



Over the past 16 years, they [Jamaat-e-Islami] were not active in the field. They could not enforce a hartal even when their leaders were executed. They merged with the Awami League. Now they are dreaming of turning our independent country into Pakistan. Forget dreaming – such dreams will never come true.

IQBAL HASAN
MAHMUD TUKU
BNP leader



Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus returned home yesterday after concluding his nine-day trip to New York to attend the 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly. PHOTO: CA'S PRESS WING

ILLEGAL DEPOTS, WITHHELD INFO Fatal trap for firefighters

16 killed in 3 years in two
chemical-related incidents

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and KEERO ADHINAN

Deaths of firefighters have seen an alarming rise in recent years, driven by a rapid increase in illegal chemical warehouses and property owners concealing crucial information during emergencies.

According to the fire service, of the 19 firefighters who died on duty in the last three years, 16 were killed in just two major chemical-related incidents – the recent Tongi fire and the 2022 Sitakunda container depot explosion – where owners allegedly withheld vital information.

"A total of 51 fire service personnel has died on duty since 1966. But we're seeing more deaths recently, with 19 in the last three years," said Talha Bin Zaim, an official at the fire service media cell.

Former fire service deputy director Debashish Barman links the trend to the presence of illegal chemical warehouses in densely populated areas and a lack of specialised training.

"Authorities do not issue licences for stocking flammable chemicals in such areas. But in Tejgaon, Old Dhaka and Tongi, there are many illegal chemical warehouses. Since they lack licences to keep highly flammable chemicals, owners tend to conceal information and lie to firefighters when a fire breaks out," he told The Daily Star, stressing the need to relocate these warehouses.



In many cases, firefighters are not given accurate information, as explosive chemicals are often stored illegally in densely populated areas. Such concealments occur because owners fear legal consequences and mislead firefighters during emergencies.

Shajahan Sikder
Deputy assistant director, fire service

The September 22 Tongi fire is the latest example. The blaze at a chemical warehouse claimed four lives, including three firefighters, allegedly because the owner concealed information.

Debashish said, "The firefighters knew there were chemicals, though they probably didn't know the specific type. But why didn't they wear protective gear for a chemical fire?"

He suspects the warehouse contained hydrogen peroxide, which exploded when firefighters used water. He also pointed out that the fire service lacks sufficient training and resources to tackle chemical fires.

"There are only a few firefighters trained for chemical-related fires. They need to be deployed at stations near chemical warehouses," he said.

Bangladesh has witnessed several high-casualty chemical fires in the past two decades. In 2010, 124 people died in Old Dhaka's Nimtali fire, which involved flammable chemicals. In 2022, at least 47 people, including 13 firefighters, were killed in Chattogram's Sitakunda, after a fire and subsequent explosions at a container depot.

Contacted, Shajahan Sikder, deputy assistant director (acting in-charge, media) of the fire service, acknowledged that concealment of information has contributed to a rise in firefighter fatalities.

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Green chilli prices soar past Tk 300

Rain drives up veggie prices

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Continuous rain over the past few days has driven up the prices of several vegetables.

During visits to various markets in the capital, this correspondent found that long and round eggplants were selling for Tk 100–200 per kg, up from Tk 80–160 last week, while big round eggplants were priced at Tk 260–300, compared to Tk 200–240 previously.

Prices of other vegetables, including bitter melon, okra and pointed gourd, increased by Tk 10–20.

Bitter melon and yard-long beans were selling at Tk 80–120 per kg, up from Tk 80–100 last week. Spiny bitter melon was priced at Tk 100–120, compared to Tk 80–100, while pointed gourd and okra were sold at Tk 80–100, up from Tk 70–90.

Green chilli prices surged to Tk 300–400 per kg, from Tk 200–300 previously.

Mohammad Faruk, a wholesaler at Karwan Bazar, said, "Many vegetable plants have died due to the continuous rain. The goods come from various districts like Dhaka, Manikganj, Narshingdi and Gazipur."

The situation was observed during visits to Shewrapara, Ibrahimpur, Karwan Bazar, Hatirpool, Kathalbagan and Sukrabad yesterday.

Prices of papaya and potatoes, however, remained unchanged at Tk 20–30 per kg and Tk 20, respectively.

Rabiul Awal, a shopper at Karwan Bazar, said, "Round chickpeas are now Tk 250 per kg, which was only Tk 160 a few days ago, while green chilli has jumped to Tk 400 per kg from Tk 200 last week."

Sirajuddin, a trader at Kathalbagan Kitchen Market, added that blackish, round chickpeas were selling at Tk 300 yesterday morning due to very low supply.



Early motherhood, lasting vulnerability

Adolescent mothers face severe physical, mental health risks due to premature pregnancies

SAIMA AKTER ESHA

Only 14 years old, Eka Akhter Munni lay in the gynaecology ward of Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), her face marked by exhaustion and despair.

