those experiences obviously helped.

DS: Could you tell us about the sporting lineage of your family?

FAR: My brother, Rakibul Hasan Rocky, is a national hockey player. Two of my sisters play volleyball.

DS: Do you want to take hockey professionally?

FAR: There is no hockey matches, as far as I know, up next. There is U-21 AHF Cup in June probably, but I'm overaged for that. Despite that, I am serious about hockey and want to take the sport professionally. The authorities have said that there will be tournaments arranged. So we are hoping those happen soon. Now I'll be going back home tomorrow and continue my studies.

BCB likely to defer BCL due to packed schedule

SPORTS REPORTER

A Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) official yesterday said that the upcoming season of the first-class competition Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) might get deferred due to the packed schedule of the national team, A team and High-Performance Unit in May.

The BCB initially planned to hold the next edition of BCL, which is usually held in November-December, in May but is now likely to postpone it as majority of the country's top players will be engaged in different series at the same time.

"We planned the tournament [BCL] as these tours weren't finalised before. But now we have called a meeting [to reschedule the event]," Akram Khan, BCB's tournament committee chairman, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We will sit with the selectors as well. If we don't get sufficient players, the tournament can be delayed. We want our top players to participate in the league," he added.

New Zealand A team will arrive in Bangladesh on May 1 to play three one-dayers

and two four-day matches against their Bangladeshi counterparts between May 5 and 24. The series was initially scheduled to take place in September last year, but the touring side postponed the series due to travel restrictions following the ouster of the Awami League regime.

Meanwhile, South Africa's Emerging Team are also

scheduled to arrive here

in early May to play

three one-dayers

and two four-day

matches against the

HP unit while the

Tigers have a white-

ball away

series against

Pakistan in

the same

month where

they will play

three ODIs and

three T20Is.

"We will have

a jam-packed

schedule from

May 1. I see it as an

opportunity for our

players," chief selector Gazi

Ashraf Hossain Lipu told The

Daily Star.

"There were doubts regarding some of these series. Due to the non-availability of the South African team, the HP Unit had to compromise with the schedule and host the series at this time. Otherwise, they might not have been able to play the series," he concluded.

Partex's last batting

pair then took two cheeky

singles in final two

deliveries to hand Agrani

Bank their second loss in

seven rounds.

Earlier, Marshall Ayub

struck 64 off 87 balls as

Agrani were bowled out

for 218 in 50 overs after

being asked to bat first.

Naeem Islam Jnr was the

pick of the bowlers for

Partex, finishing with three

wickets for 41 runs.

Almada fires Argentina towards qualification

Argentina took a major step towards securing their place at the 2026 FIFA World Cup with a hard-fought 1-0 win over Uruguay in Montevideo on Saturday, thanks to a stunning strike from Thiago Almada. Almada scored a sensational winner in the second half, firing into the top corner from the edge of the box. The reigning world champions are now on the verge of becoming the first South American team to officially qualify. The top six teams qualify automatically for the 2026 World Cup in the USA, Canada, and Mexico.

- Argentina avenged their earlier 2-0 home defeat to Uruguay with a tense but vital away win.
- With 28 points from 13 games, Argentina tops the 10-team South American qualifying table.
- The victory ensures Argentina can finish no lower than seventh, securing at least an inter-confederation playoff spot.
- A win or a draw over Brazil on Wednesday in Buenos Aires would guarantee Argentina's direct qualification.
- Uruguay remain fourth with 20 points, just behind Brazil (21 pts) and Ecuador (22 pts).



PHOTO: REUTERS

Foreman's final bell rings at 76

AGENCIES

George Foreman, the legendary boxer and unlikely American icon who rose from poverty to global fame, died Friday at age 76. A two-time heavyweight champion and beloved pitchman, Foreman's life was a tale of second chances -- and triumph.

Born in 1949 in Marshall, Texas, and raised in Houston's tough Fifth Ward, Foreman overcame a troubled youth through the Job Corps, which introduced him to boxing. At just 19, he captured Olympic gold in 1968. His ferocious style brought him 37 consecutive professional wins and a 1973 knockout of Joe Frazier to claim the heavyweight crown.

But it was his 1974 defeat to Muhammad Ali in the historic "Rumble in the Jungle" that etched Foreman into boxing lore.

Devastated, he left the sport in 1977, finding solace as a Christian minister.

Then came the comeback. He returned to the ring a decade later -- heavier, older, but full of fire -- and shocked the world by regaining the heavyweight title at 45, becoming the oldest ever to do so.

Beyond boxing, Foreman became a cultural phenomenon, famously lending his name to the George Foreman Grill, a product that made him a fortune and symbolized his transformation from fierce fighter to smiling salesman.

"George's journey from the streets of Fifth Ward to boxing and business success was an inspiration," said Houston Mayor John Whitmire.

Married five times and father to 12 children -- five sons all named George -- Foreman lived large but remained grounded in faith and family.

"By George," he once wrote, "I've had two lives, and I'm grateful for both."

In and out of the ring, George Foreman proved that it's never too late for a comeback -- and never too early to believe.



Can Hamza help Bangladesh exorcise the Chhetri curse?

