



Clockwise from left, activists hold a torch procession in Shahbagh demanding the release of baul singer Abul Sarkar; artists perform protest songs at a programme in the area; and a similar event takes place at the Central Shaheed Minar with baul singer Aleya Begum, wife of Abul Sarkar, and poet and columnist Farhad Mazhar in attendance. Abul Sarkar was sent to jail in Manikganj on November 20 in a case filed on charges of hurting religious sentiments.



PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON, PALASH KHAN

Yunus seeks  
prayers for  
Khaleda Zia's  
recovery



STAR REPORT

CA Prof Muhammad Yunus has expressed deep concern over the current condition of former prime minister and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia.

He has been regularly monitoring the updates on Khaleda Zia's health condition and has instructed all concerned to ensure every necessary medical support, the CA Press Wing said in a statement yesterday.

The chief adviser also sought prayers from the country's people for her speedy recovery.

He said, "There must not be any shortcomings in Begum Khaleda Zia's treatment. The government is prepared to provide all necessary support."

Prof Yunus further said, "At this time of democratic transition, Begum Khaleda Zia is a profound source of inspiration for the nation. Her good health is extremely important for the country."

Khaleda, 80, was admitted to Evercare Hospital on Sunday night after developing a chest infection affecting both her heart and lungs. She is currently under the care of Prof Dr Shahabuddin Talukder.

## Families struggle as dengue cases peak in November

HELEMUL ALAM

Twelve-year-old Nuhas and his two and a half-year-old sister Najat are sharing a single bed at the children's ward of Mugda Medical College and Hospital, both diagnosed with dengue.

Their grandmother, Dina, said Nuhas developed a fever on Friday and was treated at a local clinic in Demra. As his condition worsened, he was referred to Mugda Medical College and Hospital and admitted on Tuesday.

"After his admission, Najat also developed a fever and was diagnosed with dengue on Wednesday," Dina said.

According to their mother, Sonia, Nuhas' platelet count fell to 26,000 on Thursday, though his condition has since shown slight improvement. Doctors are still waiting for Najat's test results. The family said they are trying to avoid admitting her unless necessary, as they want to keep her off saline unless required.

A similar ordeal was unfolding for another family from Mugda. Four-year-old Mohammad Bagdad was admitted to the dengue ward on Tuesday. His mother, Samsunnahar, said he had been suffering from fever since Sunday and was diagnosed at Islamia Hospital before being referred to Mugda. "He still has fever and abdominal pain," she said.

Bagdad's two-year-old sister, Kaniz Fatima, has also been running a fever since Monday but has not been admitted. Doctors are treating her on an outpatient basis, Samsunnahar added.

These are not isolated

cases. November recorded the highest number of deaths and hospitalisations from dengue this year, even though overall cases have recently begun to decline.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), 377 people have died from dengue and 93,194 have been hospitalised nationwide so far this year. Of these, 94 deaths occurred in



► Dengue death toll stands at 377 this year

► Nov saw 94 deaths, highest in a month

► Hospitalisations peaked in Nov with 23,322 admissions

► Total dengue admissions this year 93,194

► Experts warn cases may not fall significantly before Jan

November, the highest in a single month, surpassing October's 80 deaths.

Hospitalisations also peaked in November with 23,322 admissions, compared to 22,520 in October.

Entomologist Prof Kabirul Bashar of Jahangirnagar University said dengue will decrease only slightly in December, with a significant decline unlikely before late January.

"The immediate emergency is that in Dhaka's multistorey buildings, Aedes mosquitoes are breeding in basements. This is not linked to rainfall. These areas must be brought under control immediately," he said.

He pointed to under-construction buildings and abandoned structures in Old Dhaka as high-risk breeding zones.

"These three areas - basements, abandoned buildings, and construction sites - must be closely monitored. Immediate action is essential," Bashar added.

He warned that irregular water supply in parts of Old Dhaka forces residents to store water, increasing breeding risks. "People should clean water containers with detergent at least every three to seven days before refilling," he said.

Entomologist GM Saifur Rahman said while dengue cases may fall gradually, they will not disappear soon.

"Only the number of patients will slowly decrease," he said, cautioning that the Culex mosquito population is rising and could cause new public health problems by January or February.

"Containers that held water earlier may still contain eggs even if they are dry. These must be disposed of properly. Active breeding sites must be destroyed immediately," Rahman said. He added that authorities have a short window to act. "If preventive measures are implemented now, it may delay the dengue surge that usually comes after the first rains in March or April."

