

## Laurels for tech powerhouses

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app enables micro and small entrepreneurs to manage sales, record transactions and access digital financial services. Its AI driven tools are helping shop owners build credit profiles and transition from cash-based operations to digital bookkeeping.

Augmedix Bangladesh, winner of the ICT Solution Provider of the Year, has become a leading health tech powerhouse connecting Bangladeshi professionals to American healthcare industry. With more than 1,300 staff, it boosts clinical efficiency through real-time documentation and creates high-value digital jobs.

Ambareen Reza, managing director and co-founder of foodpanda Bangladesh, received the ICT Woman of the Year award for leading foodpanda's nationwide expansion and building one of the country's largest digital service ecosystems.

Returning to Bangladesh in 2013, she helped transform online food and grocery delivery, enabling restaurants, riders and SMEs to reach customers in all 64 districts.

Although the country has many skilled ICT experts, the government is not engaging them effectively, said Planning Adviser Wahiduddin Mahmud, who handed over the awards to the winners at a gala event held at Sheraton Dhaka.

"That is why we have now made it a requirement that ICT experts from outside the government must be engaged in relevant projects."

Bangladesh's ICT market is expanding rapidly and the next decade will be dominated by AI, big data and computer scientists.

Foreign donors are funding the development of hi-tech parks but these initiatives focus mainly on physical infrastructure.

"The intention is good, but I am not sure how much of it will help in building real entrepreneurship. Bangladesh has strong entrepreneurial capacity," Mahmud said.

The ICT policy was formulated

with the goal of ensuring quality service and eliminating middlemen, he added.

When technology is inclusive, a nation becomes unstoppable, said Tareq Refat Ullah Khan, MD & CEO of BRAC Bank.

To the winners, he said, "Your accomplishments demonstrate that Bangladesh has talent – it simply lacks the platforms to display it. You are creating solutions that improve lives for families, students, small businesses, patients and professionals. You are not just influencing industries; you are shaping possibilities."

It is in the world of technology, and more specifically in the world of IT, internet and digital technology that the world is changing, said Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star.

"And we have so much talent within us to be a part of that process. But the question is why are we not a part of the process? This is something we have to ask ourselves," he added.

Resources are limited and the real challenge is how to capitalise on those limited resources through smart design, said bKash CEO Quadir.

"If you design the solution properly, even with a basic phone people can reap the benefits."

Quadir emphasised that bKash is registered in Bangladesh and said he does not believe the narrative that foreign investment cannot be attracted without registering abroad.

"Everyone who worked to build bKash is local talent."

According to him, bKash now facilitates nearly 2.1 crore transactions per day and has attracted \$382 million in foreign direct investment – without taking a single loan.

Quadir also said many people asked him how he found investors.

"Only went to [BRAC founder] Fazle Hasan Abed, the rest of the investors came to us," he said, crediting the ecosystem – NID, mobile operators, widespread mobile phone ownership and the banking infrastructure – for enabling bKash's rise.



FROM LEFT... Tareq Refat Ullah Khan, managing director and CEO of BRAC Bank; Fahim Ahmed, CEO of Pathao; Rashed Mujib Noman, country director of Augmedix Bangladesh; Wahiduddin Mahmud, planning adviser; Shahadat Khan, CEO of TallyKhata; and AHM Hasinul Qudus Rusho, chief corporate affairs officer of Daraz Bangladesh pose for a photo at the 10th BRAC Bank-The Daily Star ICT Awards yesterday.



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WAHIDUDDIN MAHMUD,  
planning adviser



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## 11 Bangladeshis in Singapore held for 'drug offences'

STAR REPORT

Eleven Bangladeshi migrant workers and another from Myanmar were arrested in Singapore for suspected drug-related offences during a Central Narcotics Bureau raid on November 27.

The men, who resided in Singapore's Woodlands dormitory, are aged between 23 and 40 years old, The Straits Times reported on November 28.

Superintendent Xanthus Tong Heng Ji, deputy commanding officer of CNB's Enforcement J Division, said the operation was part of the bureau's efforts against drug abuse, trafficking and other criminal activities.

The four-hour operation involved officers from CNB, the Health Sciences Authority, Immigration and Checkpoints Authority, Ministry of Manpower and the police.

