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Local polls too should be held under caretaker

Recommends local govt reform
commission, submits report to CA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Local Government Reform Commission has proposed holding all local government elections under a single schedule before the next national election.

The voter list being prepared for the national election can be utilised in the local government polls, according to the full report of the commission submitted to Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus yesterday.

Elections to all local government bodies, including those in the hill tracts, could be held this year, reads the report.

To do this, an ordinance can be issued to enact two laws regarding the five local government bodies – union parishad, upazila parishad, municipality, zila parishad, and city corporation.

The two laws would consolidate five existing laws and regulations to ensure a free and robust local government system, says the report.

The commission recommended forming a permanent local government commission which may get these tasks done by this June.

In future, local government elections should be held during the tenure of caretaker governments, reads the report.

Prof Tofail Ahmed, head of the reform commission, said the decision regarding local government polls can be made collectively by the government and political parties.

"However, we strongly advocate for holding local government elections immediately, as there is currently a leadership vacuum at the union, upazila, and zila levels across the country," he said while addressing a press conference at the Foreign Service Academy after submitting the report.

Upon receiving the report, the chief adviser expressed his strong commitment to transparency and public engagement with the reform process, according to the Chief Adviser's Press Wing. "Let us not delay. These reforms must move from paper to practice as soon as possible," he said.

Tofail said, "We are recommending that the Consensus Commission review and reflect on the report."

The commission's report also identifies critical challenges facing urban local bodies, particularly the Dhaka city corporations.

"Departmental inefficiencies and rampant bribery remain persistent," Tofail said. "From large infrastructure projects to everyday services, corruption flows through multiple layers – project-level, service-level, and inter-departmental. Unless we address these, effective governance will remain a dream."

The interim government formed the eight-member Local Government Reform Commission led by local governance expert Prof Tofail Ahmed in November last year. It submitted a preliminary report on February 19.

The commission also made around 180 other recommendations

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

ROOPPUR PAYMENT
Govt to seek
US sanction
waiver

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and
ASIFUR RAHMAN

Bangladesh will be seeking permission from the US treasury to repay Russia for the Rooppur nuclear power plant project, whose dues have piled up in the Bangladesh Bank's escrow account after sanctions were levied on Russia following its invasion of Ukraine.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2



Keep an eye out for
an op ed written
by distinguished
scholar Prof
Rehman Sobhan
which The Daily Star
will publish in two
installments on April
23 and April 24. It is
an exceptional read.



Demonstrators hold up signs during a 'Day of Action' protest against US President Donald Trump's policies and executive actions in downtown Chicago, Illinois, US, on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP



PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Dhaka South City Corporation is expanding the 5km Rayerbazar Sluice Gate to Kamrangirchar Lohar Bridge road into an 8-lane inner ring road. However, the project is exacerbating the already dire encroachment situation on the banks of the old channel of the Buriganga river. The photo taken on April 12 in Lalbagh area shows that piling is being conducted within the boundaries of the channel along an 870-metre stretch by removing the concrete embankment protection. This work is going on while dredging of the channel remains incomplete, and parts of the channel remain affected by encroachment from influential locals.

TALKS WITH CONSENSUS COMMISSION BNP stands against floor crossing

Objects to 2-term limit for PM, changes
to judges' appointment system

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP has rejected the Constitution Reform Commission's proposal that would bar any individual from serving more than two terms as prime minister, calling it "undemocratic and unjustified".

"If the people want someone to return as prime minister after a break following two terms, that opportunity should remain. There is no logical reason to restrict it," said BNP Standing Committee member Salahuddin Ahmed.

He was speaking to reporters yesterday after discussions with the National Consensus Commission at the LD Hall of

**BNP says a more
neutral and credible
process to appoint
the caretaker
government chief is
necessary to restore
public trust in
electoral oversight.**

the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

The meeting, held behind closed doors, marked the second day of talks aimed at reaching a consensus on proposals submitted by five reform commissions.

The BNP also reiterated its opposition to the formation of a National Constitutional

Council, which it said would undermine the authority of the prime minister.

The party raised concerns over the proposed establishment of a Supreme Court Secretariat and a new mechanism to appoint judges, asserting that such reforms cannot be implemented without amending articles 95 and 116 of the constitution. These articles deal with the appointment of judges and the control and discipline of subordinate courts.

Salahuddin maintained the party's support for judicial independence, but warned that any move to introduce judicial reforms outside the

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

NCP for polls only after electoral reforms

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The National Citizen Party has urged the Election Commission to hold the next general election only after the final recommendations made by the National Consensus Commission on electoral reforms are implemented.

NCP Chief Coordinator Nasiruddin Patwari believes it is possible to implement the reforms and hold elections within the timeframe set by Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus.

He made the remarks while briefing the media after meeting Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) AMM Nasir Uddin at the Election Commission (EC) headquarters in the capital's Agargaon yesterday.

A five member delegation met with the CEC to discuss a range of issues. Over the two-hour meeting, NCP representatives engaged in discussions on party demands, registration deadlines, and other election-related matters.

Referring to a letter sent to the EC on Thursday, in which NCP sought an extension of the deadline for new political party registration, Nasiruddin said the party demanded that the Election Commission hold the election following reforms in line with the public demand.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

MAGURA RAPE Court accepts charge sheet

Victim's sister's father-in-law charged
with rape; 3 others with intimidation,
destroying evidence

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenaidah

A local court yesterday accepted the charge sheet filed by police a month after the death of the eight-year-old girl, who was brutally raped while visiting her sister's in-laws in Magura.

Magura Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal Judge M Zahid Hasan later fixed Wednesday for framing the charges.

Monirul Islam Mukul, the public prosecutor of the tribunal, said, "After that, the trial process will be expedited by taking the testimonies of witnesses as soon as possible."

On April 13, police submitted the charge sheet against four accused.

In the charge sheet, the father-in-law of the child's sister has been charged with rape resulting in death.

The husband and brother-in-law of the child's sister have been charged with intimidation, and the sister's mother-in-law with destroying evidence of the crime.

According to the charges, the rape took place in the early hours of March 6.

On March 1, the child had gone to visit her elder sister's in-laws' house.

On March 6, around 11:30am, the child was taken to the 250 bed Magura Hospital in an unconscious state.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

Bangladesh, China vow to speed up cooperation

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh and China yesterday expressed a shared commitment to transform recent high-level discussions into actionable projects across a range of sectors, including infrastructure, trade, healthcare, education, and culture.

"Our top priority now is to move forward with the plans we discussed during the China visit," Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus said at a meeting with Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Yao Wen at the State Guest House Jamuna, where they reviewed the outcomes of Yunus's recent visit to China and outlined the next steps for accelerating Bangladesh-China cooperation.

"We want to make sure the momentum is not lost," the chief adviser's deputy press secretary Apurba Jahangir quoted him as saying.

The Chinese ambassador echoed Yunus's sentiment: "This is also our top priority. We had one of the highest-level agenda meetings in China, and we do not want to wait another two to three years just to sign agreements -- we want to implement them quickly."

One of the topics discussed was the development of the Mongla and Anowara economic zones.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3



The photo shows a makeshift charging rig for battery-run autorickshaws on a pavement in the Tejgaon Industrial Area. This dodgy setup poses a risk of electrical short circuits, potentially leading to accidents involving pedestrians. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

NCP for polls

FROM PAGE 1

He said the EC should depend on the National Consensus Commission's full report on electoral reform.

Nasiruddin said once finalised, the government would forward the final report to relevant constitutional bodies, and the NCP expects full implementation. "We discussed the electoral system in our meeting with the commission and insisted that the final report be enforced."

He emphasised that "every page, every word" of the reform report must be translated into rules and policies to guide the next election. "The CEC agreed--there must be alignment with the commission. Without it, trust is impossible."

He also criticised past manipulation of elections, stating, "For the last 15 years, the process has been engineered. We want that to end in a new Bangladesh."

The NCP has called for an investigation and accountability for those involved in the last three national elections.

Nasiruddin said, "The Awami League had pushed the country and its institutions into a fascist framework, stripping the people of their right to vote. The Election Commission also shares responsibility for this. Those who contested in the past three elections, as well as the EC officials and staff involved, must be investigated through proper procedures and brought to justice--so that no constitutional institution or individual can side with any political party in the future."

He also said that over the past 15 years, people's right to vote was taken away. Through fraud and manipulation, Bangladesh was transformed into a fascist structure--and the Election Commission played a significant role behind that fascist framework.

"We want a new, transparent electoral path for Bangladesh."

NCP'S NINE DEMANDS

The NCP leader said that they have raised nine demands with the CEC. These are: candidates must submit their nomination papers in person, certification of the election by the EC within 48 hours, investigation of candidates' affidavits to verify their authenticity, amendments to the code of conduct and expenditure rules, stopping loan defaulters from participating in elections, cancellation of candidacy if false information is found in the affidavit, and ensuring they cannot hold office even if elected, ensuring voting rights for expatriates, extending the deadline for political party registration, and monitoring political parties to ensure they practice internal democratic processes.

He also said that if these demands are not implemented, it will not be possible to participate in the election or exercise the right to vote.

EC EXTENDS PARTY'S REGISTRATION DEADLINE

Yesterday, the EC extended the deadline for new political party registration by two months, setting it for June 22. The original deadline was April 20.

"Until Thursday, seven parties applied for registration and 20 others sought an extended deadline. Under these circumstances, the time for securing registration has been extended," EC Senior Secretary Akhtar Ahmed told reporters at the EC headquarters yesterday.

He said the parties seeking registration need to apply within the extended deadline, fulfilling the related legal requirements and exhausting the procedures.

BNP stands against floor crossing

FROM PAGE 1

the Declaration of Independence -- into the constitution's preamble and fundamental principles.

During the talks, the BNP voiced strong reservations over the proposal to reduce the parliamentary term from five years to four.

It also objected to a proposal to change article 70 that would allow MPs to vote against their party on all matters except money bills.

Instead, the BNP suggested allowing MPs to participate in discussions -- without voting -- on issues like constitutional amendments, confidence motions, and national security.

The party disagreed with the commission's recommendation for proportional representation in a proposed upper house of parliament, insisting that any decision on a bicameral legislature must come through open debate in an elected parliament.

The BNP reiterated its support for restoring the constitutional provision that mentions "absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah".

On fundamental rights, Salahuddin said the state must not promise rights it cannot realistically ensure, warning that an overly broad definition could create economic burdens.

Despite major disagreements, the BNP found common ground on some issues. It agreed to incorporate the principles of equality, human dignity, and social justice -- as reflected in

the Declaration of Independence -- into the constitution's preamble and fundamental principles.

The party also supported the proposal to increase the number of reserved seats for women in parliament from 50 to 100, though it recommended keeping the current system in the next general election.

The BNP called for reforms to the caretaker government system, focusing on the method of appointing the chief adviser.

Party leaders argued that a more neutral and credible appointment process is necessary to restore public trust in electoral oversight.

The party strongly emphasised reforming the Election Commission, demanding greater legal and institutional safeguards to ensure its independence and capacity to hold free and fair elections.

In addition, the BNP advocated for the strengthening of local government bodies, stressing the need for genuine decentralisation backed by sufficient resources and authority.

On judicial reforms, the party proposed separating the Appellate and High Court divisions of the Supreme Court and suggested forming a separate constitutional court to deal with constitutional matters exclusively.

Alleging that the Anti-Corruption Commission is often used for political purposes, the BNP demanded its full

autonomy. Similar calls were made for the depoliticisation of the police and civil administration to ensure neutrality and professionalism in state institutions.

The party maintained that while some reforms would require constitutional amendments, many could be implemented through ordinary legislations passed by parliament.

It stressed the importance of political consensus in driving any successful reform agenda.

The meeting, which lasted from 11:00am to 5:30pm, was attended by five BNP representatives: Nazrul Islam Khan and Salahuddin Ahmed of the Standing Committee; party chairperson's adviser Md Ismail Jobullah; lawyer Ruhul Quddus Kajol; and former secretary Abu Md Moniruzzaman Khan.

Representing the commission were its Vice-Chairman Prof Ali Riaz, Justice Md Emdadul Haque, Badul Alam Majumdar, Iftekharuzzaman, and Safar Raj Hossain. Monir Haidar, special assistant to the chief adviser (Consensus), moderated the session.

Party sources said that while the BNP showed flexibility on minor issues, it held firm on matters of constitutional significance.

Though the party aligned with the commission on broad democratic principles, deep disagreements remain over procedural and implementation frameworks, setting the stage for further political negotiations.

To overcome these challenges, the formation of a permanent and effective Local Government Commission could create opportunities for the development, decentralisation, and quality enhancement of local government services, it added.

The full report says the term "local administration" should be replaced with "local government" in the constitution.

It recommends that article 119(i)

of the constitution include a new line, "The Election Commission shall independently conduct elections of local [government] councils." This would enable the EC to constitutionally schedule local elections, without having to wait for the government's request.

The reform commission proposed a parliamentary model for all local government institutions across the country.

Like the national government, local governments can adopt a parliamentary system. In local elections, only members or councillors would be directly elected by public vote. Subsequently, executive positions such as mayor or chairman would be elected internally by the respective councils, says the report.

If the proposals are implemented, holding the local government elections would take one or two months. Currently, it takes around 225 days, says Prof Tofail.

Local polls too should be held under caretaker

FROM PAGE 1

that include handing over the tasks of 30 government offices to the zila parishads in the three hill tract districts.

The Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs should be the overseeing authority of the local government bodies of the three districts.

