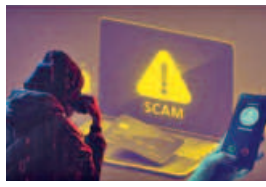


The interim government's troubling continuity
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PROTEST OVER RAPE 3 shot dead in Khagrachhari

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Three people were shot dead and four others injured yesterday afternoon in Khagrachhari's Guimara upazila during protests by indigenous people over the rape of a schoolgirl.

Ahsan Habib Palash, deputy inspector general of police for the Chattogram range, confirmed the incident to The Daily Star around 6:25pm.

"The bodies are now at Khagrachhari Sadar Hospital morgue, and post-mortems are scheduled for tomorrow," he added.

The DIG, however, could not say whose bullets caused the deaths. The identities of the deceased were also not known at the time of filing this report at 11:30pm.

Khagrachhari Civil Surgeon Mohammed Saber said three people were brought dead to the Sadar hospital along with four injured.

In the aftermath of the shooting, many shops -- mostly owned by indigenous people -- were looted and set on fire at Ramesu Bazar in Guimara. Nearby houses were also vandalised.

Videos and photos of the fire went viral on social media.

According to eyewitnesses, the Jumma Chhatra Janata, a platform of indigenous community, which has been protesting the rape of a class VIII student on Tuesday, was enforcing a blockade on the Guimara road yesterday morning.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Shops, houses, and vehicles burning in Ramesu Bazar of Khagrachhari's Guimara upazila yesterday afternoon.

- Tension runs high in Khagrachhari
- Jumma Chhatra Janata calls indefinite road blockade in 3 hilly dists from today
- ISPR accuses UPDF of shooting at army personnel, locals at Ramesu

Around 11:30am, members of the security forces arrived and asked the protesters why the blockade was continuing despite the arrest of a suspect in the rape case. At one point, an altercation ensued, and moments later, heavy gunfire rang out.

Mongsazai Marma and Kongjari Marma, who were present at the scene, said they were peacefully demonstrating in front of a food warehouse when law enforcers intervened. At one point, the forces opened fire on the protesters.

Then around 1:00pm, some 25 people, many wearing masks, went into a rampage at Ramesu Bazar. They looted and torched shops and houses. They also set fire to motorcycles parked in the area, they added.

Sanaw Marma, a former Chittagong University student, said the torched houses and shops belonged to the Marma community. Some shopkeepers were attacked with machetes.

Late at night, Inter-Services Public Relations, the media and public relations wing of the Armed Forces, issued a statement, accusing United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) and its affiliates of inciting violence in Khagrachhari.

It said UPDF activists blocked roads at Ramesu Bazar yesterday morning, defying section 144, and engaged in chase and counter-chase with Bangalees.

When troops tried to intervene, the armed groups attacked them with brickbats, sticks, slingshots, and

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'We need strict enforcement of electoral laws'

Civil society members tell EC in pre-polls dialogue

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission must strictly enforce electoral laws to ensure that the upcoming general elections are free, fair and credible, said civil society representatives yesterday.

"The upcoming election as a transitional moment for Bangladesh as it will reveal the country's future trajectory -- you must carry out your responsibilities strongly despite the challenges," said Humayun Kabir, a former ambassador, on the opening day of the EC's pre-election dialogue series.

Some parties are demanding specific symbols and threatening not to participate otherwise, said Muhammad Yahya Akhtar, vice-chancellor of Chittagong University.

"This is not right. The EC is an entirely independent institution. This is its jurisdiction. It should not be pressured."

Special care must be taken when managing voting through postal

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

CIVIL SERVICE Govt mulls hiring from outside

Move sparks unease among bureaucrats

BAHARAM KHAN

The government is moving to introduce lateral entry, or direct appointment, at the level of joint secretary to speed up the administration's work.

A committee of three secretaries and an additional secretary has held several meetings on the matter and is now working to finalise its report.

The move, which came following the Public Administration Reform Commission's recommendation, has sparked resentment among young civil service officers, though no one is willing to speak on the record.

Earlier, the commission, in its report on February 5, suggested introducing lateral entry at the level of deputy secretary and above. The report did not specify what percentage of posts would be filled through such appointments.

Lateral entry means bringing in professionals from outside the traditional civil service cadre -- often from the private sector, academia, armed forces, state-

owned enterprises, or other specialised fields -- directly, instead of them rising through the regular recruitment and promotion process of the civil service.