The Straits Times was invited to witness the operation, which started with a briefing around 9:00pm on November 27 at CNB's headquarters at Police Cantonment Complex.

Members of the media and CNB officers set off in unmarked vehicles to the dormitory.

As rain pelted down, officers entered the dormitory before midnight.

In one room, officers found suspected drug utensils such as a glass bottle, cut straw and a rubber tube.

As the suspects were processed, their roommates in these 12-bedded rooms looked on warily.

Around 1:20am on November 28, all the arrested men were taken away in unmarked vehicles for further investigations.

CNB's annual statistics report in February said that the total number of drug abusers arrested in 2024 was 3,119, down from the 3,122 nabbed in 2023.

## Polls schedule likely in 2nd week of Dec

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management should function, and even what role you, the journalists, might play."

Officials said such an exercise was important, as the current commission was constituted just a year ago and does not have experience in holding a single local body or parliamentary election.

Besides, this commission has the additional responsibility of holding a referendum simultaneously with the national election.

Asked about the confusion among some voters regarding the referendum questions, the CEC said, "The commission and the government will jointly launch an

awareness campaign to educate voters on the matter soon."

On the law-and-order situation, CEC Nasir said, "Law and order in Bangladesh has never been perfect. There's no point denying it. We will have to ensure that the overall election environment is conducive to voting."



BNP activists and leaders gather in front of Evercare Hospital yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

## Khaleda's condition 'unchanged'

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at present. Once her health improves, the option of treatment overseas will be considered," Fakhru told reporters at the BNP chairperson's Gulshan office at 5:30pm.

He, however, said preparations are underway so that, once the medical board deems her fit for travel, arrangements can be made immediately.

"Visas are being processed, talks with potential destination countries are ongoing, and an air ambulance is being arranged."

Party sources said the Qatar embassy in Dhaka has been contacted for arranging an air ambulance.

In a Facebook post yesterday, Mahdi Amin, adviser to BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman, said Khaleda's family has already contacted the London hospital and doctors under whose care she made a significant recovery during her four-month stay there earlier this year.

Since her return from London on May 6, Khaleda has been undergoing regular check-ups.

She was admitted to Evercare Hospital on November 23 on the advice of her medical board after being diagnosed with infections in her heart and lungs.

She is also suffering from

pneumonia and is currently receiving treatment in the hospital's Coronary Care Unit.

Seeking anonymity, a member of her medical board told this newspaper that excess fluid has built up in her body, requiring regular dialysis. She is also being given oxygen support to help her breathe comfortably.

Sources at the board also said Khaleda briefly spoke with Sharmila Rahman, the wife of her late younger son Arafat Rahman Koko, who was by Khaleda's bedside yesterday morning.

Khaleda, 80, has long been battling multiple health complications, including liver cirrhosis and kidney issues. She has a permanent pacemaker and has previously undergone stent placement for her heart.

Meanwhile, President Mohammed Shahabuddin yesterday expressed concern over the BNP chief's physical condition and urged the nation to pray for her recovery.

The advisory council of the interim government, at a special meeting yesterday morning, offered prayers for her speedy recovery.

In different parts of the country, special prayers were offered for her.

BNP leaders and activists gathered outside Evercare Hospital yesterday to enquire about Khaleda's health,

despite repeated instructions from the party not to crowd the hospital premises.

Leaders of different political parties and advisers to the interim government also visited the hospital yesterday.

IMPRISONMENT, RELEASE

On February 8, 2018, Khaleda was jailed in a corruption case. In April the following year, her health deteriorated due to what the BNP alleges was inadequate medical treatment.

On March 26, 2020, amid the Covid pandemic, she was released from prison after 776 days. The government temporarily released her through an executive order, suspending her sentence on the condition that she remain at her Gulshan residence and not leave the country. The term of her release had been extended several times.

In April 2021, she contracted Covid and recovered while under treatment at home.

A day after the fall of the Awami League regime on August 5, 2024, she was released from house arrest following a presidential pardon.

She was later acquitted in both the Zia Orphanage Trust and Zia Charitable Trust cases, in which she had previously been sentenced.