In the long run, there should be city governments in Dhaka and Chattogram. The city government system can be tested in the nine city corporations.

The report says local government institutions are facing challenges and struggling to maintain effective coordination with the central government. Administrative complexities, financial constraints, and legal ambiguities often hinder the efficiency of local government institutions.

To overcome these challenges, the formation of a permanent and effective Local Government Commission could create opportunities for the development, decentralisation, and quality enhancement of local government services, it added.

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Court accepts charge sheet

FROM PAGE 1

On March 8, the child's mother filed a case with Magura Sadar Police Station under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act on charges of rape and causing injury through rape. The child's sister's husband, brother-in-law, father-in-law, and mother-in-law were named as accused.

The child died while undergoing treatment at the Combined Military Hospital in Dhaka on March 13. That evening, the child's body was taken to Magura.

After the first funeral, an agitated crowd vandalised and set fire to the house of the child's sister's in-laws.

On March 15, the child's sister's father-in-law had given a confessional

Russia, Ukraine trade blame

REUTERS, Kyiv

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said yesterday Russian forces were making a pretence of a one-day Easter ceasefire announced by President Vladimir Putin, continuing overnight attempts to inflict frontline losses on Ukraine.

Russia's defence ministry, however, said that

Ukraine had broken the ceasefire more than a thousand times, inflicting damages to infrastructure and causing civilian deaths.

The ministry said that Ukrainian forces had shot at Russian positions 444 times while it had counted more than 900 Ukrainian drone attacks. It said the border districts of the Bryansk, Kursk and Belgorod regions have been attacked.

Putin, hours before heading to an Orthodox Easter service late on Saturday, ordered his forces to "stop all military activity" along the front line in the three-year-old war until midnight Moscow time (2100 GMT) yesterday.

The gesture followed a US announcement that it could abandon peace talks within days unless Moscow and Kyiv showed they were serious about negotiating.

Local polls too should be held under caretaker

It will also save public money, he said, adding that between 2021 and 2024, the government spent approximately Tk 2,300 crore on local government elections.

Reserved women's seats in each local government institution can be filled through a rotational ward reservation system. This would eliminate duality in representation and allow women to participate in governance and development through their own constituencies.

A uniform organisational structure should exist across both rural and urban institutions. A dedicated service structure called "Local Government Service" should be established, allowing for both upward and downward mobility within the system. Personnel should be able to move between Union Parishads and City Corporations, enabling promotion and transfers.

Each ward of a union parishad can consist of a population of 1,200-1,500, which means every union parishad will have a minimum of 9 wards and a maximum of 39 wards. Currently, each ward accommodates a population ranging from 5,000 to 4,75,000.

The commission also proposed the introduction of a ward system for upazila and zila parishads.

At the upazila level, it suggested the establishment of civil and criminal courts, along with alternative dispute resolution (ADR) courts. These ADR courts would operate under the leadership of a senior assistant judge to efficiently resolve disputes.

The commission recommended handing over the upazila health complexes and union health and family welfare centres, along with their manpower and resources, to the respective upazila parishads and union parishads.

It proposed transferring the 14,000 community clinics, most of which are nearly non-functional, to the union health and family welfare centres. Union parishads and upazila parishads may also be given the authority to oversee the primary education system.

It proposed that one-third of the VAT should be allocated to the local government bodies. Only union parishads, municipalities and city corporations will be entitled to collect taxes.

Court accepts charge sheet

statement in court that he had raped the child alone.

Magura Senior Judicial Magistrate Sabayasachi Roy had recorded the statement under Section 164 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

In his statement, the man said that on the morning of March 6, he found the child alone in his younger son's room and attempted to rape and murder her.

On April 7, the DNA report found evidence of the involvement of the main accused (the sister's father-in-law) in the incident, confirmed Md Rezaul Haque, the deputy inspector general (DIG) of Khulna.

All of the accused are currently in jail.

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Yunus to fly to Doha today for Earthna Summit

BSS, Dhaka

Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus will travel to Doha today on a four-day official visit to attend the Earthna Summit 2025.

He was invited by Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani, Abul Kalam Azad Majumder, the chief adviser's deputy press secretary, told BSS.

In addition to attending several high-level meetings at the summit, Yunus is also expected to meet the amir, Azad said.

Foreign Adviser Md Touhid Hossain, Energy Adviser Muhammad Fouzul Kabir Khan and Industries Adviser Adilur Rahman Khan are likely to accompany him during the visit.

Four national women athletes from Bangladesh will also accompany the chief adviser on the tour. The athlete delegation includes footballers Aleida Khandakar and Shaheda Akhter Ripa, and cricketers Sumaiya Akhter and Sharmin Sultana.

The second edition of the Earthna Summit, held under the theme "Building Our Legacy: Sustainability, Innovation and Traditional Knowledge", underscores Qatar's commitment to advancing sustainability in hot and arid environments

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6



The Banani road-8 has been dug up down the middle for drainage work, disrupting both vehicular and pedestrian movement. Locals said the authorities began the work on Friday without any safety measures in place. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Country at a crossroads
Says Fakhrul; urges party members to be vigilant

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Secretary General Mirz Fakhrul Islam Alamgir has expressed hope that a solution will soon be found through dialogue and that the country will regain people's representation through a proper election.

"We believe that a truly acceptable solution will come through discussions, and very soon, the people will have their representation through an election," said Fakhrul.

He made the remarks while addressing a memorial discussion for late BNP Vice Chairman Abdurrahman Al Noman at the Institute of Diploma Engineers in Dhaka.

Urging party members to remain vigilant, Fakhrul said, "We must remember that our struggle is not over yet. We have not yet achieved a democratic transition. We have not yet achieved an elected government or parliament through an election, have we? We must continue our efforts with caution, determination, and awareness."

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

Govt to expedite hiring of 40,000 for public sector

To recruit 30,000 teachers, 6,000 doctors, 3,500 nurses

BAHARAM KHAN

The government has decided to expedite the recruitment of 6,000 doctors, 30,000 assistant primary teachers, and 3,500 nurses to urgently address the rising number of vacancies in key public sector positions.

The decision came at a special inter-ministerial meeting held at the Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources yesterday, where senior officials discussed the staffing crisis plaguing multiple ministries.

The meeting was chaired by Energy Adviser Fouzul Kabir Khan, who also serves on the Public Administration Advisory Committee.

Advisers to the ministries of health, education, and primary and mass education attended, along with the cabinet secretary, the senior secretary of the Ministry of Public Administration, and the secretary of the Public Service Commission (PSC).

As per the meeting's outcome, 2,000 doctors will be recruited through a special Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) examination to

be held by September. The Ministry of Public Administration will request the PSC to issue the circular for this recruitment by April 30.

Another 4,000 doctors will be hired in phases over the coming months.

In addition, the Health Services Division informed the meeting that the viva voce for 2,300 nurses is already underway. Once this process is complete, recruitment for an additional 3,500 nurses will begin to help meet the demand at public hospitals and healthcare centres.

The Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, however, said it cannot proceed with fresh recruitment due to an ongoing legal complication surrounding the promotion of around 30,000 assistant teachers. A court hearing on the matter is scheduled for April 23. If cleared, the ministry plans to immediately begin recruiting 30,000 new assistant teachers.

Meanwhile, the Secondary and Higher Education Division reported it is in the process of appointing 2,876 teachers across

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

The latest figures from the Ministry of Public Administration's Statistics of Civil Officers and Staff show that of the 1,916,519 approved posts in government, 473,001 -- or roughly 25 percent -- remain vacant.

'Unacceptable, controversial'
Says Jamaat, IAB, Hefajat on Women's Affairs Reform Commission's report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami, Islami Andolan Bangladesh, and Hefajat-e Islam yesterday demanded that the government immediately scrap the "unacceptable and controversial" recommendations of the Women's Affairs Reform Commission.

The commission submitted its report, containing 433 recommendations, to the chief adviser on Saturday.

The groups denounced the commission's report, terming the recommendations "anti-Islamic and ideologically biased".

Jamaat objected to a proposal on page 25 recommending the abolition of inheritance

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

KILLING OF UNIV STUDENT 8 including two SAD leaders sued JCD, SAD at odds over the incident

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eight individuals, including two leaders of the Banani Thana unit of Students Against Discrimination (SAD), have been sued in connection with the killing of Primeasia University student



Jahidul Islam

Jahidul's cousin, Humayun Kabir, filed the case with Banani Police Station early yesterday, naming eight people and accusing 25-30 unnamed individuals, said Banani Police Station Officer-in-Charge Russel Sarwar.

Humayun said he identified the named accused using CCTV footage.

The named accused include Sobhan Niyyaz Tushar, joint convener of SAD's Banani Thana unit, and Hriday Mazi, joint member secretary of the same unit.

The other six are Meheraj Islam, Abu Jahl Giffari alias Pias, Mahathir Hasan, Rifat, Ali, and Fahim.

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রাত বা দিন
ডাচ-বাংলা ব্যাংক
ফাস্ট ট্র্যাক
খোলা প্রতিদিন



ডাচ-বাংলা র্যাঙ্ক
ফাস্ট ট্র্যাক সার্ভিস
দিন-রাত 24 ঘণ্টা টাকা জমা, উত্তোলন এবং পার্টানো যায়
সব ধরনের ব্যাংকিং একাউন্টসহ
রকেট একাউন্ট খোলা, লোন প্রসেস করা, কার্ড এবং টেক বই
ইস্যু করার ব্যাপারে সহযোগিতা করা হয়



ডাচ-বাংলা র্যাঙ্ক
আপনার বিশ্বস্ত সহযোগী

Govt to expedite hiring

FROM PAGE 3
various institutions. Any remaining vacant positions will be filled through a special BCS examination.

To address the chronic delays and procedural bottlenecks in public hiring, the meeting also decided in principle to form a separate PSC for non-cadre recruitment.

A senior official at the meeting said the existing PSC has long been overwhelmed, as it is tasked with recruiting both cadre and first-class non-cadre officers.

Recruitment of third- and fourth-class staff is currently handled by individual ministries and agencies, often resulting in prolonged vacancies and allegations of irregularities.

The proposal for a separate commission is not new. During the previous government's tenure, an evaluation committee recommended forming a dedicated body for non-cadre recruitment, but the suggestion was never implemented.

Article 137 of the

Constitution allows the establishment of more than one commission, while Article 140 empowers the PSC to "conduct tests and examinations for the selection of suitable candidates for appointment to the service of the Republic."

The latest figures from the Ministry of Public Administration's Statistics of Civil Officers and Staff show that of the 1,916,519 approved posts in government, 473,001 -- or roughly 25 percent -- remain vacant.

Among these, 1,353,509 posts fall within grades 13 to 20, which represent about 71 percent of all civil service positions. Officers in grades 1 to 9 are categorised as first-class, grades 10 to 12 as second-class, and grades 13 and below as third- and fourth-class posts.

Fouzul Kabir Khan told The Daily Star that ministries and divisions have been instructed to speed up the recruitment process across their departments and affiliated agencies.

"However, today's

Frame July

FROM PAGE 5
NCP leaders present at the meeting included Convener Nahid Islam, Member Secretary Akhter Hossen, Senior Joint Convener Ariful Islam Adib, and others.

Khelafat Majlish was represented by Secretary General Ahmad Abdul Qadir, Nayeb-e-Ameer Maulana Sakhwat Hossain, and Maulana Ahmad Ali Qasemi, among others.

During a break in the meeting, Ahmad Abdul Qadir read out a written statement to the media, while Nahid Islam responded to questions from journalists.

Take steps

FROM PAGE 5
Majhipara and Islampur villages. Yet, the Water Development Board has not taken any effective measures to prevent river erosion, they alleged.

They also said that several mosques, temples, educational institutions, markets, homesteads and vast agricultural land are at risk of erosion.

Contacted, Rakibul Hasan, executive engineer of BWDB in Kurigram, said riverbank protection work is underway at several places in the union.

Tell me, where is my father?

FROM PAGE 3
Now a teenager and eighth-grade student, Hridi said through tears, "I can't bear being without my father anymore. After August 5, we weren't supposed to be standing like this. If there's no one left in Aynagar, then where are our fathers and uncles?"

Imon -- son of Omar Faruk, who disappeared from Chattogram's Patenga in 2014 -- said Rab picked up his father on February 4 that year, and he has been missing ever since.

"Even after eight months in power, the interim government has failed to trace our loved ones," he said.

Imon demanded the immediate removal and trial of officials accused of involvement in disappearances and killings. "As long as they remain in service, neither we nor our families are safe," he said.

Afroza Islam Ankhi -- sister of BNP leader

Sajedul Islam Sumon, who was picked up in December 2013 -- said, "We've been protesting on the streets for 13 years. It's shocking and shameful that even today, we have to stand here to demand justice."

Following the protest, Mayer Dak coordinator Sanjida Islam Tulee submitted a six-point memorandum to Chief Prosecutor Mohammad Tajul Islam of the International Crimes Tribunal.

She warned that failure to act would result in wider protests.

Their demands include public disclosure of the names of officials involved; the removal and prosecution of perpetrators; preservation of evidence from Aynagar; legal action against those who destroyed it; constitutional reforms to prevent further abuse; and formal recognition of the victims' suffering.

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opposition and rights based organisations, including Nagorik Oikya President Mahmudur Rahman Manna and Gono Odhikar Parishad General Secretary Rashed Khan, joined in solidarity.

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The summit serves as a platform for exploring how both traditional knowledge and innovative approaches can inform modern sustainability, helping to shape a more resilient and inclusive future.

The two-day Earthna Summit, taking place from April 22 to 23, will cover a wide range of topics through presentations, interactive panel discussions, workshops and roundtables.

Leaders from several

Safe motherhood

FROM PAGE 5
However, she stressed that it is not the government's responsibility alone. To achieve this goal, public awareness, active involvement of families and communities, relentless efforts of doctors and health workers, and technological innovation are all essential, she added.

Secretary of the Health Education and Family

Country at a crossroads

FROM PAGE 3
"The present time is a crucial test for us," he added.

"You must have noticed -- in newspapers, on television, in talk shows -- there is a certain unrest in the country. Even predetermined matters are being questioned," he said.

Words like "reform" and "election" are being mentioned more frequently these days, Fakhrul also said.

"We believe that all parties, political groups, and everyone involved should responsibly and patiently address these issues through dialogue," he added.

Fakhrul also highlighted the need to strengthen BNP's organisational

Fascist Hasina has fled the country. A possibility of change has emerged. At this critical time, it is important to guide public opinion in the right direction and lead the people properly.

capacity.

The country is now at a crossroads, where everyone is in a state of uncertainty, said the BNP leader.

"Fascist Hasina has fled the country. A possibility of change has emerged. At this critical time, it is important to guide public opinion in the right direction and lead the people properly," he said.

Unacceptable

FROM PAGE 3
of men and women identically. Parwar said Islam acknowledges the equal dignity of men and women.

Its Secretary General Mia Golam Parwar said the existing inheritance law is based on Islamic principles, and repealing it would be like taking a stance against Islam.

He also criticised a proposal on page 9 suggesting a uniform family law for all religions and the implementation of marriage and family regulations under the CEDAW charter.

CEDAW stands for the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, an international human rights treaty adopted by the United Nations in 1979.

In the statement, Parwar said many CEDAW provisions contradicted Islamic beliefs, including the concepts of "nikah" and guardianship.

Furthermore, Jamaat rejected the proposal to treat the familial roles

identically. Parwar said Islam acknowledges the equal dignity of men and women but recognises their natural differences.

Islami Andolan Bangladesh's Central Women's Division also rejected the commission's report, calling it disconnected from the country's cultural and religious context.

The division's chief Nurul Sabina, deputy chief Kohinoor Begum, and coordinator Hafeza Bushra said the report reflected Western feminist ideologies.

Hafaj-e-Islam, in a separate briefing, demanded that the commission itself be scrapped alongside its recommendations on inheritance and religious laws.

Echoing similar sentiments, the Sammilito Ulama Mashayekh Parishad, a platform of Islamic scholars, also denounced the report.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Local Government Engineering Department
Office of the Upazila Engineer
Bancharampur, Brahmanbaria
www.lged.gov.bd

Reference No. 46.02.1204.883.14.003.25-238

Date: 17/04/2025

e-Tender Notice

Tender No. 03/2024-25

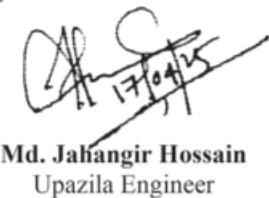
e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the Procurement of work as stated as below:

SI No.	Package No.	Name of works	Tender ID No.
01	ADP/BANC/BRA/2024-25/03	(1) Construction of Guide Wall at Kadamtali Dakkhin Govt. Primary School (2) Improvement of Paratoli Purba Govt. Primary School to Fazlul Karim Master Bari Road (3) Improvement of CC Road from Bhurburia Mannan Mia Bari to Morshed Mia Bari Road. & (4) Repair work of Sonarampur to Pahariakandi Road under Bancharampur Upazila.	1099671

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required.

The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered bank's branches up to 04/05/2025 at 17.00pm.

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).


Md. Jahangir Hossain
Upazila Engineer
Bancharampur, Brahmanbaria
E-mail: ue.bancharampur@lged.gov.bd

Govt to expedite hiring

various institutions. Any remaining vacant positions will be filled through a special BCS examination.

To address the chronic delays and procedural bottlenecks in public hiring, the meeting also decided in principle to form a separate PSC for non-cadre recruitment.

A senior official at the meeting said the existing PSC has long been overwhelmed, as it is tasked with recruiting both cadre and first-class non-cadre officers.

Recruitment of third- and fourth-class staff is currently handled by individual ministries and agencies, often resulting in prolonged vacancies and allegations of irregularities.

The proposal for a separate commission is not new. During the previous government's tenure, an evaluation committee recommended forming a dedicated body for non-cadre recruitment, but the suggestion was never implemented.

Article 137 of the

Constitution allows the establishment of more than one commission, while Article 140 empowers the PSC to "conduct tests and examinations for the selection of suitable candidates for appointment to the service of the Republic."

The latest figures from the Ministry of Public Administration's Statistics of Civil Officers and Staff show that of the 1,916,519 approved posts in government, 473,001 -- or roughly 25 percent -- remain vacant.

Among these, 1,353,509 posts fall within grades 13 to 20, which represent about 71 percent of all civil service positions. Officers in grades 1 to 9 are categorised as first-class, grades 10 to 12 as second-class, and grades 13 and below as third- and fourth-class posts.

Fouzul Kabir Khan told The Daily Star that ministries and divisions have been instructed to speed up the recruitment process across their departments and affiliated agencies.

"However, today's

[yesterday] meeting focused specifically on fast-tracking urgent recruitments in the Health and Education ministries," he said.

The Public Administration Reform Commission has also recommended forming multiple PSCs in its latest report to streamline public sector recruitment.

Frame July

FROM PAGE 5
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Leaders from several

Welfare Division Sarwar Bari, WHO Representative to Bangladesh Ahmed Jamsheed Mohamed, Director General of the DGHS Prof Abu Jafor, and Director General of the Directorate General of Health Education Prof Nazmul Hossain, among others, spoke at the programme. Health Services Division Secretary Saidur Rahman chaired the event.

Country at a crossroads

FROM PAGE 3
"The present time is a crucial test for us," he added.

"You must have noticed -- in newspapers, on television, in talk shows -- there is a certain unrest in the country. Even predetermined matters are being questioned," he said.

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VISUAL ART EXHIBITION

'Kromosho': Munem Wasif's artistic homecoming at Bengal Shilpalay

From a critical perspective, Old Dhaka is the most unlivable part of the city and a testament to our greed and collective amnesia. Yet, strangely, this part of the city also has a "life," which is inexplicable.

SHAHBAZ NAHIAN

Around the mid-2000s, a young Munem Wasif, with his rickety Soviet-era Zenit camera, found himself indulging in the allures of the older parts of Dhaka. Infinite lived experiences and thousands of shutter counts later, his magnum opus, *Belonging*, came to life in 2012. Little did he know that the photo book would become one of the most revered photographic bodies of work in Bangladesh's visual art history.

Since then, much has flown through Buriganga's black water park, and Wasif's artistic practice evolved and branched out. From *Seeds Shall Set Us Free* to *Collapse*, he chiselled himself into one of the finest from this part of the world. More importantly, his love affair with Old Dhaka never ceased after *Belonging*.

After almost 16 years of his journey with visual arts, Munem Wasif is currently hosting a solo exhibition in Dhaka. Titled *Kromosho*, the ongoing exhibition at Bengal Shilpalay witnessed a house full opening day last Friday. Notably, photographer-activist Shahidul Alam and architectural historian urbanist Kazi Khaleed Ashraf, among others, graced the inauguration. Moreover, Tanzim Wahab is credited as the exhibition's curatorial adviser, with Iftekhar Hassan as project assistant, and Dehsar Works on architectural design. The open for all event is scheduled to run until May 31.

When inquired about *Kromosho*, Munem Wasif expressed, "I felt something was missing after the publication of *Belonging*. I figured that perhaps I only captured the outer shell, the people, and their festivities. I failed to touch the soul of their day-to-day life. That is when I first



Kazi Khaleed Ashraf, Shahidul Alam, Luva Nahid Choudhury, and Munem Wasif (from left to right) spoke during the opening ceremony.

PHOTOS: THABIT AL BASHAR

thought of producing my film *Kheyal*... This exhibition bears witness to my transformation over more than a decade."

Kromosho is predominantly arranged in three phases, showcasing a blend of photography, film, and sculpture that revolves around Wasif's exploration of Old Dhaka. From the ethereal black-and-white images of his *Belonging* era, juxtaposed with newly shot colour images in *Stereo*, to the screening of *Kheyal*, and the installations featured in *Shamano* and *Paper Negative*—the exhibition offers a vast collection of moments spanning past, present, and future: some recorded, some

staged, and others entirely imagined.

From a critical perspective, Old Dhaka is the most unlivable part of the city and a testament to our greed and collective amnesia. Yet, strangely, this part of the city also has a "life," which is inexplicable. If you learn to perceive far beyond the clichés and breathe the true air of its alleys, this part of the city will engulf and take you to an addictive space that cannot be captured through cameras or words.

However, Munem Wasif's *Kromosho*, which translates to "gradually" in Bangla, becomes more than just another psychological journal of an artist. Perhaps it is trying to remind us to introspect.

NEWS

Chaos over cuffs at ICT

FROM PAGE 12
former prime minister's advisers Salman F Rahman and Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, former justice Shamsuddin Chowdhury Manik, former home secretary Jahangir Alam, and former lawmaker Mohammad Solaiman Salim.

Our correspondent saw at least two of them in handcuffs.

According to police, the accused, after being disembarked from the prison van in cuffs and taken to a lock-up room on the court premises, held a meeting. Forcibly retired Maj Gen Ziaul Ahsan threw his helmet in anger, while several others were visibly enraged.

During the proceedings, former minister Shahjahan Khan sought permission to speak. He refuted the police officer's claims: "What has been said here is not true."

Clad in a white panjapi and pyjama, he said, "I was handcuffed from behind when inside the van and outside. I'm a freedom fighter. My father and we six brothers fought in the Liberation War under the leadership of Amir Hossain Amu. So did Rashed Khan Menon and Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury. We liberated this country. We deserve dignity."

"I asked the police whether handcuffs were necessary for such a short distance [from jail to court]. They said it was a court order. I don't know if that is true."

Chief Prosecutor Tajul stated that Ziaul's act of throwing his helmet posed a security risk, adding that all the accused were treated as per protocol.

Shahjahan also objected to Tajul allegedly calling him a "former Awami League leader", saying that the Awami League is not a banned party and thus he is not a "former leader".

Later, Shahjahan Khan said, "We didn't handcuff the Razakars. Why are we being handcuffed? This is shameful."

Of the 19 accused, Lt Col (retd) Faruk Khan, visibly exhausted, was walking with a cane while being escorted by police. Salman F Rahman entered with his head lowered, while Kamal Ahmed Majumder stumbled, appearing frail.

Meanwhile, the tribunal extended the deadline for the investigation of a case filed against former minister and Awami League general secretary Obaidul Quader and 44 others, including those who were in court yesterday. The new deadline is July 20.

He also claimed that some of them had hurled insults such as "Rajakar bachecha (offspring of Razakars)" in the lock-up room.

At that, tribunal member Justice Md Shoful Alam Mahmood said no such phrase should be uttered on court premises.

Bangladesh, China

FROM PAGE 2
Bangladesh Investment Development Authority Executive Chairman Chowdhury Ashik Mahmud Bin Harun said preparations are underway and, once completed, the zones will be handed over to developers to begin implementation.

Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to launching a long-term 50-year master plan on water management, including work on the Teesta River system.

They also discussed a plan to procure four new vessels from China, with the Chinese side assuring that the process would be completed by June this year.

The Chinese ambassador further stated that China's commerce minister will visit Bangladesh soon, accompanied by a 100-member delegation of investors aiming to explore new investment opportunities.

"We will organise a mini-investment

summit focused on Chinese investors to strengthen sector-specific collaboration," said Ashik.

Healthcare cooperation featured prominently in the discussions.

The Chinese side reaffirmed their commitment to building a 1,000-bed hospital in Bangladesh, as initially proposed during the China visit. They also highlighted ongoing support for the establishment of a specialised burn unit in Chattogram.

Chinese Ambassador Yao Wen said progress is being made to launch a direct Kunming-Chattogram flight, and efforts are underway to expedite medical visits for Bangladeshi patients.

The chief adviser stressed the importance of cultural exchange, proposing the establishment of a Chinese Cultural Centre and Language Institute to enable young Bangladeshis to engage more closely with Chinese

language and culture.

Yunus also raised the possibility of expanding jute exports to China and urged greater Chinese investment in the locomotive sector. He proposed setting up locomotive manufacturing and maintenance hubs in both Chattogram and Sylhet, alongside capacity-building workshops and training programmes.

Agricultural trade was another area of progress. Bangladesh will begin exporting mangoes to China this season, with jackfruit exports scheduled for next year. "I'll send a basket of fresh mangoes to President Xi myself," said Yunus.

The meeting was also attended by Foreign Adviser Md Touhid Hossain, National Security Adviser Dr Khallur Rahman, BIDB chairman Ashik Mahmud Bin Harun, special assistant Faiz Taib, cabinet secretary Siraz Uddin Miah, and SDGs affairs principal coordinator Lamiya Morshed.

Polls must be held by Dec

FROM PAGE 12
national stability, the election must be held by December."

He added that since political parties already submitted written reform proposals to the National Consensus Commission, it is certainly possible to finalise a "July Charter" based on the agreed issues and proceed to election by December.

The BNP yesterday also held its first round of informal talks with leaders of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) and the Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal (BSD), as part of its efforts to forge an all-party consensus on holding the next parliamentary election by December.

"We believe the election must be held before December. Any delay will only deepen the crisis," CPB General Secretary Ruhin Hossain Prince told this newspaper.

Freeze 70 accounts

FROM PAGE 12
On December 26 last year, the ACC filed three cases against Nasrul Hamid, his wife Seema Hamid, and his son Zarif Hamid for allegedly amassing illegal assets.

In the cases, Nasrul faces charges for acquiring Tk 36.37 crore in illegal assets, while Zarif and Seema are accused of unlawfully holding Tk 20.87 crore and Tk 6.94 crore, respectively.

The investigation revealed that Zarif operated 13 bank accounts where Tk 7.84 crore had been deposited, with Tk 5.82 crore withdrawn. Seema, meanwhile, maintained 20 accounts, which saw deposits of Tk 12.78 crore and withdrawals of Tk 11.18 crore.

Shortly after the fall of the Awami League government, law enforcement agencies raided a Banani property owned by Nasrul. The operation yielded Tk 1 crore in cash, a firearm, and 50 rounds of ammunition, fuelling further allegations of financial impropriety.

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FROM PAGE 12

While sending a kilogram of apparel from HSIA to Europe typically costs \$2.90-\$3.20 during off-peak periods (and up to \$4.50 in peak season), shipping through India costs about \$2.60 per kg, even after accounting for overland transport to Indian airports.

Major international buyers like Inditex (Zara's parent company), which maintains a distribution hub in Delhi, preferred the route for speed and efficiency.

Local suppliers relied on it to shorten lead times and optimise delivery schedules.

By contrast, exporters have long complained about bottlenecks at HSIA.

The airport's cargo village has a maximum capacity of 300 tonnes, but it handles more than 800 tonnes daily even in the off-season, and up to 1,200 tonnes during peak periods. Ground handling inefficiencies and mismanagement have plagued the Dhaka airport for years. Often, shipments are left exposed to the elements.

Another sticking point is the ground handling fees.

Dhaka charges 29 cents per kilogram compared with just five cents at Delhi airport.

Combined with slower service and a lack of modern equipment, these high costs have driven exporters to seek alternatives abroad.

Both CAAB and Biman are working to revise the current civil aviation and

ground-handling tariffs to make air cargo more cost-effective, said CAAB Chairman Md Monjur Kabir Bhuiyan.

The government also plans to form a task force led by the ministry of civil aviation and tourism, comprising all relevant stakeholders, to streamline and reduce charges associated with cargo operations.

"We have been instructed at the highest level to ensure air cargo operations remain functional regardless of external disruptions. We expect to announce reduced handling charges very soon."

To address the crisis, CAAB has already deployed additional manpower at HSIA's cargo terminal.

Moreover, full-scale cargo operations at Sylhet Osmani International Airport will begin on April 27, with Chattogram to follow shortly. The authorities are also working to speed up customs clearance.

"Our existing infrastructure will soon be capable of handling two to three times more cargo ahead of the opening of HSIA's third terminal," Bhuiyan said, noting that Sylhet's modern cargo terminal has substantial capacity.

Biman is hiring 400 additional ground handlers to support its current team of over 700 at HSIA, said its director of cargo Shakil Mirza.

It is also preparing to provide ground-handling services in Sylhet, where Galistar Aviation's Airbus A330-300 freighter is scheduled to

transport 60 tonnes of garment items to Spain on April 27.

Ground-handling equipment has been transferred to Sylhet and is ready for the inaugural operation, he said.

Once HSIA's third terminal becomes operational by the end of this year, it will significantly boost Bangladesh's export competitiveness.

There is renewed optimism surrounding the new terminal, which industry leaders say is equipped with modern scanning, testing, and temperature-controlled facilities.

"The third terminal is the finest—it's just like the airport in Singapore," said Kabir Ahmed, president of the Bangladesh Freight Forwarders Association.

Biman's cargo handling capacity will double with the launch of the new terminal, said Bushra Islam, its general manager for Public Relations.

Currently, Terminals 1 and 2 have a combined export cargo space of 19,600 square metres and can handle 200,000 tonnes annually.

The third terminal will offer 36,000 square metres of space and a handling capacity of 546,000 tonnes per year.

At present, about 16 to 17 percent of HSIA's annual 175,000-tonne cargo volume is carried by Biman's passenger flights.

Major international airlines including Emirates, Cathay Pacific, Qatar Airways, Turkish Airlines, and Ethiopian Airlines currently operate dedicated cargo flights from Dhaka's HSIA.

Sabina Yasmin to grace Toronto stage for Bangladesh Festival



Sabina Yasmin is all ready to return to the stage at the eighth Bangladesh Festival, scheduled for May 17, at the Toronto International Pavilion. Organised by Weekly Bangla Mail, the festival marks her first international performance after recovering from a health setback.

In a video message, Yasmin invited her fans to the event, saying, "On May 17, I hope to see you all. We'll talk, share stories, and, of course, there will be music."

Joining Yasmin on stage will be other notable Bangladeshi artistes, including Mosharraf Karim, Robena Reza Jui, and Tanzika Amin.



Actors Equity gets new leaders

Actors Equity Bangladesh has elected new leadership for a three-year term. Azad Abdul Kalam won the presidency with 310 votes, defeating Abdullah Rana, while Rashed Mamun Apu became general secretary with 367 votes, beating Shahid Sharif Khan.

The results were announced last Saturday evening by Naresh Bhuiyan and Faruque Ahmed, in the presence of Chief Election Commissioner Khairul Alam Shabu.

The newly elected members of the new committee are Azizul Hakim, Shams Sumon, and Iqbal Babu (Vice Presidents); Rajib Saleheen and Sujat Shimul (Joint General Secretaries); Masud Rana Mithu (Organising Secretary); MA Salam Sumon (Event Secretary); Suchona Sikdar (Legal and Welfare Affairs Secretary); Mukul Siraj (Publicity and Publications Secretary); and RA Rahul (Information and Technology Secretary).

Additionally, Muhammad Nur-e-Alam (Finance Secretary) and Masud Alam Tanvir (Office Secretary) were elected unopposed.

We cannot miss this chance for change

Authorities should start work on feasible reform proposals

We welcome the submission of proposals by the Women's Affairs Reforms Commission, which provided 433 recommendations aimed at eliminating discriminatory provisions and structures in our laws, policies, and institutions. Unlike many other reform reports, this one specifies recommendations that the interim government can implement immediately. Among these is the withdrawal of Bangladesh's reservations to two articles of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which ensures legal equality in marriage and divorce.

In that regard, the commission proposed the introduction of a uniform family code, regardless of religion and ethnicity, which can be made applicable optionally during the current government's term. Other laws that require strengthening and/or amendment to make the provisions more inclusive and victim-friendly, according to the commission's proposal, include the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act-2010, the Guardians and Wards Act-1890, and rape and labour laws. The report also recommends enacting a new law on sexual harassment based on the 2009 High Court guidelines.

Rights of female migrant workers, domestic labourers, sex workers, as well as the elderly also came under the purview of the commission's recommendations. For example, it urged the government to ratify and implement the International Labour Organization's Conventions C189 and C190, which focus on domestic workers' rights and protection of workers from workplace violence and harassment, respectively. It proposed the establishment of help desks at all police stations and courts for women, children, the elderly, and people with special needs. Other recommendations include ensuring six months' paid maternity leave and two weeks' paid paternity leave in all sectors, and implementing the National Broadcasting Policy 2024 to stop mass media from presenting women in a negative light. In the political arena, the most notable recommendation was expanding parliamentary seats to 600, with 300 seats for directly elected women. Although this appears "unrealistic," the commission chief believes such an increase is necessary.

For years, rights groups have been advocating for many of these changes only to be ignored by successive governments, thus allowing the perpetuation of repressive and discriminatory laws denying women equal rights. For the first time, a comprehensive document has now been drawn up with the aspiration that we can actually move forward towards a more women-friendly society. Sadly, certain quarters, instead of presenting constructive criticism and logical arguments for or against the recommendations, are already voicing their opposition and demanding the dissolution of the Women's Affairs Reforms Commission itself. We are, however, encouraged by Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus' directive to promptly implement recommendations where possible. We hope that all political parties and other stakeholders will engage in healthy debate about the recommendations, recognising that ensuring equal rights for all genders will lead to a just, fair, and prosperous nation.

Save Shibsa River from further decline

Encroachment, short-sighted projects to blame for its condition

We are concerned about the growing trend of rivers drying up in Bangladesh. The plight of the Shibsa River, as highlighted by a recent report, is yet another example of how careless our treatment of rivers has been. Once a vital communication route linking Khulna to Kolkata, the Shibsa used to bustle with boats, launches, steamers, and so on. Today, however, it has declined drastically, reduced to a narrow stream in many parts. This dried-up condition spans roughly 27 kilometres of the river as it flows through the Paikgachha upazila. From there, it continues eastward through Soladana and Garuikhali unions before entering the Sundarbans and merging with the Pasur River. Although its 64-kilometre portion inside the Sundarbans still carries tidal water, heavy siltation is rapidly reducing its depth.

This situation cannot be attributed to any one reason alone; rather, it is the result of decades of unplanned, often illegal interventions such as the construction of polders and embankments as well as encroachment on riverbanks. For instance, around a hundred ponds and various structures have been set up along the Shibsa's banks, leading to persistent waterlogging in surrounding areas. Over the years, many rivers have been similarly choked by encroachment, pollution, and short-sighted government projects cutting floodplains off from them, increasing siltation, and eventually making rivers shallower.

Following the fall of the Awami League government, there have been noticeable efforts against illegal settlements along riverbanks, but those have proved to be insufficient in addressing the decline of our rivers. The fact is, without comprehensive measures addressing all the interlinked issues, our rivers cannot be saved. One major concern in this regard is the persistent inactivity of the National River Conservation Commission (NRCC), the so-called guardian of rivers. The delay in reactivating this commission—currently run by an additional secretary who merely holds its chairman's responsibilities on an additional basis—has compromised its ability to steer river conservation efforts.

These issues need to be resolved. Saving rivers like the Shibsa requires a holistic strategy based on sound river management principles. This includes reactivating and strengthening oversight institutions like the NRCC, implementing the Tidal River Management (TRM) system to restore natural tidal flows, preventing illegal occupation of riverbanks by local administrations, and conducting regular dredging. At the same time, there must be greater public awareness of their pivotal role in river conservation. We must also hold relevant authorities accountable for negligence and wrong policies.

EDITORIAL

SINGAPORE IN 10 YEARS?

BIDA chairman's optimism vs economic reality



OPEN SKY

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BIRUPAKSHA PAUL

The Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA) recently organised an international investment conference, which more than 400 investors attended. The BIDA chair, Chowdhury Ashik Mahmud Bin Harun (more popularly known as Ashik Chowdhury), in his eloquent presentation, claimed that Bangladesh would turn into a regional manufacturing hub and thus become a country like Singapore or Thailand by 2035. His English language proficiency and oratory skills eventually became the talk of the town. All the government advisers who attended the BIDA chair's address seemed to be mesmerised, deeply gratified, and immensely proud as they enjoyed the 12-minute presentation. The media kept pouring praise on the interim government, which has done an exemplary job by picking a brilliant non-resident Bangladeshi to lead BIDA.

The Sheikh Hasina regime often picked retired bureaucrats to head most financial institutions so they could guarantee unconditional obedience and little merit. We are proud, too, of the new BIDA chair's performance, because no BIDA chief could speak so eloquently about attracting investments in the past. But marketing excellence is not enough to pull in foreign investors, who mainly judge the ground reality of the country—something not always palatable given the recent rise in mob violence, vandalism, and animosity towards foreign companies. *The New York Times* added salt to the wound by painting Bangladesh as a home of growing extremism. The law-and-order situation is also under question. Mr Chowdhury didn't do enough justice to economics in his stunning presentation, making the outcomes of the hugely publicised summit quite uncertain.

BIDA's claim that Bangladesh will

become like Singapore or Thailand in a decade is reminiscent of Hasina's claim that Bangladesh will become a developed nation by 2041. We are not sure which quack economist gave this idea to the former prime minister. But the politicians in power echoed the tune without understanding its feasibility. It requires double digit growth for 25 years in a row. Economists who raised this point were seen as "anti-development" agents. Mr Chowdhury's dream is even more euphoric at an uncomfortable time when the interim



BIDA Chairman Ashik Chowdhury during a presentation at the Bangladesh Investment Summit 2025 on April 9, 2025.

FILE PHOTO: CA PRESS WING

government is heading towards an election, and political stability, the precondition for FDI growth in a developing nation, is lacking.

When Mr Chowdhury mentioned two countries to model our targets on, it didn't make much sense either, because Singapore is far more advanced than Thailand. According to the World Bank (WB) data, Thailand's per capita income was \$7,182 in 2023, while Singapore's was \$84,734, almost 12 times higher. WB data also shows that in 2023, Bangladesh's growth was 5.8 percent, Thailand's 1.9 percent,

in forecasting. Of course, people have some appetite for dreams and fantasy. But whether a story of imagination teeming with fantasy will really bring investment to this land is an area for both doubt and research. Bangladesh earned FDI of \$824 million in the first eight months of FY2025, marking a 20 percent drop in foreign investment compared to the previous period.

