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THE DAILY

Star

SECOND EDITION

ON FRIDAY

DHAKA FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 26, 2025

REGD. NO. DA 781

VOL. XXXV No. 243

ASHWIN II, 1432 BS

www.thedailystar.net

RABIUS SANI 3, 1447 HJRI

20 PAGES: TK 15.00

Justice eludes women, children as trials drag on

Experts warn delays are letting offenders walk free

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN and EMRUL HASAN BAPPI

Fatema Akter (pseudonym) was just five when she was raped by her neighbour in Dhaka's Khilgaon. After her 20-year fight for justice, the trial has ended -- not with accountability but with the man's acquittal.

On July 21 this year, the Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal 3 cleared him of the charges, citing insufficient evidence.

Case documents show her mother heard her scream from the neighbour's house around 6:00pm on February 9, 2004. Rushing inside, she found the child in a pool of blood. Locals caught the perpetrator and handed him over to police.

A case was filed with Khilgaon Police Station that night, and charges were framed on May 18, 2004.

In the meantime, Fatema grew up to be 25, carrying the trauma of a crime the courts ultimately left unpunished.

She is one of thousands of survivors whose quest for justice remains stalled, as conviction rates for crimes against women and children continue to be among the lowest in the justice system.

Police Headquarters data show that in the first eight months of this year, just 0.52 percent of child-related cases and 2.61 percent of women-related cases ended in conviction. Conviction rates for child-related cases were 0.48 percent and 0.73 percent in 2023 and 2024 respectively, while women-related cases had a 5.06 percent conviction rate in 2023 and 5.85 in 2024.

For perspective, the conviction rate for cases across the board was 28 percent in December 2023.

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CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN	CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN
2025 (JAN-AUG)	
0.52%	Conviction 2.61% ,
0.30%	Punishment 1.44%
2024	
0.73%	Conviction 5.85%
0.52%	Punishment 4.63%
2023	
0.48%	Conviction 5.06%
0.32%	Punishment 3.58%



Displaced Palestinians, fleeing northern Gaza due to an Israeli military operation and evacuation order, rest on their way to southern territories in the central Gaza Strip, yesterday. The Israeli military yesterday said that 700,000 Palestinians have fled Gaza City since late August, as it presses an air and ground assault on the urban centre. At least 46 Palestinians were killed in Israeli strikes yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

CEC rules out PR system without legal change

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin said yesterday that the next general election cannot be held under a proportional representation system unless the law is amended to allow it.

"The election will be held according to the procedures outlined in the RPO [Representation of the People Order]. The PR system isn't included there," he said at a press briefing at the EC office.

"If the RPO is amended or replaced, then maybe. But without changing the law, I can't proceed," he added.

In reply to a question about whether it would be possible to hold the election in February if the law is changed, he said, "I don't want to respond to hypothetical questions."

Referring to the ongoing political agitation over PR, he said, "Let the issue be settled. They [politicians] will understand whether it's feasible for us or not."

Currently, Bangladesh uses the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system, where the candidate with the highest votes in a constituency wins. Under PR, parliamentary seats are distributed proportionally to the total votes each party receives.

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'Delhi didn't like what our students did'

Yunus says bilateral ties also being affected by Hasina, Saarc issues

UNB, Dhaka



India has not been able to accept the change in Bangladesh because it "did not like" what the students did during the uprising last year, said Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus.

He said India's hosting of ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina, who created all sorts of problems in the country and killed young people, is not helping bilateral ties between the neighbours.

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PHOTO: AZAHLA UDDIN

A solar-powered pump house now irrigates hundreds of bighas of farmland in the Hard Barendra region of Rajshahi. With uninterrupted water supply from this system, farmers can harvest paddy up to four times a year -- a sharp rise from just once annually in the past. The photo was taken yesterday in Godagari upazila's Kalipur.

Country sees rise in HIV infections, deaths

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

In contrast to the global decline in HIV infections and deaths, Bangladesh is witnessing a troubling rise in both cases and fatalities -- a trend that has raised public health concerns.

The country recorded 1,438 cases of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and 326 deaths from HIV infections last year. The numbers show a marked increase from 2023, when 1,276 people tested positive for the virus and 266 died, according to Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) data.

In the first six months of this year, 882 HIV-positive cases were reported, indicating a further rise in infections, said a DGHS official, adding that data on HIV-related deaths in 2025 is yet to be compiled.

HIV attacks the body's immune

YEAR	HIV CASES	DEATH DATA
2025 (till June)	882	Not available
2024	1,438	326
2023	1,276	266
2022	947	232
2021	729	205
2020	658	141
2010	343	37
2005	193	30
2000	31	1

system, weakening its ability to fight infections and diseases, and if left untreated, can lead to Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

Attributing the rise in infections to increased testing, health officials said around 23 percent of those potentially living with HIV remain

unaware of their health status.

They fear that a lack of funding for preventive services could result in a further increase in the positivity rate and make it more difficult for the country to achieve the target of eliminating AIDS by 2030.

The expiry of a government programme in June last year caused serious disruptions to preventive services -- such as the distribution of condoms, needles, and syringes among key populations, including people who inject drugs, female sex workers and transgender individuals, noted officials.

Altogether, these groups comprise 3.22 lakh people and accounted for half of the HIV cases last year.

In Bangladesh, the first HIV case was detected in 1989. The total

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