



FTII restores and releases Ritwik Ghatak's film 'Fear' in 4K
P8



The unspoken trauma of journalists
P7



Rising gas prices threaten our investment prospects
P6



BTRC approves licence for Starlink
B1

UP CHAIRMEN'S ABSENCE People suffer amid service disruptions

HELEMUL ALAM and BAHARAM KHAN

Many union parishads across the country are still struggling to provide essential services as the chairmen of the local government bodies either went into hiding or were arrested in the aftermath of the July mass uprising.

Though the government has appointed administrators to fill the leadership void, there have been complaints of delays in getting birth and succession certificates that require approval from UP chairmen.

The situation worsened after the launch of "Operation Devil Hunt" in early February when several UP chairmen were arrested over alleged links to criminal activities, prompting many others to go into hiding.

Out of 4,575 UP chairmen across the country, at least 1,535 remain absent from work. Panel chairmen are handling the responsibilities of UP chairmen in 885 unions, while administrators have been appointed in 650 unions, according to officials at the LGRD ministry.

Moreover, 245 chairmen and 335 members were suspended till January, they said.

Besides running the government's social safety net programmes and village courts, implementing rural development projects, and ensuring law and order, union parishads issue birth, death, character and citizen certificates, among other services.

Talking to this newspaper, residents, officials and UP members in several districts said the absence of elected representatives caused disruptions to services.

They said many of the administrators are unfamiliar



PHOTO: MASUK HRIDIOY

The BOC Ghat paddy market in Brahmanbaria's Ashuganj is buzzing with activities as farmers from nearby riverside regions bring boatloads of freshly harvested crops for sale. Daily trading volume currently ranges between 80,000 and 100,000 maunds at this major paddy trade hub by the Meghna. Meanwhile, farmers are frustrated, saying an increased supply has caused paddy prices to fall by Tk 500 per maund.

Hasina, 407 others sued over BNP man's killing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina and 407 others have been sued over the killing of BNP activist Mahfuz Alam Shraban in the capital's Mirpur during the mass uprising last year.

The accused individuals include 24 journalists, at least 36 former ministers and state ministers, more than 41 former lawmakers of the Awami League government, and six former advisers to Hasina, including her son Sajeb Wazed Joy.

Businessmen of seven groups, five former election commissioners and former Election Commission secretary Muhammed Sadique, three former top officials of Bangladesh SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

1,535 out of 4,575 UP chairmen absent from work

Panel chairmen working in 885 unions

Administrators appointed in 650 unions

245 chairmen suspended till January

Source: LGRD ministry officials

with the people and infrastructure in their new places of deployment and are often burdened with additional work.

Besides, some panel chairmen, picked from among UP members to perform the duties of UP chairmen in their absence, are finding it hard to play their new role due to a lack of leadership experience.

In Chattogram, 134 out of 191 UP chairmen remain absent from office. Now, 46 UPs are managed by upazila nirbahi officers (UNOs), 39 by assistant commissioners of land, and 49 by panel chairmen.

Scores of service seekers in these unions said they had faced difficulties in obtaining documents from UP offices.

Recounting her ordeal, Rumana Akter, a resident of Ward-1 in Barahatia Union, said, "I had to visit the parishad office multiple times to get my daughter's birth certificate. I was told that UP Chairman Bijoy Kumar, an Awami League leader, remains absent. It took 15 days and a lot of hassle to get the certificate."

Milton Chowdhury, secretary of Popadia union parishad, said, "Our chairman, SM Jasim Uddin Chowdhury, has not come to office since August 5. For his approval, we have to send documents to the port city where he is staying now. What used to take a day now takes two or three."

Out of the 146 UP chairmen in Mymensingh, 77 are absent, with government officials or panel chairmen filling their positions, said district administration sources.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Family faces double blow Rape victim laid to rest next to her July martyr father

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

After the killing of her husband, the sole breadwinner of the family, in last year's uprising, the woman pinned her hopes on the eldest daughter. The girl's death, reportedly by suicide following the trauma of being gang-raped, shattered the mother's new dreams.

With two young children, the woman now wonders how the family will survive.

"Oh my daughter! Where have you gone, leaving us behind?" the inconsolable mother wailed as crying relatives tried to soothe her at Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital in the early hours yesterday. She was losing consciousness repeatedly.

Through her sobs, she described the tragedy of losing her husband as the first blow to the family.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

No place to heal

Rape survivors struggle amid a lack of mental health support

NILIMA JAHAN

Lamia, a 18-year-old girl and the eldest daughter of a July martyr, vowed to rebuild her family's life for her grieving mother. Following the death of her father, she would often say, "We will stand again, Ma. I will take care of everything."

"Without mental support, survivors can sink into deep guilt and primal shame, which can lead to PTSD or even suicidal tendencies."

Dr Sunjida Shahriah, a psychotherapist working with rape survivors.

Despite her quiet strength, grief lingered as a constant presence in their home. Then, on March 18, after visiting her father's gravesite, Lamia was gang-raped by men, who filmed the assault and threatened to release the footage if she reported the crime.

As she struggled to cope with the trauma after returning to her home in the capital's Shekherk, the whispers and judgement from neighbours turned her home into a place of suffocating isolation.

