

## Two rights activists assaulted in Rangamati

Attack took place after event commemorating Kalpana Chakma

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two rights activists, including a university teacher, were assaulted while they were returning from a programme commemorating the disappearance of Kalpana Chakma in Kawkhali upazila of Rangamati.

Kalpana, the then organising secretary of the Hill Women's Federation, disappeared on June 12, 1996. Yesterday was the 29th anniversary of her disappearance.

Oliur Sun, lecturer of English at ULAB, women's rights activist Marzia Prova and Nuzia Hasin Rasha, president of the DU unit of Biplobi Chhatra Moitri, were invited as speakers to the event held by the Hill Women's Federation.

Oliur suffered eye injuries in the attack.

Recounting how the attack took

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Photo shows the rear of the Air India plane following its crash in Ahmedabad, India, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Yunus receives the Harmony Award

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The award is given based on the King's tenet that "we should work with nature, not against it".

South Korean diplomat and former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon became the first recipient of the King Charles III Harmony Award last year in recognition of his lifelong efforts to promote a "sustainable relationship between people, planet and place on a local and global scale".

The King's Foundation was founded in order to support communities where people, places and the planet can coexist harmoniously.

This year's awards ceremony comes as the charity revealed it has trained more than 1,15,000 students in traditional crafts and environmental education over its 35-year tenure, welcomed more than 2.5 million visitors to its UK destinations, and positively affected more than 5,00,000 lives through sustainable urban planning, reports UK's People Magazine.

The event celebrated the work of students, teachers, alumni and partners who have contributed to the foundation's work across various sectors such as sustainability, traditional heritage skills and environmental education.

Celebrities including Meryl Streep, David Beckham and Kate Winslet were among the 200 guests in attendance, and the trio were photographed sharing a laugh with King Charles.

Earlier on the day, Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus met Britain's King Charles III at Buckingham Palace, London, for a private audience.

During the one-to-one meeting, Yunus briefed Charles on the political transition and the reform measures implemented in Bangladesh following last year's July uprising and the ousting of the Awami League government.

"It was the most important event of the chief adviser's visit to the UK," CA's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam told journalists.

An audience granted by the King is an acknowledgement of the importance of certain individuals and their work.

After the meeting, Charles and Queen Camilla gave Yunus a gift signed by them, said Shafiqul.

"It was a proud moment," he said.

On the third day of his visit to the UK, Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus also met Sir Lindsay Hoyle, Speaker of the UK House of Commons in Westminster, London.

## No barrier to Tarique's return

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he said in a media briefing in front of Salna Highway Police Station in Gazipur.

Regarding the issue of push-ins by Indian authorities despite Bangladesh's objections, he said that the matter has already been addressed by the foreign affairs adviser, and formal letters have been issued.

"If any Bangladeshi national is staying in their country, of course, we will take them back, but they must return through proper channels," he said.

When asked about the risk of Covid-19 transmission from those being pushed in, he said: "Tests are being conducted for everyone. Measures have been taken to strengthen awareness and health screening at airports and land ports."

About the public health issues, the adviser said greater awareness is needed regarding the use of polythene.

"People must be made aware so that polythene is not used under any circumstances. Masks must be used properly, not just kept in pockets. We must stay alert even though we are not currently facing serious Covid-related issues."

## Over 260 killed in Air India plane crash

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videos from the area showed. The tail of the plane was stuck on top of the building.

India's CNN News-18 TV channels said the plane crashed on top of the dining area of the hostel, killing many medical students as well.

The passengers included 217 adults, 11 children and two infants, a source told Reuters. Of them, 169 were Indians, 53 were Britons, seven Portuguese, and one Canadian, Air India said.

Investigators are prioritising the recovery of the aircraft's black box, the key to understanding what caused the tragedy.

Aviation tracking site Flightradar24 said the plane was a Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner, a modern passenger aircraft.

It was the first crash for the Dreamliner, which began flying commercially in 2011. The plane that crashed yesterday flew for the first time in 2013 and was delivered to Air India in January 2014, Flightradar24 said.

"At this moment, we are ascertaining the details and will share further updates," Air India said on X.

The crash occurred just after the plane took off, television channels reported. One channel showed the plane over a residential area and then disappearing from the screen before a huge fireball can be seen rising into the sky from beyond the houses.

Visuals also showed debris on fire, with thick black smoke rising up into the sky near the airport. They also showed

people being moved in stretchers and being taken away in ambulances.

"My sister-in-law was going to London. Within an hour, I got news that the plane had crashed," Poonam Patel, a relative of one of the passengers, told news agency ANI at the government hospital in Ahmedabad.

According to air traffic control at the Ahmedabad airport, the aircraft departed at 1:39pm from runway 23. It made a "Mayday" call, signalling an emergency, but thereafter there was no response from the aircraft.

Flightradar24 also said that it received the last signal from the aircraft seconds after it took off.

US aerospace safety consultant Anthony Brickhouse said one problematic sign from videos of the aircraft was that the landing gear was down at a phase of flight when it would typically be up.

"If you didn't know what was happening, you would think that plane was on approach to a runway," Brickhouse said.

Boeing said it was aware of initial reports and was working to gather more information. Boeing shares fell 6.8 percent to \$199.13 in pre-market trade.

Aircraft engine-maker GE Aerospace said that it would put a team together to go to India and analyse cockpit data, India's CNBC TV18 reported.

Britain was working with Indian authorities to urgently establish the facts around the crash and to provide support to those involved, the country's foreign office said in a statement posted

on its website.

"The tragedy in Ahmedabad has stunned and saddened us," Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi posted on X.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said images emerging of the crash were "devastating", and that he was being kept informed as the situation developed. A Buckingham Palace spokesperson said King Charles was also being kept updated.

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus has expressed shock over the crash of an Air India Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner in Ahmedabad.

In a message sent to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday, Yunus extended his deepest condolences to the families of the victims.

"At this trying hour, our thoughts and prayers remain with the victims and their loved ones," the chief adviser said. "We stand in solidarity with the people and government of India, and offer our full support in any form."

Pakistani Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar said he was "saddened" by the plane crash in neighbouring India.

The Tata Group, owner of Air India, will provide Rs 1 crore to the family of each person who lost their life in the plane crash, announced the company's chairman N Chandrasekaran.

Tata Group will also cover the medical expenses of those injured and ensure that they receive all necessary care and support, he said.

## Top Spanish ruling party official implicated in graft probe

AFP, Madrid

A top official in Spain's ruling Socialist Party was implicated yesterday in a widening corruption investigation that has already ensnared a former close aide to Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez.

Santos Cerdan, the party's organisation secretary and its third-ranking figure, is suspected of being an accomplice in the alleged improper awarding of a public contract during the Covid-19 pandemic, according to a newly published judicial report.

A judge said a police report "reveals the existence of consistent evidence" suggesting Cerdan acted in collusion with former Transport Minister Jose Luis Abalos and his former adviser, Koldo Garcia Izaguirre, in exchange for financial gain.

Cerdan, who is also a member of parliament, has been invited to testify voluntarily before the Supreme Court on June 25.

Due to his parliamentary immunity, he cannot be formally charged unless the court proceeds with further steps.

"I am absolutely not afraid. I am

completely certain that I will not be accused of corruption," he said as he arrived in parliament.

The investigation centres on public procurement of medical equipment during the early months of the pandemic.

Abalos, who served as transport minister from 2018 to 2021 and was once a key figure in Sanchez's administration, is accused of receiving illegal commissions through business contracts.

He faces charges of corruption, influence peddling, and embezzlement.

Abalos was dismissed from Sanchez's cabinet in 2021 and expelled from the Socialist Party earlier this year but remains a member of parliament as an independent.

His parliamentary immunity was lifted in January. During a court hearing in December, he denied receiving any kickbacks and maintained there were no irregularities.

Sanchez's wife, Begona Gomez, and his brother, David Sanchez, are also the target of separate investigations for graft.

## Economy to face 7 challenges

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"Collectively, these factors may pose a risk to the economy by increasing unemployment and exerting downward pressure on GDP growth," the report said.

