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ICT-1 CASE 'Hasina gave the order to kill us'

Adviser Asif Mahmud testifies before tribunal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Asif Mahmud, a key leader of Students Against Discrimination, yesterday told the International Crimes Tribunal-1 that the then prime minister and home minister had ordered the killings of him and other coordinators when they were in DB custody last year.

"We were repeatedly told that we had been picked up on the direct orders of prime minister Sheikh Hasina and home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal. We were warned that if we refused to call off the movement, we would be killed on their instructions. They even said we were still alive only because of their mercy," he said while testifying as a prosecution witness.

Then DB chief Harun-Or Rashid and Ramna

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JEWEL OF THE FORESTS



A twin-spotted tree frog spotted in Chattogram's Hazarikhil Wildlife Sanctuary rests motionless on a damp branch, its emerald skin glistening under the forest light. Native to the humid forests of northeastern India, Bangladesh, and northern Myanmar, this striking amphibian spends most of its life in the treetops, emerging at night to hunt insects. During the day, it shelters among leaves and tree hollows near streams. Recognised by its vivid green body, yellow underside, and twin dark flank spots, the frog's webbed limbs allow it to glide between branches like a tiny parachutist. Listed as Least Concern on the IUCN Red List, the species plays a vital ecological role -- controlling insect populations and linking forest and freshwater ecosystems through its life cycle.

PHOTO: SHAMEEM HASAN

Women must have equal space in politics

Speakers say at seminar

SIX KEY DEMANDS INCLUDE

- Increasing reserved seats to 100 and filling those through direct vote from 2026
- Ensuring 33% women nominees, raising it to 50% through reforms
- Funding, decentralisation, and safety for women candidates

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As Bangladesh looks toward its next national election, women leaders yesterday called for sweeping reforms to ensure fair and proportional political representation for women, who make up more than half of the country's population.

The call came at a seminar at the capital's Krishibid Institute Bangladesh, organised by Narir Rajnoitik Adhikar Forum, a coalition of 12 organisations working to secure women's rightful place in national politics.

The forum placed six key demands, including proportional participation of women in all political structures. It proposed increasing the number of reserved seats for women in parliament to 100 and filling those through direct voting in 2026.

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Bangladesh not ready for upper house: CPD

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Centre for Policy Dialogue has recommended that the National Consensus Commission drop its proposal to form a bicameral parliament, saying Bangladesh's historical and structural realities do not support a second chamber at this stage.

It said the priority should be strengthening the existing unicameral parliament through legal, institutional and structural reforms rather than introducing an upper house.

It made the recommendations in a study presented yesterday at a national dialogue titled "Proposed Upper House in the National Parliament: Can it Ensure Accountability of the Majority Party?"

The think tank, however, did not explain why it came up with the recommendation at a time when structural reforms have been finalised by the consensus commission after months of talks with political parties. The implementation process will also be finalised in the coming days.

Its study was based on primary and secondary data on parliamentary systems, detailed literature reviews, and interviews with political scientists, academicians, and party leaders.

CPD Research Director Khandaker Golam Moazzem and Prof Nizam Ahmed of Chittagong University made the presentation at a city hotel. They said the study found several proposed constitutional and electoral reforms may seem appealing in theory but are not realistic in the country's current political context.

These include bicameralism, proportional representation (PR), appointment committees and inclusion of non-partisan members.

In Bangladesh, CPD said, long-standing patron-client networks and a "winner-takes-all" culture have kept such reforms largely symbolic.

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EXTORTION CASE Mikel Chakma sentenced to eight years

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

A Rangamati court has sentenced Mikel Chakma, an organiser of the United People's Democratic Front (UPDF), along with one Suman Chakma, to eight years imprisonment in a 2007 extortion case.

The details of the verdict, delivered on Wednesday, were confirmed yesterday by Prasadeb Chakma, assistant to the bench of the Rangamati Additional District and Sessions Judge Court.

Both accused were absent when Judge Tawhidul Haque delivered the verdict.

Mikel serves as a central organiser of the UPDF. He had been in a secret detention facility and was released after the fall of the Awami League-led government on August 5, 2024.

UPDF's spokesperson Niron Chakma wrote on Facebook, "Mikel Chakma has already endured more than 5 years of confinement and torture. What's the point of sentencing him to prison again at this stage?"

WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY

The silent cries while on the job

Poor work conditions fuelling mental health crisis, costing trillions worldwide, shows WHO data



NILIMA JAHAN

By the time Alam Hossain, station manager of Uttara Fire Service & Civil Defence, reached Milestone School and College on July 21, the campus was in chaos -- flames leapt from the Haider Ali Bhaban, smoke choked the sky, and children lay on the ground as parents screamed their names. A fighter jet had just crashed into

the building, leaving it in ruins.

"The mental pressure was crushing," Alam recalled. "All I could think was how to save lives and minimise damage."

With limited men and equipment, he called for backup. His team spent hours battling fires, pulling survivors from rubble, and rushing the injured and dead to hospitals.

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Globally, about 15% of working-age adults had a mental disorder in 2019

Depression and anxiety lead to an estimated 12 billion lost working days each year

Bangladesh has fewer than six mental health professionals per million people

Community health workers in the country face exhaustion and fatigue from heavy workloads



Krasznahorkai wins Nobel in Literature

AGENCIES

The Nobel Prize in Literature was awarded yesterday to László Krasznahorkai, considered by many to be Hungary's most important living author, whose works explore themes of postmodern dystopia and melancholy.

The Swedish Academy honoured him "for his compelling and visionary oeuvre that, in the midst of apocalyptic terror, reaffirms the power of art."

Krasznahorkai is "a great epic writer... characterised by absurdism and grotesque excess," the Academy said.

Speaking to Swedish Radio, Krasznahorkai said he had only planned to write one book, but after the first one, he wanted to improve his writing

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Peacekeeping forces to be cut 25% due to budget strains: UN

AFP, United Nations

The United Nations will be forced to reduce its peacekeeping forces worldwide by around 25 percent due to a lack of funding, largely linked to US aid cuts, a senior UN official said Wednesday.

About 13,000 to 14,000 military and police personnel, as well as their equipment, will have to be repatriated, the official said on condition of anonymity, with "a large number of civilian staff in missions" also to be affected.

The United States was expected to contribute \$1.3 billion of the total \$5.4 billion budget for 2025-2026 peacekeeping operations.

But it has now informed the UN that it will only pay around half the amount, or \$682 million -- which includes \$85 million earmarked for a new international anti-gang mission in Haiti that was not in the original budget.

China is expected to contribute \$1.2 billion to the peacekeeping budget, which had \$2 billion in unpaid contributions as of July.

Of its total budget, the UN now expects a shortfall of 16 to 17 percent in the current peacekeeping budget.

President Donald Trump has long claimed that international institutions have taken advantage of the United States and has overseen massive cuts to US foreign aid since his return to the White House in January.

"We know that there will be consequences in terms of

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Bangladesh players were left distraught after fighting valiantly but ultimately falling 4-3 to Hong Kong, China, in a 2026 AFC Asian Cup qualifying fixture at the National Stadium in Dhaka yesterday, leaving their hopes of progression in jeopardy. The hosts started brightly, with Hamza Choudhury curling in a powerful early free-kick, while late goals from Sheikh Morsalin and Shamit Shome sparked hopes of a dramatic turnaround after Hong Kong went ahead 3-1. Yet, in the dying moments, Raphael Merckies' hat-trick sealed the visitors' win.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Thriller ends in heartbreak

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Hamza Choudhury, Shamit Shome and Sheikh Morsalin found the net, still Bangladesh could not avoid defeat against Hong Kong, China, losing 4-3 in an entertaining AFC Asian Cup Qualifier at the National Stadium on Thursday.

Raphael Merckies hit the decisive goal in the last minute to complete a hat-trick and silence the home crowd. Everton Camargo scored the other goal for the visitors.

The defeat leaves Bangladesh's hopes of progressing in disarray, with one point in three games. Hong Kong, meanwhile, moved to the top with seven points.

Hamza gave the hosts the lead in the 13th minute from a free-kick, but Bangladesh squandered the lead four minutes into stoppage time, when Camargo tapped the ball home after a misplaced header from Faisal Ahmed Fahim.

Merckies, who came in as a substitute, then scored in the 50th and 74th minute as Hong Kong were seemingly running away with the match.

However, Morsalin then pulled one back in the 84th and Shamit made it 3-3 in extra time. But in the dying moments, Merckies sealed the win for Hong Kong.