Lamia's mother, overwhelmed by the situation, confided in Sabrina Afroz Sabonti, an executive member of the July Smrity Foundation, who had been in contact with the family

since the death of her father. Sabonti recalls the mother mentioning that once Lamia finished her exams, they planned to leave the area.

However, Lamia did not wait. Before her exams even began, she took her own life on Saturday night.

Her death by suicide highlights the critical lack of mental health

support since the death of her father.

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SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Polls no later than June 2026

Yunus tells Al Jazeera

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus has said that next national polls will be held within June 2026.

In an interview with Al Jazeera, he also said the timeline will depend on how many reforms all agree or disagree on.

"They're not saying let the interim government go, have the election today... We have not faced any such problem of people saying that 'hand it [power] over as soon as possible'."

PROF MUHAMMAD YUNUS



If the consensus is on a larger number of reforms, then it will take longer. "If we can focus on a smaller version of the [reform] implementation, then we will have an early election in December," he said in the interview that was aired yesterday.

"However, if the process takes longer, we go up to June, but we will not go beyond June," he added.

Yunus promised that the next election will be best ever election in the country's history.

Asked if the Awami League will be allowed to take part in the polls, Yunus said, "We don't know yet, they [AL] have not declared anything."

He said once the declaration comes, then the matter of the response from the Election Commission and other factors will arise. Then there are other parties who may say that under this law they cannot participate and so on, he added.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 4

CONFLICT-TORN RAKHINE Dhaka agrees to aid corridor, but with conditions: Touhid

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka agrees in principle with the UN proposal for a humanitarian corridor to Myanmar's Rakhine State, but certain conditions must be met for its implementation, said Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain yesterday.

Talks over the corridor intensified after UN chief Antonio Guterres, during his 4-day Bangladesh visit last month, said that he discussed with authorities the option of sending humanitarian aid into Myanmar via Bangladesh.

Guterres said such a move will help Rohingya repatriation to Rakhine. However, he admitted it would require the "authorisation and the cooperation of the parties to the conflict".

Yesterday, Touhid, while interacting with reporters at the foreign ministry, did not elaborate on the conditions, but a diplomatic source said a major one is to ensure a conducive environment for Rohingya repatriation.

Foreign adviser urges talks to ease Indo-Pak tensions

'Bangladeshis' arrested in India will be repatriated after verification

SEE PAGE 8 COL 3

DEFAULT LOANS Bank puts 3 S Alam factories up for auction

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Three firms owned by Chattogram-based S Alam Group are going under the hammer for defaulting on around Tk 2,180 crore loans from the Islami Bank.

They are S Alam Steel Mills, S Alam Power Generation, and S Alam Vegetable Oil Industries, according to a notice published in local newspaper Dainik Purbokone by the bank's Khatunganj Corporate Branch in the port city yesterday.

To recover the dues, the bank has invited bids from interested buyers for the mortgaged properties under section 12(3) of the Money Loan Court Act 2003.

The notice says that the auctioned assets cover approximately 1,149 decimals of land.

It has held 15 individuals, including S Alam Group Chairman Mohammed Saiful Alam, responsible for the defaulted loans.

Others include Alam Cold Rolled Steels Ltd's Chairman Abdus Samad, Managing Director Osman Gani,

SEE PAGE 8 COL 1

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এতদ্বারা সংশ্লিষ্ট সকলের অবগতির জন্য জানানো যাচ্ছে যে, ঢাকা দক্ষিণ সিটি কর্পোরেশনের আওতাধীন এলাকায় কতিপয় আবাসিক/বাণিজ্যিক ভবনের অভ্যন্তরে রাজস্ব কর্তৃক অনুমোদিত নক্সায় রেস্টুরেন্ট না থাকলেও বিধি বহির্ভূতভাবে রেস্টুরেন্ট পরিচালনা করা হচ্ছে এবং ভবনের ছাদে অবৈধভাবে রুফটপ রেস্টুরেন্ট পরিচালিত হচ্ছে, যা জনস্বাস্থ্যের জন্য ঝুঁকিপূর্ণ। বিধি বহির্ভূতভাবে রেস্টুরেন্ট পরিচালনা করায় ইতোমধ্যেই বিভিন্ন স্থানে দূর্ঘটনায় সম্পদ ও প্রাণহানির ঘটনা ঘটেছে। এসব ক্ষেত্রে অনেক অবৈধ ব্যবসা প্রতিষ্ঠান অনৈতিক উপায়ে কর্পোরেশনের ট্রেড লাইসেন্স গ্রহণ করেছেন।

বর্ণিত অবস্থায় সম্পদ ও জানমালের ক্ষতির ঝুঁকি এড়াতে নক্সা বহির্ভূত সকল রেস্টুরেন্ট এবং ভবনের ছাদে স্থাপিত রুফটপ রেস্টুরেন্টের ট্রেড লাইসেন্স বিজ্ঞপ্তি জারীর তারিখ হতে বাতিল ঘোষণা করা হলো। বাতিলকৃত লাইসেন্স দ্বারা কোন ব্যবসা পরিচালনা করা হলে তাদের বিরুদ্ধে আইনানুগ ব্যবস্থা গ্রহণ করা হবে।

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