The net FDI inflows as a share of GDP have always remained very low in Bangladesh despite hyper-marketing in the past. In 2000, FDI inflows reached 0.53 percent of GDP for the

first time. It exceeded one percent in 2005 and peaked at 1.7 percent in 2013, marking the start of a downturn since then. From a fishermen's society, Singapore turned into a paragon of development primarily by enhancing its institutions, which are highly substandard in Bangladesh, mainly because of political corruption across all regimes. And that is the main reason why Bangladesh can't become Singapore overnight.

Foreign investors are prudent and cautious. Historically, Bangladesh experienced higher volumes of FDI whenever an elected government took office since 1991, suggesting that political stability is the mantra for drawing foreign investments. Simple rhetoric and marketing gimmicks may impress the audience temporarily, but investors will investigate economic rationales, which were starkly missing in Mr Chowdhury's presentation. The prognosis of making Bangladesh a regional manufacturing hub seems odd at a time when the country's relationship with its neighbours remains strained.

Chowdhury even went so far as to claim that all imagination and vision for a "Singapore bound Bangladesh" began just eight months ago, defying all the achievements of past regimes. The country embarked on a new path of growth and development in the early 1990s with the inception of the market economy and economic openness. Bangladesh achieved average growth rates of 3.54 percent in the 1980s, 4.71 percent in the 1990s, 5.6 percent in the 2000s, and 6.6 percent in the 2010s. This story of growth acceleration could have been the strongest point for investment advocacy, which Chowdhury's smart presentation either missed or ignored. Highlighting the growth dynamics since the early 1990s would have added more strength and justification for investing in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh need not be like Singapore right now. Rather, it needs to understand how a country like Vietnam has been accelerating its pace of development—by ensuring law and order, improving infrastructure, expanding social safety nets, nurturing better relationships with regional partners, and building stronger institutions that value knowledge and expertise.

Does K2-18b really have alien life?



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QUAMRUL HAIDER

For millennia, we thought that our solar system was the only planetary system in the universe. We even thought that it was home to the only planet in the cosmos where intelligent life evolved. This perspective changed in the early 1990s when astronomers began identifying planets that orbit stars beyond our Sun. To date, over 5,000 such planets, referred to as exoplanets, have been discovered.

Given the vast number of exoplanets, it is only natural to ponder: are we the only beings in the universe? Current scientific consensus suggests that it is highly unlikely we are alone. Researchers estimate that within our galaxy, the Milky Way, which contains approximately 100 billion stars, there may be hundreds of thousands of planets that could support extraterrestrial life.

In the quest to discover extraterrestrial life, astronomers have concentrated their research on red dwarf stars. The vast quantity of these stars—estimated to be at least 75 billion within the Milky Way—significantly enhances the likelihood of finding habitable planets orbiting some of them. While red dwarfs, which possess masses ranging from 0.08 to 0.60 times that of the Sun, are crucial targets in the search for alien life, they present challenges for observation due to their faintness, emitting only 0.05 percent of the Sun's luminosity. Nevertheless, they are relatively more luminous in the infrared part of the electromagnetic spectrum. This is where the recently launched James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) comes into play as it is specifically engineered

to detect infrared light.

In remarkable advancement that has stirred the scientific community, JWST has uncovered what could be the most compelling evidence of extraterrestrial life on a planet designated K2-18b, which orbits within the habitable zone of the red dwarf star K2-18. The habitable zone refers to the region around a star where conditions are suitable for the existence of liquid water, avoiding extremes of heat and cold that would render a planet inhospitable. Initially identified in 2015 by the Kepler satellite, this exoplanet has a radius approximately 2.6 times that of Earth and is 8.6 times more massive, making it roughly half the size of Neptune. It is situated 124 light-years from Earth and falls into the category of "sub-Neptune" planets, which are larger than Earth but smaller than Neptune. The distinctive features of this planet have prompted scientists to suggest that it may be classified as a new category of celestial body: a Hycean planet. This type of exoplanet is primarily composed of a vast ocean of water, enveloped by an atmosphere rich in hydrogen and helium.

The existence of an atmosphere is crucial for life as we know it. Therefore, one of the main goals of the JWST's observations was to perform "atmospheric reconnaissance." The JWST is well-equipped to measure a planet's atmosphere. Specifically, when a planet passes in front of its star, its atmosphere absorbs some of the starlight. The JWST can collect this modified light to detect the unique signatures that signify the presence of an atmosphere.

What about the possibility of intelligent extraterrestrial life? The telescope has the capability to detect signs of extraterrestrial life through the identification of atmospheric pollution on exoplanets, particularly greenhouse gases and industrial emissions such as chlorofluorocarbons and nitrogen dioxide. These are indicators of alien life, similar to how we are recognised on Earth by our environmentally harmful emissions. However, researchers caution that there are constraints to JWST's ability to detect atmospheric pollutants. For instance, if a planet's host star is excessively bright, it may obscure the signals from the planet's atmosphere. Additionally, if a planet orbits too

complicated task, and confirming such discoveries presents even greater difficulties. Additionally, even if planets like K2-18b host intelligent life, it does not guarantee the existence of civilisations capable of interstellar communication. This is due to the requirement that a species must evolve to a level of intelligence sufficient for developing such communication. In essence, the planet must support a species with intelligence comparable to our own. Furthermore, this species would need to establish a civilisation with technology that is at least as advanced as ours.

Although certainty eludes us, the prevailing view among scientists is that achieving a level of "sufficient intelligence" is a challenging prospect. A core principle in contemporary science is the belief that humanity is not uniquely exceptional. We inhabit a relatively ordinary planet that orbits an ordinary star within a typical galaxy, and it is posited that any life forms existing elsewhere—regardless of their rarity—would experience evolutionary pressures akin to those that have shaped life on Earth. Hence, if intelligent species comparable to ours have emerged elsewhere, it is reasonable to assume they would possess similar social motivations that could ultimately drive them to develop the technology required for interstellar communication.

Finally, while the discovery made by JWST is undeniably a "revolutionary moment" for us, it is not an Archimedes-type "eureka" moment, or smoking gun. It is the detection of a potential biosignature, rather than confirming the existence of actual alien life forms. Further investigation is needed to determine whether K2-18b is inhabited or has the potential to support life. Should future observations validate the current findings, the consequences will extend well beyond the realm of astronomy. It will transform our comprehension of life, the universe, and most importantly, redefine our place in the universe.

Following the fall of the Awami League government, there have been noticeable efforts against illegal settlements along riverbanks, but those have proved to be insufficient in addressing the decline of our rivers. The fact is, without comprehensive measures addressing all the interlinked issues, our rivers cannot be saved. One major concern in this regard is the persistent inactivity of the National River Conservation Commission (NRCC), the so-called guardian of rivers. The delay in reactivating this commission—currently run by an additional secretary who merely holds its chairman's responsibilities on an additional basis—has compromised its ability to steer river conservation efforts.

These issues need to be resolved. Saving rivers like the Shibsa requires a holistic strategy based on sound river management principles. This includes reactivating and strengthening oversight institutions like the NRCC, implementing the Tidal River Management (TRM) system to restore natural tidal flows, preventing illegal occupation of riverbanks by local administrations, and conducting regular dredging. At the same time, there must be greater public awareness of their pivotal role in river conservation. We must also hold relevant authorities accountable for negligence and wrong policies.

The reform process and its discontents

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JYOTI RAHMAN

Sheikh Hasina's despotic regime rigged three elections, destroyed every state institution, plundered the economy, committed grave human rights abuses, and ultimately fell after three blood-soaked weeks last monsoon. In his iconic speech at the Shaheed Minar on August 3, 2024, Nahid Islam demanded not only Hasina's resignation but also political reforms to ensure that such a regime never torments us again.

Without absolving the ousted despot of her many crimes, it has long been acknowledged that Bangladesh is in dire need of institutional and constitutional reform. Even during the 1991-2011 era of elected democracy, our highly centralised political system concentrated power in the person, and persona, of the prime minister. In such a system, losing an election could, and often did, endanger not only one's livelihood but also one's life.

This winner-takes-all, zero-sum politics did not necessitate Hasina's depravity, but it made Bangladesh particularly vulnerable to authoritarianism. That is why the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) had placed institutional and constitutional reforms at the heart of its future agenda.

The BNP's reform programme was founded on two core ideas following a free and fair election in the post-Hasina era: i) a set of independent commissions to examine the failures of our republic and offer recommendations; and ii) government of national unity to implement those reforms.

In addition, the party proposed the establishment of an upper house, executive term limits, and checks on the power of the prime minister.

Hasina's flight from the country in the face of a popular uprising has, of course, altered the sequence of reform. Recognising the urgent public demand, the interim government formed several commissions in October. Headed by respected scholars and veteran activists such as Prof Ali Riaz, Dr Badiul Alam Majumdar, and others, these commissions worked tirelessly, producing volumes spanning several thousand pages in a matter of months.

A National Consensus Commission was formed in February to synthesise recommendations and solicit responses from political parties. Since then, we have seen their reactions. And unfortunately, it remains unclear how the process will move forward. The interim government has complicated matters by linking the reforms to an unnecessary dichotomy of a "minimum or larger package" and election timing between "December 2025 and June 2026." This framing has sown distrust and jeopardised the reform process itself.

Let's unpack this.

Reform proposals can be classified into two categories: those requiring constitutional amendment and those that do not. For the latter, where there is agreement among major parties, the interim government can begin implementation immediately. These include changes relating to the electoral process, the judiciary, and anti-corruption efforts. Fortunately, there is broad consensus on these matters.

Reforms to the election process should, of course, be prioritised. Yet none of these reforms require a longer timeline that would necessitate pushing the election to June. The

claim that a "minimum package" enables a December election, while a "larger package" delays it until June, lacks credibility.

The constitutional reforms, however, are more complex. Here too, there is agreement between parties in principle: term limits for the prime minister, the creation of an upper house, enhanced female representation, and the independence of accountability institutions. But there are disagreements over

key accountability bodies—such as the Election Commission, Anti Corruption Commission, Public Service Commission, and Human Rights Commission—be made through a National Constitution Commission (NCC), which would include strong opposition representation. However, since the NCC would also have a say in key defence appointments, the BNP opposes it, even as it acknowledges the need to depoliticise these institutions.

represented upper house, directly elected female MPs, lifetime limits on the premiership, and opposition input in key appointments—then the current process is clearly inadequate.

Here, history may offer some guidance.

In the aftermath of the horrors of 1975—one-party rule, coups, and massacres—it fell upon Ziaur Rahman to rebuild the republic. He personally engaged a wide spectrum of political and civil society stakeholders to craft and enact a reform package. If Prof Yunus believes that the reform package proposed by Prof Riaz and his team are crucial, then he must lend his personal gravitas to secure a consensus among the parties.

Regrettably, the chief adviser appears more at ease mingling with global elites in Davos than engaging in the necessary give-and-take with local politicians.

There is another historical precedent. In 1991, the victorious BNP faced strong public demand to restore parliamentary democracy. At that time, civil society—comprising intellectuals, journalists, academics, development workers, and entrepreneurs—worked alongside politicians to forge consensus, resulting in the 11th and 12th constitutional amendments.

Today, we face another political impasse. The interim government seems either unwilling or unable to unite the parties around vital reforms. It is, therefore, time for civil society, non-partisan but politically conscious citizens, to step up. Instead of looking solely to the office of the chief adviser for salvation, we must directly engage political parties on key issues like a proportionally elected upper house.

The BNP has historically responded to reformist public pressure. It was born from the post-1975 reform movement. It restored the parliamentary system and codified the caretaker government. Civil society engagement with the BNP on reform, coupled with a demand for an election date, offers a far more effective path forward than the current charade of "minimum/larger package" and the December-to-June election timeline.

One final issue remains unresolved: even if there is agreement on the reforms, how do we ensure the parties actually implement them?



VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

specifics.

For instance, Prof Riaz's commission proposes a lifetime limit of two terms for the prime minister, while the BNP prefers a cap of two consecutive terms. The commission suggests electing upper house members based on the proportion of votes won in the lower house; the BNP prefers allocation based on seats won in the lower house. On female representation, the BNP proposes that 100 women MPs be selected proportionally by parties, whereas the commission recommends directly electing 100 women MPs.

To guarantee institutional independence, the commission proposes that appointments

Importantly, the BNP has not closed the door to further discussions on any of these issues. Yet the current reform process offers no viable pathway for progressing them.

If we take the chief adviser at his word, that no reform will be imposed on anyone, then, given the BNP's reservations, the logical next step is to hold an election. Parliament is the appropriate forum for debating and negotiating details of term limits, female representation, the upper house, and institutional independence.

If, on the other hand, there is a belief that an in principle, pre-election consensus is essential—on matters like a proportionally

No alternative to financial reforms for IMF loan

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SEЛИM JAHAN

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) mission left Bangladesh last weekend without any decision on the release of the fourth and the fifth tranches of a loan to the country. These two tranches amount to \$1.3 billion under the \$4.7 billion package agreed upon two years ago. The first tranche of the loan, amounting to \$476.2 million, was released in February 2023, the second tranche of \$681 million in December 2023, and the third tranche of \$1.15 billion in June 2024. However, the lender has withheld the release of the fourth and fifth tranches. In fact, as a decision, the mission has neither approved the immediate release of funds, nor has it shut the door completely. So, the whole situation reflects uncertainties.

A few observations about the phenomenon can be pointed. First, the release of the fourth and fifth tranches of the loan was tied to critical reforms under the Extended Credit Facility and the Resilience and Sustainability Facility. The mission indicated that since Bangladesh has yet to meet all the IMF conditions, the disbursements of the two tranches were withheld. It mentioned that the country has made progress on the financial sector, but more is needed. It further pointed out that Bangladesh still has a path forward, but cautioned that time is running out.