She was brought to the hospital from Kamrangirchar's Battery Ghat slum, and this is not her first stay here. Munni has just given birth to her second child and is now under treatment in the postnatal ward.

Her mother, sitting beside her, said, "The doctor said she has low blood, so she feels very tired and weak. She also had seizures during the pregnancy. After giving birth, she was bleeding a lot."

"It wasn't a planned pregnancy. The baby was born very small," the mother added.

A few doors away, in the prenatal ward of DMCH, 17-year-old Tamanna Akhter Sweetie has made the long journey from Bikrampur. This is also her second pregnancy, complicated by a serious condition.

"There is water in my kidneys. Doctors said the pregnancy has worsened my situation," Tamanna said.

These are not rare exceptions. Many underage girls across the country continue to face severe health risks due to pregnancy, long before they are old enough to understand what motherhood means. Such risks affect two generations at once – adolescent mothers and their newborns.

According to the Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2023, the marriage rate among girls aged 15–19 stands at 99.31 per 1,000, while girls aged 10–14 face a marriage rate of 20.20 per 1,000.

During visits to DMCH, Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College, Mohammadpur Fertility Services & Training Centre (MFTSC) and

complications.

"These young girls often suffer from anaemia, eclampsia and malnutrition because they themselves are children. Their babies are also born underweight, with poor brain development. These girls' pelvises are not fully developed, so pregnancy and delivery become life-threatening," she said.

She added that home births, often encouraged by family members, further increase the risks for both mother and child.

Dr Nahid Parvin, medical officer at the gynaecology unit of Pallabi Urban Health Centre, highlighted the emotional struggles many adolescent mothers face. She said many of them cannot properly care for their newborns or form emotional bonds with them.

Bangladesh continues to have the highest prevalence of child marriage in South Asia, according to the UNFPA-Unicef Global Programme to End Child Marriage 2024, despite decades of intervention.

While the rate has halved since 1970, disruptions in 2024 – including political unrest, school closures and natural disasters – have increased girls' vulnerability to early marriage and adolescent pregnancy, it said.

Mahbub-UL-Alam, programme manager at the Directorate General of Family Planning (DGFP) and

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Dr Suchitra Saha
Head of infertility department at MFSTC

the Urban Health Centre in Pallabi, adolescent mothers were found in almost every gynaecology ward.

Doctors report that they encounter such cases regularly.

Dr Suchitra Saha, head of the infertility department at MFSTC, said underage mothers are frequently admitted with

DHAKA AIRPORT Journalists boycott Akhter, Tasnim Jara press meet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Journalists boycotted a press conference of National Citizen Party leaders Akhter Hossen and Tasnim Jara at Dhaka's Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport yesterday morning, accusing NCP activists of misbehaving with them.

The incident took place around 9:45am in front of the VIP gate.

A journalist, who witnessed the altercation and claimed he was among those mistreated, told The Daily Star, "The NCP activists were shouting 'Inqilab zindabad' during the media briefing by Humayun Kabir, foreign affairs adviser to BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman. Because of the shouting, we couldn't hear Kabir properly. When one of us asked them to stop, they got louder. Later, when

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EC asks NCP to pick symbol from 50 options Shapla not included in the list

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission has sent a letter to the National Citizen Party, asking it to choose an election symbol from its reserved list of 50 symbols.

The party has been asked to inform the EC in writing of its choice by October 7.

The letter, issued on September 30, was sent by Md Rafiqul Islam, deputy secretary of the EC's election assistance branch, to NCP Convener Nahid Islam.

According to the EC, the NCP applied for party registration and mentioned shapla (water lily), pen and mobile phone as its preferred symbols, later modifying "shapla" to "red shapla" or "white shapla".

However, the EC noted that under Rule 9(1) of the Election Conduct Rules, 2008, the shapla symbol is not included in the list of permissible symbols.

The letter provided the NCP with the full list of available symbols, from which the party has to select one for the next step in the registration process.

The listed symbols are wardrobe, bed, ostrich, kite, cup and saucer, spectacles, building, brinjal, rechargeable lamp, computer, jug, ship, tube well, tiffin carrier, table, table clock, telephone, refrigerator, tabla, heron, rooster, pen, watermelon, flute, gourd, pitcher, prawn, plate, bench, lychee, swing, butterfly, balloon, football, flower tub, stool, bucket, banana, electric fan, mug, microphone, peacock, mobile phone,

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A father carries his 16-month-old son, who is suffering from dengue, through the corridors of Mugda Medical College Hospital yesterday. In front of him, his brother-in-law holds the saline bag that is being administered intravenously to the child. As the child kept crying while on the hospital bed, his father decided to comfort him by carrying him through the halls of the hospital.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN