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Govt moves to
revive stock
market

B1

China's Xi holds
talks with North
Korea's Kim

P5

Why are we
trying to make
the election
uncertain?

P6

Fear confronted
is fear
conquered

P11

Referendum likely on PR for upper house

NCC prepares proposal, revises three contentious commitments

MD ABBAS

The National Consensus Commission is set to propose a referendum on how the upper house of parliament would be formed.

Several sources close to the commission confirmed this to The Daily Star last night.

A commission member, on condition of anonymity, told this paper that they are likely to suggest the referendum be held either before the next general election or at the same time as the polls.

The sources said the commission is not considering a referendum for the implementation of constitution-related amendments. However, some matters will be recommended for implementation through ordinance or government order, while others will require constitutional amendments, they said.

Initially, the commission had planned to send the July Charter to political parties first and decide later on the charter's implementation process. However, it is now preparing to send the charter and its implementation plan to political parties and the government.

The implementation plan will be finalised on Sunday following consultations with legal experts, as the commission has already received the feedback needed from the political parties.

Prof Ali Riaz, vice-president of the commission, said, "At first, we

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



A residential area has sprung, erasing hillocks, in Sylhet city's Baluchar area. Under the Awami League regime, a syndicate of land grabbers demolished at least 10-15 hillocks in the area to develop it. More than 100 families now live in this landslide-prone zone. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Gazipur gets a new seat, Bagerhat loses one
EC finalises delimitation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ahead of the 13th national election next year, the Election Commission yesterday finalised the boundaries of the 300 constituencies, with 46 seats in 16 districts redrawn.

In the final list, the commission has added a new parliamentary constituency in Gazipur district and reduced one in Bagerhat.

So, Gazipur will have six parliamentary seats while Bagerhat three in the upcoming election to be held in February.

The 46 redrawn seats are: Panchagarh-1 and 2; Rangpur-1 and 3; Sirajganj-1 and 2; Pabna-1 and 2; Bagerhat-1, 2

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Disqualified until proven innocent

Draft ICT ordinance says if charged, one cannot contest polls, hold public office and govt job

BAHARAM KHAN and
SIRAJUL ISLAM RUBEL

"If action can be taken against someone merely because charges have been brought, then what is the point of having a trial?"

Shahdeeb Malik,
Eminent jurist

With these provisions, the latest draft amendment to the International Crimes Tribunal Ordinance, 2025, received final approval at an advisory council meeting chaired by Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus yesterday.

This marks the third attempt to amend the ordinance during the interim government's tenure.

Under the amended draft, such individuals cannot hold or contest positions as MPs, or as members, commissioners, chairmen, mayors, or administrators of any local government body or institution. The provision does not apply to those acquitted of the charges.

A summary, signed by Law Secretary Liakat Ali Molla, sought to justify the amendment, saying it was necessary to make the ordinance more effective.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

Correction to Editors' Council statement

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Editors' Council yesterday issued a correction to its statement released on Wednesday, titled "Concerns over photo denial, mob incident at DRU, and new initiative regarding laws under the Awami League era."

That statement, signed by Council President Mahfuz Anam and General Secretary Dewan Hanif Mahmud, referred to the proposed legislation as the Media Workers Protection Act.

The accurate title of the draft law is the Media Workers (Terms of Employment) Act, 2021.

The Editors' Council said, "We regret this inadvertent error."

On Wednesday, the council expressed concerns over claims that a genuine protest photograph was AI-generated; attempts to create a mob at the Dhaka Reporters Unity; and the move to implement the aforementioned law.

Bangladesh tops Asia's bad loan charts

India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka reduced their NPL ratios last year, says ADB report

NON-PERFORMING LOANS IN BILLION US DOLLARS

	2023	2024	Change (%)	% of total loans
Bangladesh	15.8	20.27	28.3	20.2
India	69.41	56.31	-18.9	2.5
Sri Lanka	4.35	4.58	5.3	12.9
Pakistan	3.58	3.9	8.7	6.3
Nepal	1.23	1.68	36.5	4.6

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and WASIM BIN HABIB

Bangladesh now has the highest non-performing loan (NPL) ratio in Asia, with defaults surging to 20.2 percent of total loans in 2024, according to a new Asian Development Bank report.

The \$20.27 billion stock of distressed assets marked a 28 percent jump year on year, underscoring that Bangladesh has the region's "most fragile banking system", said the report titled Nonperforming Loans Watch in Asia 2025 and published last month.

"Bangladesh stood out as a regional outlier,"

it said, adding that the country's NPL ratio rose by 11.2 percentage points in just one year.

In contrast, other South Asian countries -- India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka -- reduced their NPL ratios last year, while Nepal recorded only a marginal increase of 0.9 percentage points.

India, the region's largest economy, cut its NPL ratio to 2.5 percent from 3.4 percent, helped by sweeping banking reforms.

According to the ADB, the five South Asian countries collectively accounted for \$86.74 billion in NPLs in 2023, which was 12.4 percent

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

AUG 21 ATTACK CASE
SC upholds
Tarique, Babar's
acquittals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court yesterday upheld the High Court verdict that acquitted BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman, former state minister Lutfuzzaman Babar, and 47 others in two cases filed over the August 21 grenade attack on an Awami League rally.

On August 21, 2004, the gruesome grenade attack was carried out on the rally at Bangabandhu Avenue in Dhaka, leaving at least 24 people killed and 300 injured.

Then opposition leader Sheikh Hasina, who later ran the country as the prime minister for 15 years and was forced to flee on August 5 last year amid an uprising, narrowly escaped the attack.

The two cases -- one for murder and another under the Explosives Substances Act -- were lodged after the incident was considered to be one of the most sensational political crimes in the country's history.

Yesterday, a six-member bench of the Appellate Division, led by Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed, dismissed the state's appeal challenging the HC verdict.

With the apex court judgment, Tarique has got acquittal from all the cases in which he had been convicted and sentenced to imprisonment, and therefore, there is no legal bar for him to contest elections, his lawyer Zakir Hossain Bhuiyan told The Daily Star.

The lawyer, however, could not instantly say in how many cases Tarique had been convicted and sentenced by courts.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5



A battery-run three-wheeler, overloaded with sugarcane, plies the busy Dhaka-Barishal highway in Barishal's Kashipur area. Such vehicles are illegal on highways. The photo was taken recently.

Reforms cannot be sustained in a climate of violence

Says TI chair François Valérian

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

François Valérian, chair of Transparency International, has said that Bangladesh cannot sustain reforms or fight abuse of power "in a climate of violence, harassment and threats against journalists and civil society activists."

Speaking at a press conference at the TIB office at the Midas Centre in Dhanmondi yesterday morning, he expressed concern over "rising attacks" on journalists, saying that free and safe reporting is essential to break the "culture of secrecy" that fuels corruption.

Valérian said that the estimated \$16 billion siphoned from Bangladesh annually under the previous regime has caused long-term destruction of public services and widened inequality.

"If this money were not stolen, poverty could be reduced much more efficiently," he said.

Defending the participation of Transparency International Bangladesh in the reform commissions, he said that the watchdog must "engage with power and criticise power" to help build the "new Bangladesh" after last year's uprising.

He has lauded Bangladesh's civil society for its role in the downfall of the "authoritarian and massively corrupt regime" last year, calling it an inspiration at a time when authoritarianism is rising globally.

The TI chair said reforms initiated since August 2024 must be sustained under strong civil society monitoring to prevent abuse of power.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