India talisman Sunil Chhetri has been a nightmare for Bangladesh in recent contests. While stopping Chhetri is no easy task, Hamza Choudhury's inclusion in the Bangladesh squad adds an unpredictable dynamic to the Asian Cup Qualifiers encounter between the two sides on March 25. A disciplined midfield performance could cut off the supply lines to the Indian great and perhaps, for the first time in over a decade, neutralise the Chhetri effect.

**Read full story on The Daily Star website.

Lewis-Skelly lights up Wembley

AGENCIES

At just 18 years old, Myles Lewis Skelly didn't just step onto the pitch at Wembley -- he stamped his name into England's history books in front of 80,000-plus crowd.

On a night brimming with anticipation, the Arsenal academy graduate became the youngest player to score on his senior debut for England, helping the Three Lions secure a 2-0 victory over Albania in their World Cup qualifying opener. His calm 20th-minute finish set the game's tone.

"He's an asset for us now," Declan Rice said post-match. "He's 18 years old and has got a long career."

It's been a meteoric rise for the young left back, who only received his first England call-up after a standout season with Arsenal's senior side. Yet nothing about the moment seemed too big for him.

"Week-on-week he's shown how good he is, and the fearlessness he has in his performance," Rice added. "He didn't even know he was starting until today, and I just knew he was going to have a good performance. He has that belief in himself."

That self belief was on full display in front of a roaring Wembley crowd, but it's also been evident behind the scenes. According to new England boss Thomas Tuchel, the teenager has quickly won over teammates and coaches alike.

"Amazing player. Amazing personality," Tuchel said with a smile. "He came into camp and showed straight away that it's normal to fall in love with him. Everything you see on the pitch you see off the pitch -- full of confidence, humour, and maturity."

With Monday's fixture against Latvia on the horizon, Tuchel hopes the milestone moment can ignite inspiration within the squad.

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BANGLADESH'S

NO. 1 CEMENT BRAND

NCP to suggest lowering voting age to 16 yrs

Wants 23 as minimum age for MPs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The National Citizen Party (NCP) will submit its initial reform proposals to the National Consensus Commission (NCC) today recommending that the minimum age for MP candidates be lowered to 23 and the voting age be lowered to 16.

Briefing journalists at the party's Rupayan Tower office in the capital's Banglamotor yesterday, NCP's focal point for reform coordination, Sarwar Tushar said the party believes that the minimum voting age can be 16.

Explaining this proposal, Tushar said, "This movement has been referred to globally as a 'Gen Z uprising'. In post-uprising Bangladesh and the upcoming election, they [Gen Z] will not be able to express their opinions simply because they are under 18. The NCP does not find this logical. Therefore, we will propose setting the minimum voting age at 16."

Tushar also mentioned that while the Constitution Reform Commission has proposed lowering the minimum age for parliamentary candidates to 21 years,

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India scraps 20pc duty on onion exports from April 1

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

India yesterday announced the scrapping of 20 percent duty on onion export with effect from April 1.

The Department of Revenue issued a notification to this effect yesterday on the Department of Consumer Affairs' communication.

The export duty was in place since September 13 last year.

To ensure domestic availability and discourage export of onion, the Indian government had imposed export duty, minimum export price (MEP), and export ban for almost five months from December 8, 2023 to May 3 last year.

Despite the restrictions, India's total onion export during FY 2023-24 was 17.17 lakh tonnes and 11.65 lakh tonnes in FY 2024-25 (till March 18 this year), an official statement said.

The monthly onion export went up from 0.72 lakh tonnes in September, 2024 to 1.85 lakh tonnes in January this year, it added.

The decision to withdraw the export duty on onion export "stands as another testament to the government's commitment to ensuring remunerative prices to farmers while maintaining affordability of onion to consumers at this crucial juncture when both wholesale and retail prices have softened following the expected arrival of Rabi crops in good quantities," said the statement.

Foreman's final bell rings at 76

P11

Prime Bank

HASANAH

PRAYER TIMING MARCH 23

Fazr Zohr Asr Magrib Esha

AZAN 4:44 12:45 4:45 6:11 7:45

JAMAT 4:54 1:15 5:00 6:26 8:15

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

SEHRI, IFTAR TIMING

RAMADAN MARCH SEHRI IFTAR

22 23 6:11

23 24 4:42 6:11

24 25 4:41 6:12



As Eid approaches, people are hurrying to complete the shopping for their families and friends. The photo was taken near the capital's Gausia Market yesterday where the entire street is full of shoppers and hawkers.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

BOAT CAPSIZE IN BAY Bodies of four Rohingyas found, 25 rescued

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) yesterday recovered four bodies after a boat reportedly carrying around 40 to 50 Rohingya refugees capsized in the Bay of Bengal early in the morning.

While, during the search operation, 25 men, women, and children were also rescued off the Teknaf coast in Cox's Bazar, several others, including a BGB member, were reportedly missing.

The missing BGB member, a sepoys, was serving at the border outpost of Shah Porir Island.