Second, the release of an IMF loan is approved when a staff-level agreement is

reached. A staff-level agreement is essential for securing the IMF board approval and release of funds. Without this, Bangladesh is in a limbo. In the meantime, discussions between the IMF and the Bangladesh government will continue to reach a staff-level agreement soon, possibly by the April 2025 World Bank Group IMF spring meetings in Washington. Third, the sticky points in the discussion between the IMF and Bangladesh were exchange rate management, tax reform, subsidy rationalisation, and the banking sector reforms. The government has made progress in these areas, but it has yet to satisfy the IMF requirements.

On the exchange rate policy, the issue is choosing between a managed rate, e.g. a crawling peg and a fully flexible rate. Bangladesh has been following a crawling peg, and for the last two three years, the issue has been on the table. The arguments that are put forward in favour of a fully flexible exchange rate include enhanced export competitiveness, rebuilding foreign exchange reserves, and making the economy more resilient to external shocks. In recent times, Bangladesh's forex reserves have at least been stabilised after they have been on a steady decline for two years. Right now, the difference between informal and the official exchange rates is very small. Therefore, the pressure for a fully flexible exchange rate

would be mounting.

Arguments are also made that with a flexible exchange rate, there will be an accumulation of foreign reserves in the short term. On the other hand, a cautious approach to exchange rate policies also hinges on the arguments that a fully flexible exchange rate may fuel the inflation rate, which is already very close to double digit. In the last two-three months, food prices came down a bit with larger supplies of winter vegetables, while there have been steady increases in the non-food inflation. However, very recently, the market has become uncomfortable again as food prices are back on the rise. Surely, taming inflation requires tighter monetary policy, which Bangladesh has been pursuing for some time, but that is not enough. It would also require structural and institutional measures.

The issue of tax reforms has been in macroeconomic discussions for long time. Over the past 10 years, most developing economies have attained a tax-GDP ratio of about 15 percent. However, the ratio hovers around seven to eight percent in Bangladesh. This limits resource mobilisation for public expenditures, including development spendings. Regardless of the IMF conditionalities in this area, Bangladesh has to increase its tax-GDP ratio. Even in the neighbouring countries like India and Nepal, the tax-GDP ratio is 12 percent and 18 percent, respectively. In Bangladesh, about 68 percent of people with taxable income (2018 data) do not pay income tax. What's more, a staggering 87 percent of the country's rich and upper-middle-class citizens are evading taxes (2024 data). Meanwhile, the country relies more on indirect taxes like VATs and excise duties for resource mobilisation.

This has three implications. One, direct taxes can be used as an equalising factor

to reduce inequalities in the economy. Indirect taxes may lead to inequalities, putting more tax burdens on the poor. So, if the instruments of direct taxes are not used, it amounts to not using an effective mechanism for reducing economic and social inequalities. Two, resource mobilisation through indirect taxes may be affected by external shocks and vulnerabilities. Third, the issue of raising income taxes has a political-economy dimension. The richer section of the economy and the vested interest groups would always try to resist income tax. Since the interim government is not a political government, it can go for the necessary tax reforms, tackling the political aspect of it. The need for tax reforms is of paramount importance. Building a more equitable, transparent and streamlined system, which would ensure sustainable revenue growth, reduce widespread tax exemptions, improve compliance, and distinctly separate tax policy from tax administration, is necessary.

In the past, subsidies were used not to help the poor and the marginalised people, who needed them the most, but as favours to certain social groups and vested interest parties and to provide undue support to certain entities. Thus, inefficient industries and public enterprises enjoyed subsidies without any economic rationale. The past government also used food and other subsidies for political purposes, to appease groups so that they remained loyal to it. At the local level, the administration has been using subsidies as political means to control people. The issue of input versus output subsidies needs to be revisited.

There are increasing needs for legal and regulatory reforms in the financial sector, particularly in the banking sector. Yes, there has been a new loan reclassification rule. But it should be remembered that non-

performing loans have not been caused by the reclassification, but by a legacy issue. For maintaining economic stability, well-sequenced reforms are necessary. The legal reforms of the banking sector must conform to global standards. It is necessary to operationalise new frameworks that enable orderly bank restructuring, while protecting the small depositors. The banking sectors' health will be regained and people's confidence in banks and financial institutions will be improved with effective asset quality reviews, better governance, and transparency and accountability. The government has been successful in recovering some of the defaulted loans within the country. The issue now remains with regard to the money laundered abroad. The Bangladesh Bank has been coordinating domestic and international efforts to freeze and confiscate, and recover stolen assets. These efforts must be strengthened and more means must be explored for legal and financial actions to recover those laundered assets.

The issue of financial reforms in Bangladesh cannot be complete without the necessary institutional reforms to enhance the Bangladesh Bank's independence and governance. This is crucial not only for macroeconomic and financial stability, but also for successful execution of the financial reforms. Sustaining the pace of reforms is absolutely necessary to tackle Bangladesh's economic challenges. The IMF loan is quite important for Bangladesh. Apart from providing resources, disbursement of future tranches of such loans would represent a sign of financial credibility of the country, because such disbursements would encourage other global financial organisations to provide loans and would reassure foreign investors to invest in Bangladesh.

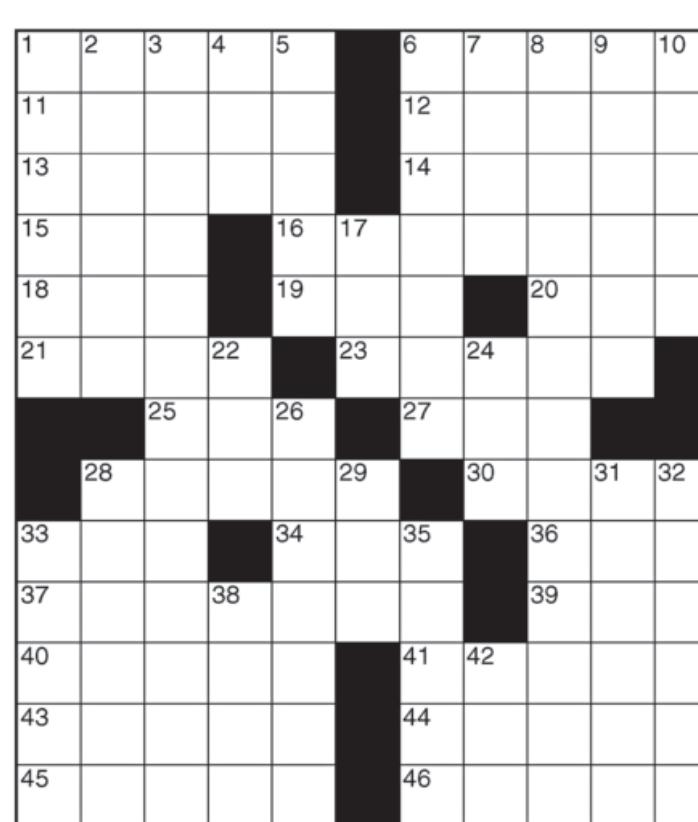
CROSSWORD
BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 30 Pesters
- 33 Bikini top
- 34 Saloon vessel
- 36 Lopped down
- 37 Pull off
- 39 Give it a go
- 40 Subway support
- 41 Ordeal
- 43 Bert's buddy
- 44 Hint of color
- 45 Shows fondness
- 46 Like oxen
- 1 Medium meeting
- 2 Reception aid
- 3 Subtly suggesting
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DOWN

- 5 Instruct
- 6 Check the addition
- 7 Strays
- 8 Complaining noisily
- 9 Facet
- 10 High maintenance
- 17 Drake's music
- 22 Nearest star
- 24 Physics particle
- 26 Formidable rivals
- 28 Jockey Eddie
- 29 Minivan alternative
- 31 Repair site
- 32 Did salon work
- 33 Disrobed
- 35 Noted oil tycoon
- 38 "Would -- to you?"
- 42 Carnival city



SATURDAY'S ANSWERS



IN THE SHADOW OF THE COLD WAR

The Untold Story of Franklin Book Dhaka

NADEEM OMAR TARAR

The Cold War was a war of armaments and ideologies—but it was also a war of words, fought in classrooms, libraries, and on the printed page. As part of its strategy to win hearts and minds in the newly decolonised world, the United States launched the Franklin Book Program (FBP) in 1952, deploying books as emissaries of liberal democracy, scientific progress, and capitalist modernity. In East Pakistan, where questions of language, identity, and cultural autonomy shaped the politics of everyday life, Franklin's arrival intersected with a growing Bengali intellectual movement. At the centre of this intersection stood A.T.M. Abdul Mateen, the founding director of Franklin Dhaka, whose vision and leadership transformed the programme from an American soft power project into a vehicle for the cultural and linguistic assertion of East Pakistan's Bengali intelligentsia.

Mateen's path to this position was shaped by the intellectual trajectories of the Indian Muslim middle classes in the twentieth century. Educated at Aligarh Muslim University and later at Cornell University, where he completed a master's in international economics, Mateen returned to Dhaka as a lecturer in economics and history at Ahsanullah Engineering College. With no prior experience in publishing, he was inducted into Franklin's fold in 1955 by Datus C. Smith, Franklin's founding president, who



Students in Dhaka earnestly examining Franklin-sponsored Bengali books during East Pakistan Education Week.

COURTESY: FRANKLIN NEWSLETTER

publishing standards. The aim was not only to disseminate knowledge but also to set a new benchmark for book production in the country. Franklin books became instantly recognisable for their attractive design, rigorous editing, and thematic relevance.

This was no small feat in a publishing ecosystem dominated by textbook monopolies. Many established publishers were reluctant to cooperate with Franklin, viewing it as a foreign competitor. Mateen lamented what he saw as the narrow commercialism of these publishers, whose primary interest was the mass production of low-quality textbooks and exam guides. "A nation's character is built not by textbooks," he wrote to Franklin's headquarters in New York, "but by books other than that."

To counter this publishing inertia, Mateen actively nurtured new entrants—individuals with education, integrity, and nationalist zeal. He described his cohort of publishers as "graduates and outstanding leaders in their respective fields," confident that "the history of Cairo, Lahore, and Tehran may also be repeated here at Decca." Franklin's cultural politics was thus intricately tied to an emerging Bengali middle class eager to claim its space in the postcolonial public sphere.

Franklin Dhaka and the Scientific Lexicon of Bangla

At the heart of this effort lay a linguistic project. If Bangla was to replace English as the language of education and governance in East Pakistan, it required a corpus of modern literature. The political rhetoric surrounding linguistic rights often ignored the practical task of developing Bangla's scientific and administrative vocabulary. Franklin, in this context, became a tool for language development. Its Bangla translations of American books in physics, chemistry, biology, home economics, and political science filled an urgent pedagogical void.

The Basic Science Series, for instance, employed the expertise of respected scientists such as Prof. Fazlur Rahman, Prof. Zahurul Huq, and Prof. Abdullah Al-Muti. These were not simply translations—they were acts of cultural adaptation, rendering modern science intelligible and accessible in Bangla. For vocational institutes like the Dhaka Polytechnic, Franklin books became indispensable, particularly for students who lacked English proficiency. As one instructor, Sultanuddin Ahmed, wrote, "the severe shortage of technical books and writings available in Bengali" was hampering national progress.

Cultural Censorship and Strategic Adaptation

Franklin Dhaka also had to navigate the delicate religious and political terrain of East Pakistan. When considering the translation of H.A.R. Gibb's *Mohammedanism*, a respected but Eurocentric history of Islam, Datus Smith advised that the book be reviewed by "not too liberal students of Islamic doctrine" before translation. A similar caution was applied to Cressy Morrison's *Man Does Not Stand Alone*, which used science to argue for the existence of God. Mateen ensured that two learned theologians reviewed the manuscript to ensure its alignment with Islamic values.

These accommodations reflected the dual imperatives of Franklin: to disseminate American ideas while respecting local cultural and religious norms. Franklin's publishing decisions were guided by the understanding that cultural diplomacy required restraint. Illustrations were redesigned, content revised, and even titles changed to avoid offence and gain legitimacy.

A. Sabur underscores Franklin's success in fostering a literary aesthetic that resonated locally—even while remaining entangled in geopolitical anxieties.

Translation as Transformation

Mateen's advocacy of translation was deeply rooted in a modernist ethos. He drew parallels between Franklin's work and the great translation movements of Islamic history—under the Abbasids, and in medieval Bengal under Muslim rulers. At public events, he cited the Hadith:

"Knowledge is the gem which the Muslims have lost." He argued that translation was the only means through which the masses could access global intellectual developments. "Facts about science are universal," he reminded his audiences, "and these books, although translations, have yet retained the maximum amount of originality." He compared Franklin's work to the translation movement of the Abbasid Caliphate: "It is no exaggeration to say that after the days of Haroun-al-Rashid and Mamun, Franklin Publications...is the largest single well-planned international translation program undertaken by any country or cultural organization on such a gigantic scale."

Franklin Dhaka consciously resisted the notion that translation was a mechanical act of linguistic equivalence. Translation became an interpretive and creative enterprise—one that transformed original texts into new works of literature in their own right. This view clashed with the prevailing nationalist emphasis on original writing as the sole site of literary merit and authorship.