The committee working on the matter is headed by ASM Saleh Ahmed, senior secretary of the land ministry, and includes the finance secretary, local government secretary, and an additional secretary from the public administration ministry.

Saleh Ahmed told The Daily Star, "We have held multiple meetings, and the report is now being drafted. It will be submitted soon."

Currently, there are over 1,000 joint secretaries in the administration. For example, if the government approves lateral entry for 10 percent, more than 100 officers could be recruited.

Sources familiar with the committee's work told The Daily Star that it studied lateral appointment practices in Pakistan, India, and Sri Lanka, but found that such appointments were generally not well received there.

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WORLD HEART DAY Drug shortage risks hypertension control effort

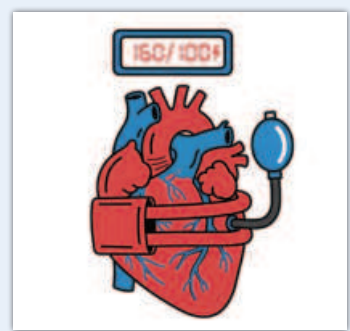
TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The government's Bangladesh Hypertension Control Initiative (BHCI), which has significantly improved hypertension control nationwide, is now facing a major setback as medicine supply to patients remains disrupted due to a funding crisis.

The World Health Organisation (WHO), in its Global Report on Hypertension 2025 published last week, praised the initiative for "demonstrating a strong and scalable impact in improving hypertension management and control".

Under the programme, registered patients with hypertension and diabetes receive free check-ups and medicines at Upazila Health Complexes (UHCS) and select district hospitals. Between October 2018 and June 2024, 56 percent of 5.17 lakh treated patients achieved blood pressure control at implementing facilities, the WHO report noted.

But medicine supply was disrupted after the expiry of the Fourth Health, Population, and Nutrition Sector Programme (HPNSP) in June 2024. The programme previously funded the supply



- BHCI helped 56% of 5.17 lakh patients control blood pressure
- Medicine supply broke down after funding ended in June 2024
- Tk 100cr allocated but projects still awaiting approval

of medicines and equipment to Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) corners in hospitals.

Health officials warn that the disruption is increasing patients' out-of-pocket costs, raising the risk of life-threatening complications from sudden interruptions in medication, and potentially undoing the initiative's gains as many may discontinue treatment.

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On a pavement near Dhaka University's Milon Chattar, two children sleep under a mosquito net -- shielded from the threat of dengue. Having no other choice but to bring them along, their mother, a flower seller, tends to her stall in the background. Her struggle for survival means taking care of livelihood and her children at the same time. The photo was taken yesterday. PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Corruption impeding investment in Bangladesh

Says US State Department report

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

A US State Department report has identified corruption as a persistent and serious impediment to investment and economic growth in Bangladesh.

"Despite the interim government's efforts to combat corruption, it remains common in public procurement, tax and customs collection, and among regulatory authorities," said the 2025 Bangladesh Investment Climate Statement, released last Friday.

"Off the record payments by firms reduce Bangladesh's GDP by two to three percent, according to some estimates," it said.

In its Bangladesh part, the report mentioned that Bangladesh is a party to the UN Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) and has laws to combat bribery, embezzlement, and other forms of corruption.

"But enforcement is inconsistent," it added.

The report helps US companies make informed business decisions by providing up-to-date information on the investment climates of more than 170 countries.

In the latest version, the report said the

previous Awami League government publicly stated its commitment to fighting corruption, but opposition parties claimed the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) was instead used to harass political opponents.

It said the interim government has signalled a stronger anti-corruption stance. Since taking office, it reconstituted the ACC with new leadership.

It also said a sluggish and reportedly corrupt judicial system and limits on alternative dispute resolution mechanisms continue to impede the timely enforcement of contracts and the fair resolution of business disputes.

The report said the interim government's enforcement of intellectual property (IPR) and labour rights remains ineffective.

Counterfeit goods are readily available, and the government does not prioritise or invest heavily in IPR protection.

US firms have reported IPR violations in apparel, consumer goods, movies, pharmaceuticals, and software.

Although Bangladesh is not in the 2025 US

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KEY HURDLES

- Inconsistent enforcement of laws
- Regulatory uncertainty
- Ineffective labour rights
- Delayed foreign currency payments
- Intellectual property violations