## Parties vow focus on employment

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businesses."

Citing Thailand's "One Village, One Product" programme as a model, he said, "We plan to support specialised village products with loans, skills, and marketing for global sales."

He outlined four criteria for investment: value for money, return on investment, job creation, and environmental sustainability.

"We have calculated how one crore jobs can be created in 18 months through targeted investment. Sports, culture, and digital skills are also major priorities.

"Bangladesh does not really have a capital market. The banking system is overdependent. We need to move from frontier markets to emerging markets, where access to trillion-dollar funds is possible."

He added, "Bangladesh is an over-regulated country. Citizens should not have to go through so many government offices. We will empower the people, not the government."

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir said, "Those who looted banks and committed corruption over the last 15 years should be punished. But [many of] these people also own factories where thousands of workers are employed. Around 14 lakh workers have already lost their jobs. Where will they go? Why are we creating this unemployment? We need to think seriously about this."

He said the government should focus on building trust with businesspersons rather than constantly trying to catch offenders, adding that BNP has always prioritised economic development.

Saying that the party's reforms will focus on education, anti-corruption measures, and justice for all, Fakhru added that Bangladesh needs major reforms in education and health. Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman said, "Bangladesh's economy cannot move forward unless fairness and equal opportunity are ensured for all citizens ... foreign loans are shared equally by all citizens. The economic system must be fair."

He criticised bureaucratic delays and corruption, which discourage both local and foreign investors.

Warning that the political leadership must be fit to ensure proper functioning of the systems, he also raised the issue of brain drain and said talented Bangladeshis settle abroad because their skills are undervalued in the country.

NCP Convener Nahid Islam said the July uprising was driven by economic grievances, not just politics.

"The [2015] anti-Vat movement, the 2018 quota reform movement, and the [2018] road safety movement were all precursors to this uprising, driven by youth aspirations and the living crisis of the urban middle class," he said, adding that the previous regime created a discriminatory system run by a nexus of corrupt bureaucrats, politicians, and business elites.

"We must break this corruption nexus. Legal reforms alone are insufficient. We need a profound shift in social values and a peaceful transition of power. Without stability, reforms cannot be sustainable, and foreign investment will not come."

He proposed a shift from infrastructure-based development to a justice-based economy. "This model prioritises reducing inequality, ensuring fair market competition, and establishing state welfare."

Decision to return not solely in my hands

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my homeland will finally come to an end."

He explained his situation in relation to returning to Bangladesh as his mother – former prime minister and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia – remains critically ill and under intensive medical supervision at a Dhaka hospital.

Citizens from all walks of life, irrespective of political affiliation, have continued to offer earnest prayers for her recovery, he wrote, adding, "The honourable chief adviser has not only prayed for her healing but also expressed a commitment to ensuring every possible support for her treatment."

Tarique further said medical teams at home and abroad have been providing highly professional and dedicated care. Several friendly nations have expressed their willingness to extend all possible cooperation, including advanced

medical support.

"The Zia family conveys its heartfelt thanks and deep gratitude to everyone for their sincere prayers and affection for the highly respected Begum Khaleda Zia. At the same time, we earnestly request all to keep praying for her swift recovery."

Meanwhile, Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam on his Facebook page yesterday said there was no restriction or objection from the interim government regarding Tarique Rahman's return to the country.

He said Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus has already expressed deep concern about the physical condition of the BNP chairperson and sought prayers for her from the people of the country.

Earlier, at the weekly advisory council meeting, prayers were offered for Khaleda's speedy recovery.

Religious Affairs Adviser AFM

Khalid Hossain conducted the munajat.

Khaleda was admitted to Evercare Hospital on November 23 on the advice of her medical board after being diagnosed with infections in heart and lungs.

She is also suffering from pneumonia and is currently receiving treatment in the hospital's Coronary Care Unit under the supervision of both local and foreign specialists.

Khaleda, 80, has long been suffering from multiple health complications, including liver cirrhosis and kidney issues. She has a permanent pacemaker and previously underwent stenting for her heart.

On Friday night, medical board sources said her kidneys are not functioning properly.

They said that if her condition permits, they may attempt to send her to the UK for advanced treatment; if that is not possible, Singapore is being considered.