Mateen's team, which included translators such as Ashraf Siddiqui, Serajuddin Hussain, and Principal Ebrahim Khan, produced works that were both faithful and transformative. They coined new terms, adapted stylistic conventions, and sometimes restructured content to better suit local sensibilities. In many cases, only selected chapters were translated, titles were changed, and illustrations replaced. The result was a genre of books that were foreign in origin but Bengali in form—books that looked and felt local.

Still, this process provoked debate. The issue of linguistic purity versus evolution became a flashpoint in the reception of Franklin's books. In a review of *Chhoto Theka Baro*, Shamsul Huq of the British Information Services praised the literary quality of the Bangla translation but criticised the use of Urdu and English loanwords, arguing they



Bengali schoolgirl in Dhaka.

COURTESY: FRANKLIN NEWSLETTER

undermined the integrity of the Bengali language. His critique echoed broader anxieties among Bengali intellectuals over the creeping influence of Urdu in East Pakistan's cultural landscape.

Against Linguistic Purism

Principal Ebrahim Khan, a prolific Franklin translator and educator, dismissed such purism as "madness." He argued, alongside linguist Dr Muhammad Shahidullah, that Bangla had always been a hybrid language, shaped by centuries of Persian, Arabic, Portuguese, and English influence. "We should not be ashamed that Bangla is a mixed language," Shahidullah declared at a 1948 literary conference. In this view, translation and linguistic borrowing were not threats to identity but instruments of intellectual growth.

This debate unfolded within a broader context of postcolonial language politics. For Franklin's translators and editors, the goal was not simply to replace English with Bangla, but to make Bangla capable of bearing the weight of modern knowledge. This required technical innovation, cultural negotiation, and institutional support. Franklin books were not just literary exercises; they were infrastructural interventions in the nation-building project.

Fidelity or Fluency?

The politics of translation extended beyond vocabulary to the structure and rhythm of the text. A reviewer in *Pakistan Observer* criticised one Franklin translation for adhering too closely to the English original, resulting in awkward and grammatically flawed Bangla. "Every word in each sentence has been faithfully rendered," the reviewer noted, "though in doing so they have often offended rules of grammar and composition."

In contrast, Dr Sajjad Hussain of Dhaka University praised the "dynamic" prose of the Bangla version of Steinbeck's *The Moon is Down*, translated by Mahiuddin Ahmed, but criticised the translator's literalism and questioned the title's rendering as *Astorag*—a word that in Bangla evoked "sunset" rather than the novel's darker implications. This debate revealed the tightrope walked by Franklin's translators: between fidelity to the

Franklin's emphasis on adaptation over literalism ultimately enabled its greater acceptance. Major projects like the translation of Edward R. Murrow's *This I Believe* included new contributions from Pakistani voices, allowing the book to speak more directly to its audience. In doing so, Franklin Dhaka mirrored the ambitions of its director: to create a Bengali literary public grounded in the universal values of knowledge and shaped by the specific conditions of postcolonial society.

Demanding Reciprocity in the Franklin Programme

During the 1957 visit of Franklin's New York-based directors, Mateen organised a series of receptions, field visits, and roundtable discussions with Bengali intellectuals. The Bengali press, including *Daily Azad* and *Ittefaq*, covered these events in detail, noting the programme's contributions and highlighting the demand for publishing original works by Bengali authors—not just translations. Indeed, the call for a "reverse flow" of literature became increasingly vocal.

Principal Ebrahim Khan and Prof. Ashraf Siddiqui, among others, urged Franklin to publish Pakistani writings for international audiences. Their concerns reflected a broader anxiety: that without such reciprocity, Franklin would be reduced to another conduit for American cultural imperialism. To their credit, Franklin's leadership responded by proposing Franklin Fellowships for Bengali authors and acknowledging the need for more locally authored content.

The Legacy of A.T.M. Abdul Mateen

Under A.T.M. Abdul Mateen's leadership, Franklin Dhaka published over 100 titles and printed nearly half a million copies in less than five years. The range of publications—spanning juvenile literature, technical manuals, science textbooks, biographies, novels, and philosophical treatises—addressed a critical shortage of educational and general reading materials in Bangla. These books circulated widely across schools, universities, and homes, transforming Franklin into more than a conduit of American cultural diplomacy. It became a catalyst for redefining Bangla as a language capable of bearing the weight of modern knowledge and intellectual inquiry.

Mateen would go on to enter national politics, eventually becoming the Deputy Speaker of Pakistan's National Assembly on the Awami League ticket in 1966. Yet, his most enduring legacy lies in shaping the modern identity of the Bangla language—not through protest or polemic, but through print. Through tireless correspondence, coalition-building, and cultural diplomacy, he reimagined Bangla as a language central to the assertion of national cultural identity. His vision echoed that of his mentor, Datus C. Smith, who described books as "the invisible capital of the nation." Mateen laid the groundwork for a modern Bengali literary public sphere, anchored in a vibrant and forward-looking publishing industry. This contribution was no mere footnote to Cold War history; it was a foundational chapter in the intellectual development of Bangladesh.

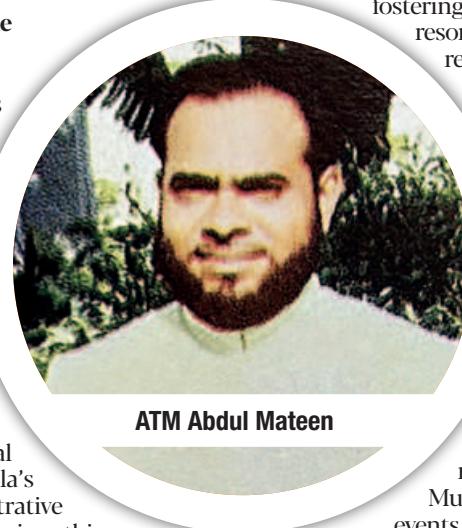
In today's Bangladesh—where debates over language, identity, and education remain deeply resonant—Mateen's pioneering work with Franklin stands as a reminder of how books, and those who believe in their transformative power, can quietly shape nations. The story of Franklin Dhaka under Mateen's stewardship is not simply that of an efficient administrator or cultural intermediary; it is the story of a generation of Bengali intellectuals who, in the shadow of West Pakistani hegemony and amidst the turbulence of Cold War politics, imagined nation-building through books.

original and resonance with local meaning. And yet, there were successes that silenced the sceptics. One review of *The Telephone Book*, translated by Qazi Afsaruddin Ahmed, celebrated the translator's ability to render a foreign text in such natural Bangla that it read like an original work. "While reading the book, I was charmed by the translator's ability to produce something foreign in his own language in a way so that it appears...as if he was reading something original."

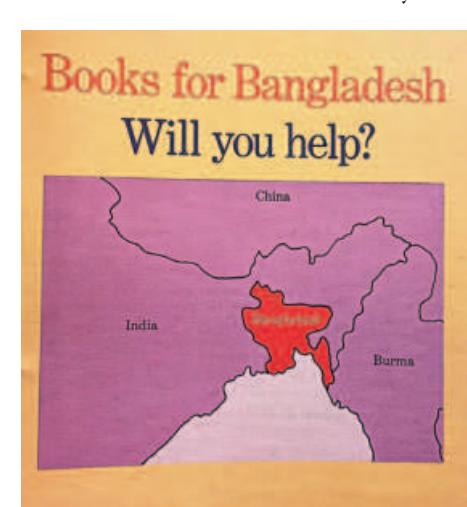
Reclaiming Intellectual Autonomy

The Bangla editions of Franklin books were thus not just translated copies of American originals. They were new books, reshaped by cultural context, political prudence, and literary craft. This transformation was recognised by readers, who increasingly viewed these works as local contributions. Translators emerged as literary figures in their own right, and Franklin's authorship became a shared space—between the American original, the Bengali translator, and the reading public.

Nadeem Omar Tarar is a Visiting Senior Research Fellow at the Department of Anthropology, University of Texas at Austin, TX, USA.



ATM Abdul Mateen



Hridoy's DPL appearance creates controversy

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammedan returned to winning ways in the Dhaka Premier League's (DPL) Super League on Sunday, but the day's highlight was Mohammedan skipper Towhid Hridoy's appearance in the match against Agrani Bank.

He was handed a two-match ban [Level 2] following two counts of misconduct -- first due to an altercation with on-field umpires and then due to public criticism of umpiring.

However, Hridoy returned, serving just a one-match ban as multiple stakeholders offered varying explanations as to how it was allowed.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) as of yet has provided no clear explanation for it.

"We appealed on the decision, and they responded and reduced the sentence by a game. We got the letter from the Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolis (CCDM) that the ban had been reduced," Mohammedan official Sajid Ahmed informed.

However, neither CCDM nor Mohammedan agreed to show the letter.

"I can't say anything regarding this. If the sentence was reduced from high level in the board, that's up to



them," Niamur Rashid, who was the match referee of the said game in which Hridoy had an altercation with the umpires, told The Daily Star.

Another technical committee member of DPL, Enamul Haque Moni, was also unsure.

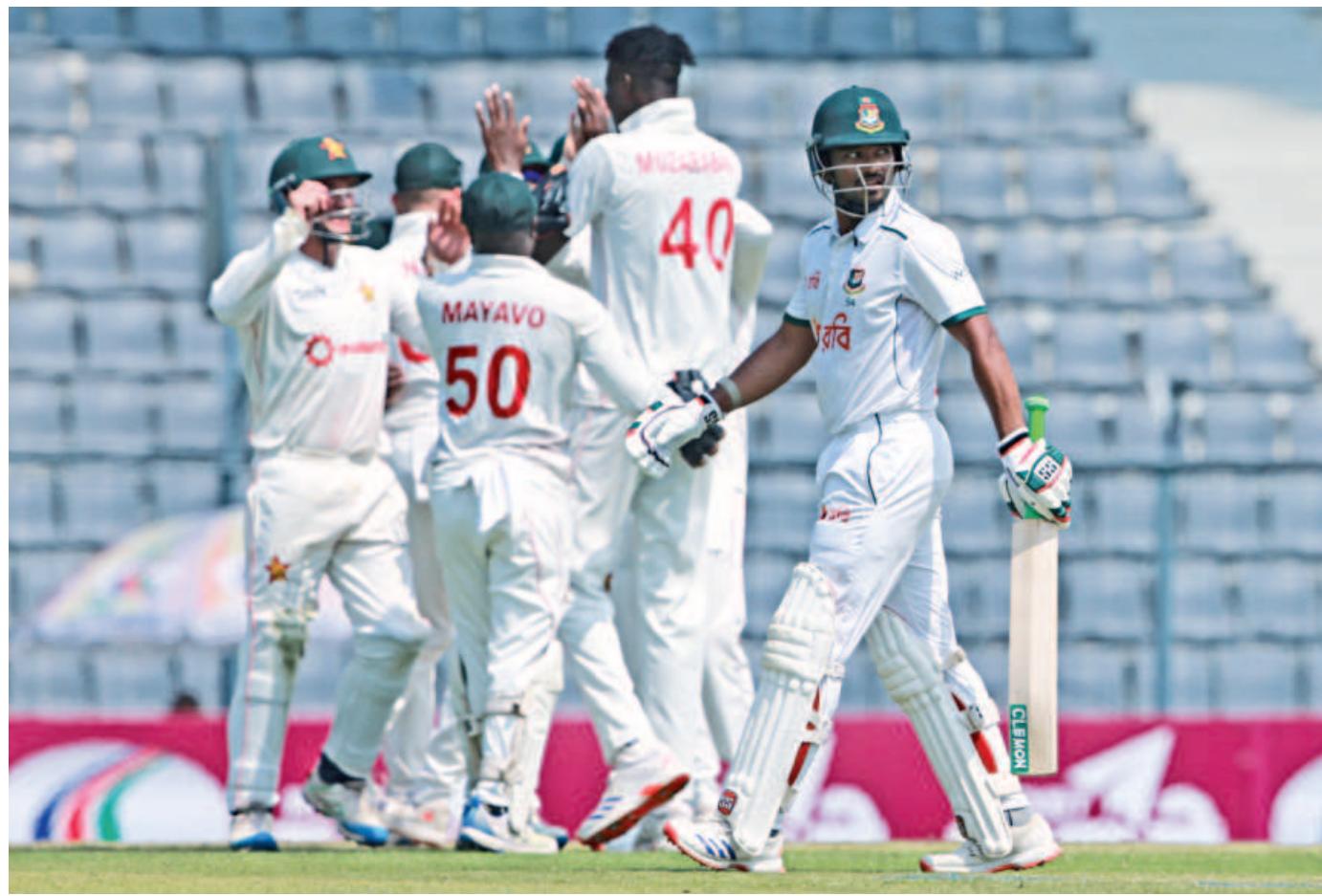
"He [Hridoy] told the technical committee that he was sorry. They [Mohammedan] had sent a letter to reduce the suspension, but I don't have it. I don't know how he still played," Moni told this newspaper.

Umpires' committee, however, provided a completely different explanation. "We sent a memo to CCDM in this regard. There was a meeting of the match referees, usually convened during the mid-point of the tournament for reviewing purposes. The rule of seven demerit points equating to a two-match suspension has been changed. That's why he could play," an umpires' committee official informed.

Meanwhile, the umpires' committee chairman, Iftekhar Ahmed Mithu, informed that the second sentence, relating to the three demerit points, is "still under process and has not been completed," and the player can play till it is completed.