TIB slams  
approval of  
ACC ordinance

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has expressed disappointment over the Advisory Council's final approval of the Anti-Corruption Commission Ordinance, 2025, saying the move ignores key strategic recommendations aimed at ensuring transparency, accountability, and institutional independence of the ACC.

TIB said the removal of the proposed "Selection and Review Committee" - despite earlier consent from relevant government authorities and unanimous support from all political parties in the July Charter - undermines efforts to reform the ACC, which it described as long burdened by a negative image and used as a tool against political opponents.

The organisation said excluding the provision indicates that the state's desire to reform is being held "hostage by anti-reform circles within the government".

It also questioned whether the chief adviser, who leads the consensus commission behind the reform initiatives, was sending a message that reforms are merely symbolic if the ACC is kept beyond accountability.

TIB Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman said the committee was

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## 'End assaults on Baul artistes'

Pala Gaan protest calls for release of Abul Sarkar, demands action from govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A group of artistes yesterday staged a protest through Pala Gaan, the traditional Bangla folk music, condemning ongoing attacks on Baul artistes and mazars across the country and demanding the immediate release of Baul artiste Abul Sarkar.

The protest rally was held at Central Shaheed Minar, where participants alleged that certain groups tried to block them from attending the rally and issued threats beforehand.

Speakers said these groups were creating unrest instead of following legal processes and accused them of using religion to expand their political influence.

They also accused the government and law enforcement agencies of failing to prevent attacks on Baul performers.

Speaking at the rally, Aleya Begum, a renowned Baul artiste and wife of Abul Sarkar, asked, "I do not know why they want to destroy our songs or what they want to achieve in our country. Where are they coming from?"

Poet and columnist Farhad Mazhar said, "We will not react, but the people of the country will defend against those creating chaos."

On November 20, Abul Sarkar was sent to jail in Manikganj after being arrested in a case filed over charges of hurting religious sentiments during a performance in Ghor upazila on November 4.

Meanwhile, in Shahbagh, another event demanding Abul Sarkar's release saw tensions break out when a group vandalised banners and scuffled with organisers.

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## Halt unplanned urbanisation to save Dhaka

### Urge experts, call for strengthening city planning

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Unless Dhaka's uncontrolled and unplanned urbanisation is stopped, there will be no effective way to protect the city from earthquakes, fires, and other disasters, speakers said at a virtual programme yesterday.

They said recurring disasters -- such as earthquakes and fires -- have made Dhaka, one of the world's most densely populated cities, increasingly unsafe and unfit for living.

The speakers noted that the government has failed to control the continuous influx of people into Dhaka or manage rapid urbanisation, while city planning has been neglected at both public and private levels.

**There is a severe lack of enforcement of building codes and construction regulations, resulting in unsafe high-rise buildings being built on weak, reclaimed land over water bodies, wetlands and floodplains.**

Speakers said there is a severe lack of enforcement of building codes and construction regulations, resulting in unsafe high-rise buildings being built on weak, reclaimed land over water bodies, wetlands and floodplains.

They added that political influence, landowners' arbitrariness, and corruption and negligence by responsible officials have turned life in Dhaka into a dangerous and uncertain reality.

They further claimed that under pressure from business groups, the government recently approved changes to the Detailed Area Plan without considering earthquake risks or the city's livability.

Presenting the keynote paper, Institute for Planning and Development Director Prof Adil Mohammed Khan said making Dhaka safe and

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## Empowered to stand on their own

Rural women rebuild lives with help from govt, UNDP project



NILIMA JAHAN

When her husband fell ill in 2013 and could no longer work, 36-year-old Moni Begum from Sherpur's Nakla upazila suddenly became the only earning member of her family. However, she refused to give up.

Leaving her six-year-old son in the village, Moni moved to Dhaka and found work as a helper in the quality department of a garment factory in Ashulia. For seven years, she supported her family alone.

By 2020, her own declining health forced her to return home, unsure of what to do next.

Back in the village, Moni felt lost but determined. Her turning point came when she enrolled in SWAPNO, a social protection and employment programme for rural women

facing extreme poverty -- widowed, divorced, abandoned, or with husbands unable to earn.

Run by the Local Government Division with technical assistance from UNDP since 2015, SWAPNO offers temporary public works jobs along with financial literacy, savings support, and livelihood training.

According to project data, over 10,000 women have been employed under the public works component, each earning around Tk 75,000 during their term. More than 6,000 women have also completed skills training in livestock rearing, small business management, fish culture, and crop production, with many now running their own income-generating activities.

For Moni, the programme was a chance to rebuild.

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Candidates and their guardians gather outside Kalabhaban after the IBA admission test, as Dhaka University began its entry exams yesterday.



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN