



EC meets today to set course for polls, referendum

STAR REPORT

The Election Commission, led by CEC AMM Nasir Uddin, will meet today to review overall preparations and finalise the date for announcing the schedule for the upcoming national election and referendum.

EC officials said all necessary preparations to announce the election schedule have been completed, and the date for the announcement will most likely be finalised at today's meeting, reports UNB.

"We've completed 100 percent preparations and the date for the election schedule has not been finalised yet," EC Secretary Akhtar Ahmed told a training workshop at the Electoral Training Institute in Agargaon.

The secretary said white ballot papers would be used for the general election, while pink ballot papers

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HAZARD ALERT... Eight months after this footbridge near Kuril was demolished for the Dhaka Elevated Expressway, exposed iron rods still poke out of the ground dangerously close to the airport road, making the area unsafe for pedestrians and vehicles alike.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

CASE AGAINST MEME CREATORS

The space for free speech shrinking again

Rights activists warn

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Filing cases against cartoonists, meme creators and satirists is a serious blow to freedom of expression, said rights activists, writers and cartoonists.

"We saw such behaviours by the previous government that led to the jailing and fleeing of cartoonists," said Supreme Court lawyer Sara Hossain yesterday at a discussion titled "Satirical memes and cartoons: expression or defamation" organised by citizens' platform Nagorik Coalition.

The discussion was called in light of Dhaka University Central Students' Union (Ducusu) Vice President Abu Shadik Kayem's filing a case with Shahbagh Police Station on December 2, against 18 individuals and more than 15 Facebook pages, including the satirical platform "Earki", alleging cyber harassment.

He said the accused circulated "edited, obscene and defamatory content" targeting him, the other Ducusu leaders and female students.

"The meaning of such cases is to create a fearful environment for the artists, writers and meme-creators. They can avoid seeing the satires or cartoons if they cannot tolerate them, but why should they file a case?"

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Anisul, Manju to announce new political alliance

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A new political alliance, led by a Jatiya Party faction chairman Anisul Islam Mahmud and JP Chairman Anwar Hossain Manju, is set to launch tomorrow ahead of the upcoming national election.

Contacted, Ruhul Amin Hawlader, secretary general of the Anisul-led faction, said the new alliance, which will involve 12-15 parties, will be formally launched at a press conference at Emmanuelle's Party Centre in the capital's Gulshan-1 on Monday.

Anisul said the name and details of the new alliance will be announced at the briefing.

Meanwhile, a party source said that most of the parties that will be included in the alliance are either small or not widely known.

The development came as two factions, one of which is led by GM Quader, brother of the late party founder HM Ershad, each claimed ownership of the party's electoral symbol, the plough.

The symbol is currently registered with the GM Quader-led faction.

Mujibul Haque Chunnun, an executive chairman of the Anisul-led JP, told this newspaper that Jatiya Party (JP) led by Anwar Hossain, Jatiya Party (Kazi Zafar), and other factions that broke off from the JP will join the

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16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

The abuse that leaves no bruise

Violence Against Women survey 2024 shows 68 percent of Intimate Partner Violence survivors face controlling behaviour

NILIMA JAHAN

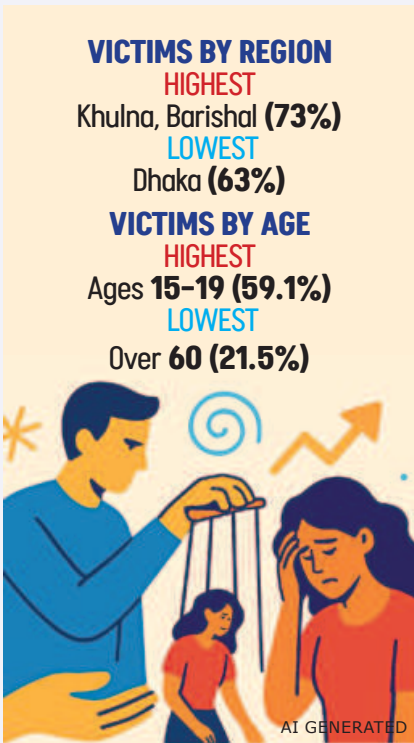
When 32-year-old Akhi (not her real name) finally left her marriage last year, it was not the beatings that drove her away. It was the slow erasure of her being.

Soon after the wedding, her husband forced her to quit a six-year corporate career. Over the next four years, he dictated what she wore, what she cooked, which friends and relatives she could meet, and even when she had to sleep.

"At first, I thought these were just the 'normal adjustments' of married life," she said.

"But the rules kept expanding. He demanded my phone password, monitored my calls and social media, forced me to remove male friends and former colleagues, and even sent messages to them pretending to be me to check if I was in any relationship. He also insisted I keep my location on whenever I stepped out.

"If I was late replying to his messages, he accused me of infidelity. He never



hit me, but he controlled every part of my life. I felt like I was living in a prison."

Akhi's experience is far from unique. Across Bangladesh, controlling behaviour has long existed as psychological abuse that leaves no marks and rarely enters police or medical records.

The Violence Against Women (VAW) Survey 2024, conducted on 27,476 women aged 15 and above nationwide, by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and UNFPA, found that 68 percent of women who faced intimate partner violence (IPV) experienced controlling behaviour. The rate was 71.1 percent among divorced, separated, or widowed women.

Experts warn such coercive control is often the first step toward physical violence, economic deprivation, sexual coercion, and femicide.

The survey measured restrictions on women's autonomy, decision-making, and social interactions.

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Country trapped in Awami-era power deals

Says TIB's Iftekharuzzaman

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has no capability to get rid of the deals that were signed by the ousted Awami League government, said Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh.

The companies that benefited from such a deal would remain in operation on one hand, and on the other hand, the people would have to bear the burdens of such deals for years, he said yesterday at the inauguration of Bangladesh Energy Conference 2025.

It is a very important finding from the national committee to review the power sector deals that the then government committed an "organised crime" in signing the deals and used state organs in this regard, Iftekharuzzaman.

"We cannot be overly angry with those who have benefited from this organised crime."

The reason is that these were agreements made between the state and state-level actors.

"The state does not have the capacity to simply withdraw from the agreements that have been made for the future."

It seems that it is not possible for the government to go to the international courts.

As a result, the responsibility will lie with the companies (with whom the deals were signed) and the burden will have to be borne by the people of this country, he said.

The companies, as well as the fossil fuel lobbies, are still active in the power sector.

"The sector's progress is always in strong opposition to those lobbies. We are now aiming for Net Zero Transition, but that lobby is very much strong."

In contrast, the groups who are working on renewable energy would need to build a clear national roadmap

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4 civilians, soldier killed in Afghan-Pak border clash

Kabul says 5 civilians hurt

AFP, Kandahar

An overnight exchange of gunfire and shelling at a major Pakistan-Afghanistan border crossing killed four civilians and one soldier, Afghan officials said yesterday, the latest flare-up of fighting between the two countries despite a ceasefire since deadly clashes in October.

Five other civilians were wounded, an Afghan government spokesman, Hamdullah Fitrat, said in a video statement.

The local hospital at the Pakistani border town of Chaman said three people suffered minor injuries during the fighting.

Each side accused the other of launching "unprovoked" attacks at the crossing between Chaman and Spin Boldak, in southern Afghanistan.

"Unfortunately, tonight, the Pakistani side started attacking Afghanistan in Kandahar, Spin Boldak district, and the forces of the Islamic Emirate were forced to respond," Taliban government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid posted on X late Friday.

Pakistan said Afghan forces fired first. "A short while ago, the Afghan Taliban regime resorted to unprovoked firing" along the border, Mosharruf Zaidi, a spokesman for Pakistan's prime minister, said on X.

Ali Mohammed Haqmal, head of Kandahar's information department, said that Pakistani forces

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People stand near a building hit in a Russian missile and drone strike in the town of Slobozhanske in Ukraine's Dnipro region yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Ex-Jubo Dal man in police custody dies in Jashore hospital

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

A former local leader of Jatiyatabadi Jubo Dal died in custody after falling ill following his arrest during an operation by the joint forces in Jashore's Keshabpur upazila on Friday night.

The deceased was identified as Ujjal Biswas, 39, a member of the Keshabpur municipality Jubo Dal and the younger brother of former ward councillor Afzal Hossain.

He was declared dead by doctors at Jashore General Hospital around 10:30pm last night after being brought in from Jashore Central Jail, Keshabpur Police Station Officer-in-Charge (OC) Anwar Hossain confirmed to The Daily Star.

Ujjal was accused in 10 cases, the OC added.

On Thursday night, joint forces conducted a raid and arrested four individuals, including Ujjal, reportedly with firearms, homemade weapons, and drugs.

The OC said Ujjal appeared ill when the joint forces handed him

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