Anamul Haque Bijoy became the first Bangladeshi to score 50 tons in recognised cricket when he notched up an unbeaten 105-ball 110 to lead Gazi Group Cricketers to a comfortable seven-wicket win over Legends of Rupganj in a Dhaka Premier League Super League fixture at the BKSP-4 ground yesterday. Bijoy's record-setting ton means that the 32-year-old now has 23 List A centuries, 24 in first-class cricket, and three in T20s. He had already gone past Naeem Islam (46 tons) in January this year with a century in the Bangladesh Premier League. In the other matches on that day, league-leaders Abahani beat Gulshan Cricket Club by 50 runs in Mirpur, while second-placed Mohammedan picked up a seven-wicket victory over Agrani Bank at BKSP-3 ground.

PHOTO: BCB



What to WATCH

T SPORTS

DPL
Live from 9:00 am
IPL
Kolkata vs Gujarat
Live from 8:00 pm

NAGORIK TV
PSL
Karachi vs Peshawar
Live from 9:00 pm
STAR SPORTS

SELECT HD1
Premier League
Tottenham vs Nottingham Forest
Live from 1:00 am
(Tuesday)

SA YOUTH TT C'SHIPS

Bangladesh eye medals

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh table tennis teams are scheduled to leave for Kathmandu today to take part in South Asian Youth Table Tennis Championships, which will be held from April 24-27, with the hope of securing medals.

The regional championships will also serve as qualification platform for upcoming Asian Youth Table Tennis Championships, with the champions in both men's U-19 and women's U-19 team events advancing to the 24th edition of continental championships.

Bangladesh, who became champions in men's U-19 team event in 2022 and finished behind champions Sri Lanka in 2024, are hoping to fight for the final in absence of India.

"We have a good team this time around. Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka are of similar strength. So we believe we can play the final and win a medal," head coach Mostafa Billah told the reporters at a press conference at BOA Auditorium yesterday.

BTTF general secretary captain AM Maksud Ahmed Sonet said, "The preparation started on March 12, about a month after we took responsibility in the federation. There was flexibility in the camp due to Ramadan and Eid but we hope the players will produce good results as we also emphasised on fitness by appointing a fitness trainer."

Sonet informed that they will simultaneously train the players and test them through different tournaments in a bid to sharpen their skills and that they would also consider appointing a Chinese and a Japanese coach to groom players from the grassroots level.

He also claimed that they started the activities of federation with a Tk 4.5 lakh debt but they are optimistic about continuing all activities soundly in coming days, adding that they have requested the National Sports Council to have the federation's accounts audited to find out whether they have been any irregularities.

SHORT CORNER

Tahsin secures final IM norm



FM Tahsin Tajwar Zia earned the third and final norm for turning an International Master after beating Hungarian Grandmaster Gergely Aczel in the 10th and final round of Farago Ivan Memorial GM Chess tournament in Hungary on Sunday. The 19-year-old, however, will have to wait to get the IM title till taking his rating to 2400, which currently is 2354.

Bangladesh scrape past Indonesia in AHF Cup

Bangladesh survived a second-half scare to notch up a hard-fought 3-2 win over hosts Indonesia in their second match of the AHF Cup in Jakarta, Indonesia, yesterday. With two consecutive victories, the four-time champions sit top of Pool B with six points, followed by Thailand, who secured four points from two matches.

Read full stories on The Daily Star's website

It was a great day for Zimbabwe cricket, I think the bowlers were too short in the first session. They didn't make the batters play enough. I told them to string a few overs together without giving away runs. We eventually removed [Najmul Hossain] Shanto, which led us to initiate a mini collapse.

Zimbabwe's pace bowling coach Charl Langeveldt

Shanto had spoken about how he has been guilty of throwing away his wicket after getting set and how the batters in the team are working hard to do better.

However, there was no reflection of his words on the field.

After openers Shadman Islam (12) and Mahmudul Hasan Joy (14) departed in space of two overs, leaving Bangladesh at 32-2 in 11 overs, Mominul Haque and Shanto repaired the early damage by putting up a 66-run stand.

But just when it looked like Bangladesh

could post an imposing first innings total, Shanto, on 40, slashed an ordinary ball of Blessing Muzarabani to a man at point.

Mushfiqur Rahim, Bangladesh's most experienced batter, tried to pull left-arm spinner Wellington Masakadza only to be caught at mid-wicket after making only four runs.

Bangladesh's top scorer Mominul Haque (56) never looked at ease and ended his innings trying sweep the ball against the turn only to top-edge it and get caught at mid-wicket.

Unlike in many recent Tests, lower-order batters Mehedi Hasan Miraz and Jaker Ali could not perform a rescue act and Bangladesh got dismissed for a below par total.

Batters making the same mistakes repeatedly naturally draws questions over their commitment to improvement.

However, Salihuddin claimed that the players are trying to get better, even if the fruits of their efforts are still not visible.

"The boys are trying to change a lot of things mentally and they are very conscious about self-improvement. We have played very poorly today [yesterday]. But we can't say that they aren't trying and they don't have the urge to become great players. You can make mistakes. But if you repeat the same mistakes, it is a big problem. We need to be careful about repeating the same mistakes."

Arsenal delay Liverpool's title party

REUTERS, Ipswich

Arsenal cantered to a 4-0 victory over Ipswich Town to end Liverpool's hopes of winning the Premier League title on Sunday, with Leandro Trossard scoring twice and the hosts' Leif Davis sent off.

Arsenal moved on to 66 points in second spot but Liverpool, who face Leicester City later, still only need to win two of their remaining games to secure the crown.

Arsenal took the lead through Trossard in the 14th minute and Gabriel Martinelli doubled the advantage with a simple finish in the 28th minute before Reid was shown a straight red card for raking his studs down the back of Bukayo Saka's leg.

Trossard grabbed his second in the 69th minute and Ethan Nwani added a late fourth to leave Ipswich stuck in 18th place. They will be relegated if they drop points again or 17th-placed West Ham pick up one more point.



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Chaos over cuffs at ICT

SHARIFUL ISLAM and
SIRAJUL ISLAM RUBEL

A ruckus broke out at the International Crimes Tribunal yesterday as some of the 19 high-profile accused, including former ministers and senior bureaucrats, were brought into the courtroom in handcuffs.

The use of handcuffs inside the courtroom caused outrage among the defence and prompted a swift inquiry by the tribunal into the police's conduct.

"This is cruel and disgraceful. The accused are elderly and pose no threat. They deserve to be treated with dignity," defence lawyer Mustafizur Rahman Khan told the court.

Minutes earlier, police had escorted the accused into the courtroom in a case filed over crimes against humanity during the July uprising.

The accused included former ministers Amir Hossain Amu, Anisul Huq, Qamrul Islam, Lt Col (ret'd) Faruk Khan, Shahjahan Khan, Abdur Razzaque, Dipu Moni, Rashed Khan Menon, Hasanul Haq Inu, Kamal Ahmed Majumder, Golam Dastagir Gazi, and former state minister Zunaid Ahmed Palak, as well as

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1



Former ministers and bureaucrats accused in a case filed over crimes against humanity committed during last year's July uprising are being taken to a courtroom at the International Crimes Tribunal for a hearing yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Air freight capacity to increase

CAAB, Biman planning a series of upgrades

RASHIDUL HASAN

The Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) and Biman Bangladesh Airlines are enhancing their air cargo infrastructure following India's sudden suspension of third-country transhipment.

CAAB, the civil aviation regulatory body of the civil airlines, and Biman, the sole ground-handling agent at airports in Bangladesh, are taking urgent steps to expand capacity, deploy manpower and reduce costs to ensure uninterrupted exports by air, particularly of garment items.

The move comes as Bangladesh's garment exporters face a major challenge in handling urgent international shipments after India abruptly closed a widely-used air cargo transhipment route on April 8.

The route, via Kolkata and Delhi airports, allowed Bangladeshi exporters to move goods overland to India through the Benapole-Petrapole border and then air-ship them worldwide.

It became popular since the pandemic, offering faster service and often lower costs than relying on the overstretched Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA) in Dhaka.

Industry estimates suggest about 18 percent of Bangladesh's garment air cargo was flown through Indian airports per week in a lean season.

Bangladesh exported roughly 3,400 tonnes of garments by air in a week, with 600 tonnes flown through Indian airports before the transhipment ban, according to data from the Bangladesh Freight Forwarders Association.

One of the main attractions of Indian air transhipment

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

'Freeze 70 accounts of Nasrul Hamid'

Court also orders ACC to confiscate his 4 flats, 3 vehicles

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday ordered the Anti-Corruption Commission to freeze 70 bank accounts of Nasrul Hamid, former state minister for power and energy, in a case filed over acquiring Tk 36.37 crore illegally.

The court also ordered confiscation of three cars and four flats owned by Nasrul. The flats are located at the capital's Ramna and Banani areas.

Judge Md Zakir Hossain of Dhaka Metropolitan Senior Special Judge's Court passed the order after ACC Assistant Director Minhaz Bin Islam, who is leading the inquiry team, submitted an application in this regard.

In the application, the ACC official said they learned from credible sources that the accused has been attempting to transfer his properties. Therefore, an order is needed to prevent him from doing so, the official said.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3

Israeli strikes across Gaza kill 25

Netanyahu says military to increase pressure on Hamas

AFP, Gaza City

Gaza's civil defence agency reported that Israeli air strikes since dawn yesterday have killed at least 25 people across the Gaza Strip, including women and children.

Israel resumed its aerial and ground assault on Gaza on March 18, reigniting fighting after a two-month ceasefire that had paused more than 15 months of war in the coastal territory.

"Since dawn today, the occupation's air strikes have killed 20 people and injured dozens more, including children and women across the Gaza Strip," Mahmud Bassal, spokesman for the civil defence agency told AFP.

In a separate statement later, the agency reported that five people were killed in an Israeli drone strike on a group of civilians in eastern Rafah.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Saturday vowed to continue the war and bring home the remaining hostages held in Gaza without yielding to Hamas's demands.

"We are at a critical stage of the

campaign, and at this point, we need patience and determination to win," Netanyahu said in a statement, rejecting calls from the Hamas to end the war and withdraw troops from Gaza.

Since Israel resumed its offensive last month, at least 1,827 people have been killed in Gaza, according to the Hamas-run territory's health ministry.

The overall death toll in the Gaza war has reached 51,201, the majority of them civilians, according to the ministry, figures the UN considers reliable.

Pope Francis yesterday reiterated his call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza in an Easter Sunday message read aloud by an aide as the pontiff, still recovering from pneumonia, looked on during a brief appearance on the main balcony of St Peter's Basilica.

In the Easter message, the pontiff said the situation in Gaza was "dramatic and deplorable". The pope also called on Hamas to release its remaining hostages and condemned what he said was a "worrysome" trend of antisemitism in the world.

► Pope calls for Gaza ceasefire during Easter appearance

► 1,827 killed in Gaza since Israel resumed its offensive



The daughter of a victim of extrajudicial killing breaks down into tears at a protest held yesterday demanding justice for abductions and killings allegedly committed by law enforcers during the ousted Awami League regime. The platform Mayer Dak organised the demonstration in front of the High Court Mazar Gate. Story on page 3.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Recruit more women peacekeepers

Yunus urges chief of UN peace operations



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus yesterday urged the United Nations to recruit more Bangladeshi women in peacekeeping missions, reaffirming the country's steadfast commitment to international peace and security.

He made the call during a meeting with Jean-Pierre Lacroix, UN under-secretary general for peace operations, at the state guest house Jamuna in Dhaka, the CA's Press Wing said in a statement.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

Nasa's oldest astronaut returns to Earth on 70th birthday



AFP, Washington

Cake, gifts and a low-key family celebration may be how many senior citizens picture their 70th birthday.

But Nasa's oldest serving astronaut Don Pettit became a septuagenarian while hurtling towards the Earth in a spacecraft to wrap up a seven-month mission aboard the International Space Station (ISS).

A Soyuz capsule carrying the American and two Russian cosmonauts landed in Kazakhstan yesterday, the day of Pettit's milestone birthday.

"Today at 0420 Moscow time (0120 GMT), the Soyuz MS-26 landing craft with Alexei Ovchinin, Ivan Vagner and Donald (Don) Pettit aboard landed near the Kazakh town of Zhezkaizgan," Russia's space agency Roscosmos said.

Spending 220 days in space, Pettit and his crewmates Ovchinin and Vagner orbited the Earth 3,520 times and completed a journey of 93.3 million miles over the course of their mission.

It was the fourth spaceflight for Pettit, who has logged more than 18 months in orbit throughout his 29-year career.

The trio touched down in a remote area southeast of Kazakhstan after undocking from the space station just over three hours earlier.

Nasa images of the landing showed the small capsule parachuting down to Earth with the sunrise as a backdrop.

MURDER, RAPE OF CHILD One lands in jail, 4 in correction centre

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A Pabna court yesterday sent a man to jail and four others to a juvenile correction centre on charge of killing a minor girl after rape in Natore last week.

The accused, Md Sohel Rana, 25, and four others, aged between 14 and 17, are of Baraigram upazila of Natore.

Police said eight-year-old victim was returning home alone from her grandmother's home on April 14 evening. The suspects stopped and forcibly took her to a nearby banana orchard. They strangled her after raping her and dumped the body in a nearby village in Pabna's Chatmohar upazila, said Md Monjurul Alam, officer-in-charge of Chatmohar Police Station, citing the suspects' confessional statements.

Her face bore burn injuries as chemicals were poured onto the face, said the OC.

On information, police recovered the body on April 15. The victim's mother filed a case with the Chatmohar Police Station against

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3