All of the challenges are valid and these can impact investment and GDP growth, said Mustafizur Rahman, a distinguished fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

"But the question is what are they doing to face these challenges?"

The government is taking a contractionary monetary policy to tame inflation. Due to tight monetary policy, investment is being impacted.

However, investors are facing many other problems like shortage of gas, turnaround time of port, high costs for trade facilitation and institutional inefficiency, he added.

"It is not true that fiscal policy is not tight, so unemployment may not rise because of this," said Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office.

Next fiscal year's budget deficit is almost similar to that of this fiscal year's revised budget.

"So, it is not an accurate description that the fiscal policy is tight. The opposite argument may come, which is: if the fiscal policy was tight, the budget deficit could be lower."

If the budget deficit was lower, the government would have borrowed lower from the banking sector, which would reduce interest rates and ease the private sector's access to credit, he said.

After reaching a decade-high of 11.7 percent in July last year, inflation moderated to 9.4 percent in March, the finance ministry report said.

In response, the government has implemented a tighter monetary policy stance alongside fiscal consolidation measures aimed at stabilising prices and restoring macroeconomic stability.

Despite these measures, inflationary pressures remain elevated, it said.

The government is aiming to reduce inflation, but it has no clear indication in the monetary policy of how the policy rate will be changed with the changes in the inflation rate, Hussain said.

Meanwhile, the Trump administration's imposition of a 37 percent tariff this year on Bangladeshi exports -- temporarily suspended for

90 days -- is raising concerns among exporters.

Moreover, the International Monetary Fund in its World Economic Outlook in April projected a global growth slowdown to 2.8 percent in 2025, which may further dampen external demand for Bangladeshi goods.

In light of these developments, achieving the projected 10 percent export growth in fiscal 2025-26 is likely to be challenging, said the policy statement.

Bangladesh continues to face the longstanding challenge of a persistently low tax-to-GDP ratio.

This constrains the government's ability to mobilise adequate domestic resources, which ultimately limits fiscal space for critical development and social sector investments, undermining long-term growth prospects.

The financial sector is facing acute challenges marked by rising defaulted loans, distressed banks and ongoing liquidity pressures, it said.

While some banks have improved their positions, several remain at risk of bankruptcy.

Without comprehensive reforms addressing governance, risk management, legal recovery and potential mergers or acquisitions of weak banks, these vulnerabilities could significantly undermine financial stability and hinder overall economic growth, it said.

Bangladesh may face key challenges after its graduation from the least-developed country bracket in 2026, including loss of preferential trade benefits, maintaining export competitiveness and achieving greater economic diversification.

Additionally, adapting to reduced access to concessional financing and climate resilience funding will be critical as Bangladesh remains highly vulnerable to climate change impacts.

The Climate Risk Index 2025 estimates that the disasters result in annual economic losses of approximately \$3 billion -- about 1 percent of GDP -- impacting over 6.3 million people each year.

Given the recurring nature of such events, comprehensive assessments and effective strategies are essential to mitigate potential economic damages and enhance climate resilience, it added.

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at the right time for the nation."

Important decisions about how the country will be governed in the future may be made after this meeting, he added.

"Through this meeting, we hope we will quickly move towards a democratic transformation. The faster we move towards a democratic transformation, the sooner a sense of relief will return and the other political problems will subside," he added.

BNP Standing Committee member Khandaker Mosharraf told The Daily Star that the Yunus-Tarique meet will open a path to restore democracy in Bangladesh.

"We have urged our acting chairman to raise the issues that the BNP as a party had been talking about."

Jamaat-e-Islami Assistant Secretary General Ahsanul Mahboob Zubair said, "Something good may happen for democracy and the country from this event. Any issue can be resolved through discussions."

National Citizen Party Chief Coordinator Nasiruddin Patwary



This handout photo, taken and released yesterday by the Ukrainian State Emergency Service, shows firefighters extinguishing a fire in a grocery store that was destroyed during an overnight Russian drone strike in Kharkiv, Ukraine.

PHOTO: AFP