Confirming the incident, Lt Col Ashiqur Rahman, commanding officer of the Teknaf 2 BGB Battalion, said, "A boat carrying Rohingya refugees sank near the jetty at West Para of Shah Porir Island in Teknaf upazila while trying to illegally enter Bangladesh from Myanmar via the sea."

"The boat reportedly capsized after its keel gave in."

Informed, BGB personnel stationed

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Kamalapur Railway Station is teeming with people leaving Dhaka for their village homes yesterday. A lot of people leave early to avoid the Eid rush. This Eid holidays effectively start on March 26 for many.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Potato farmers facing losses

Many struggling to cover costs and failing to avail cold storage facilities as prices dip

SUKANTA HALDER, KONGKON KARMAKER, MOSTAFA SHABUJ, and TANJIL HASAN

Many farmers across Bangladesh are facing significant financial losses this year as potato prices have dropped below production costs during the peak harvest season.

Despite a bumper yield, many farmers are struggling to break even and are now worried about recovering their losses.

Meantwhile, farmers are urging the government to provide incentives for potato exports, reduce transportation costs, and promote the cultivation of export-quality varieties.

Encouraged by high prices during the potato planting season last November, farmers significantly increased their cultivation of the crop this year.

According to the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), potato cultivation surged to a record 5.24 lakh hectares this fiscal year, marking a 15 percent increase compared to the previous year. Farmers aimed to capitalise on last year's peak prices, which had soared as high as Tk 80 per kg, hoping for similar gains.

In Dhaka yesterday, potatoes were selling at Tk 20-25 per kg in retail markets. The price has been roughly the same for around a month, according to the data of the state-run

Trading Corporation of Bangladesh

The situation is worse in the potato-producing hubs like Bogura, Pabna, Jyoti, Thakurgaon, Rangpur, and Dinajpur, with farmers reporting prices as low as Tk 11-15 per kg – far below the production costs.

While the Department of Agricultural Marketing estimates the country's average production cost at Tk 14 per kg this season, for farmers in the northern region it's around Tk 20 per kg.

This has left many farmers fearing they will be unable to recoup their initial investment. They are now pinning their hopes on rising prices in the coming months or government intervention to support them.

This season, total production is expected to reach 1.20 crore tonnes, according to the Bangladesh Cold Storage Association, a major player in the local supply chain.

The figure is close to the 1.09 crore tonnes produced last season, according to DAE data, and surpasses the country's annual demand of around 90 lakh tonnes.

Although the government estimates that around 30 percent of the total produce is lost due to shortcomings in storage facilities, this oversupply means there may be little relief for

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Don't keep JS seats reserved for women
Khelafat Majlis tells consensus commission

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

During its talks with the National Consensus Commission, Khelafat Majlis proposed excluding pluralism from the fundamental principles of the constitution.

The party also suggested including "full faith in Allah" in the fundamental principles of the constitution and opposed reserving any seats for women in parliament.

The Electoral Reform Commission and the Constitution Reform Commission had proposed increasing the number of parliamentary seats to 400, with 100 seats reserved for women.

While Khelafat Majlis agreed to increasing the seats, it opposed reserving seats for women.

"All 400 constituencies should be open to all. There is no need to reserve 100 seats for women," Ahmed Abdul Quader, secretary general of Khelafat Majlis told the commission.

The party supported the proposal for bicameral

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MOB VIOLENCE
Govt being lenient towards those involved
Says Prof Anu Muhammad

A CORRESPONDENT, DU

The government showed leniency towards those involved in mob violence, said former Jahangirnagar University teacher Prof Anu Muhammad, also a member of the Ganatantrik Odhikar Committee.

He said some groups became active after the July uprising. These groups were committing atrocities against women and minorities. Women in the country were feeling unsafe, he said at a rally in front of the National Museum yesterday afternoon.

Student-People's Alliance organised the rally demanding justice for rape and abuse of women and children across the country and removal of the Home Affairs Adviser Lt Gen (retd) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury among others.

Anu Muhammad said, "A situation has been created where some groups are actively working to reduce women's presence and activism. They are trying to stop women's participation and their vocal presence in political, organisational, and cultural activities. They don't like women's activism, they don't like indigenous people, and they create divisions between minorities and majorities. They also create divisions like one between Shapla Chattar and Shahbagh."

Regarding rape and violence against women, the professor said, "Women of all ages -- be it children



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Space 'tornadoes' discovered around our galaxy's core

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Scientists say they've found "space tornadoes" swirling in the center of our Milky Way galaxy.

While the galaxy's center, including the supermassive black hole Sgr A, is known to be active and filled with swirling dust and gas molecules, the process has remained mysterious.

Using the Atacama Large Millimeter/sub-millimeter Array — a group of dozens of radio telescopes in the Chilean desert and the largest astronomical project in existence — astronomers were able to peel back the curtain and sharpen their view of the area. That's how they found the so-called "tornadoes."

"We can envision these as space tornadoes: they are violent streams of gas, they dissipate shortly, and they distribute materials into the environment efficiently," Xing Lu, a research professor at Shanghai Astronomical Observatory, said in a statement.

Lu is a corresponding author of the study, which was published in the journal *Astronomy & Astrophysics*.

