



There's only going to be one winner here, and that's probably going to be the US or China and right now, we're winning by a lot. Trump after signing order targeting AI laws

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Dhaka-8 aspirant Hadi shot in broad daylight

Critically wounded, Inqilab Moncho spokesperson receiving treatment at Evercare Hospital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In a brazen broad-daylight attack, Sharif Osman Hadi, an independent MP aspirant for Dhaka-8 and spokesperson for Inqilab Moncho, was shot in the capital's Paltan area yesterday, leaving him critically injured.

The incident took place on Box Culvert Road, between DR Tower and Baitus Salam Jame Mosque, around 2:25pm, said Hussain Muhammad Farabi, assistant commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (Motijheel Zone).

The attack came just a day after the Election Commission unveiled the schedule for the 13th national election.

Police said Hadi was seen on a rickshaw in Bijoy Nagar around 2:30pm. CCTV footage shows a motorcycle approaching the rickshaw from behind, pulling up to the right side, before the pillion rider fired at him point-blank.

Both men on the bike wore helmets. The entire attack lasted only seconds before the assailants sped off.



SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



Sharif Osman Hadi, an independent MP aspirant for Dhaka-8 and spokesperson for Inqilab Moncho, being transferred to the Evercare Hospital last night from the Dhaka Medical College Hospital, where he was initially taken earlier in the day with critical gunshot injuries.

PHOTO: STAR



Culprits will be brought to justice: CA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus has said those behind the attack on Sharif Osman Hadi, as well as those who planned it, must be arrested as quickly as possible.

He made the comment while holding an emergency meeting at the state guesthouse Jamuna last night with several members of the advisory council as well as key officials from law enforcement and security agencies, according to the CA press wing.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

Parties outraged, concerned

Those who want to weaken the country's independence, sovereignty, and stability have already begun their conspiracy, as evident from this shooting incident.

BNP acting chairman **Tarique Rahman**

Any violence arising from political rivalry or differences of opinion is never acceptable. I demand a quick, impartial, and transparent investigation into this incident.

Jamaat e-Islami Ameer **Shafiqur Rahman**

If the government fails to provide security or bring the perpetrators to justice, we will have to take action against it.

National Citizen Party Convener **Nahid Islam**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of different political parties have condemned the shooting of Sharif Osman Hadi in the capital's Paltan area yesterday.

BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman said those who want to weaken the country's independence, sovereignty, and stability have already begun their conspiracy, as evident from this shooting incident.

"A party, group, or some individuals have openly threatened to obstruct the election. They are working to disrupt peace and stability," he said, virtually addressing a programme from London.

Meanwhile, the BNP, in a statement last night, said: "This attack is part of an evil plan. It is undoubtedly a blueprint to spread criminal activities and disrupt the election environment. There is a planned effort to spread fear and panic in society for personal gain."

The party announced rallies across the country today to protest the shooting of Hadi, an independent MP aspirant for Dhaka-8, and BNP nominee for Chattogram-8, Ershad Ullah.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir and Jamaat e-

SEE PAGE 8 COL 4

Tarique to return home Dec 25

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman is finally returning to Bangladesh on December 25 from the UK after 17 years in exile, putting to rest the speculation about his homecoming.

"I am happy to announce that our party's acting chairman Tarique Rahman will set foot on Dhaka's soil on December 25," BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir said at a briefing last night after attending an emergency meeting at the Chairperson's office.

Fakhru said, "The obstacles that were created in the path to democracy, we believe, will be removed when Tarique Rahman arrives in the country."

According to party sources, Tarique called the emergency meeting, where he informed senior leaders about his return.

"I have decided to return to the country. I will be returning on December 25th. You are my colleagues, long-time companions. I thought you should know my decision before it becomes public," Tarique said to the senior leaders virtually.



His decision came a day after the announcement of the election schedule and party insiders said it was made considering his mother's health condition and the current political situation ahead of the polls.

They said Tarique will be given a grand reception at the airport, making his "homecoming a historic and memorable day."

During the 1/11 government, Tarique was arrested on March 7, 2007. He was granted bail on September 3, 2008, and left for London with his family on September 11 for medical treatment.

Tarique has been living in London with his wife, Zubaida Rahman, and daughter, Zaima Rahman. Zubaida arrived in Dhaka on December 5 to look after her mother-in-law's treatment.

Since the mass uprising, there had been widespread speculation about Tarique's imminent return. It grew even louder after he met Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus in London on June 13 this year.

On October 6, in an interview with BBC Bangla, Tarique was asked when

SEE PAGE 8 COL 5

EC sets longer prep period for polls

Says extended nomination, scrutiny timeline to smooth process

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

The extended gap between the announcement of the national polls schedule and polling day will allow more time to both Election Commission officials and aspiring candidates to prepare for the elections, said EC officials.

Unveiling the schedule for the 13th national election on Thursday, the EC set a 63-day gap between the two dates. This is the longest interval since the February 1991 elections, which had a 74-day gap. In contrast, elections held between February 1996 and January 2024 saw much shorter intervals, ranging from 39 to 59 days, according to EC data.

Election Commissioner Abdur Rahmani Masud explained that the extended timeline is meant to give candidates more breathing space. The longer gap will make election preparations more organised and less rushed, helping both candidates and officials carry out their responsibilities more smoothly.

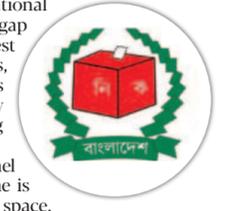
"We have increased the period for submitting nominations because, compared to previous elections, candidates now need to submit more documents. We want to ensure they are not under undue pressure and have enough time to prepare," he told the newspaper.

He said many had previously complained about the short time allowed for nomination scrutiny.

The commission has also added extra days to handle appeals against returning officers' decisions.

According to the timeline, nomination papers must be filed

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1



2 univ students killed as DSCC garbage truck hits motorcycle

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two private university students were killed yesterday when a Dhaka South City Corporation garbage truck collided head-on with their motorcycle in Konapara of the capital's Demra.

Police arrested the driver, identified as Rafik, from the Bandar area of Narayanganj yesterday evening.

The victims were identified as Iram Ridwan, 26, a final-year student at Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB), and Tahsin Topu, 25, a third-year honours student at United International University (UIU).

The accident occurred around 4:30am. Sub-Inspector Md Rubel Howlader of Demra Police Station, who rushed to the spot, said the motorcycle was struck head-on by the truck, which was coming from the wrong direction.

Police seized the vehicle, but the driver initially managed to flee the scene. Contacted, Md Murad Hossain, inspector (Investigation) of the station, said the driver was later apprehended around 7:00pm.

Friends of the victims rushed them to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, where

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1



The struggle to cope with rising salinity, depleting fresh water, and diminishing livelihoods continues on the frontlines of climate change in the rural south west. This is the last part of the series.

BANGLADESH'S COASTAL BELT

Families pushed into migration, debt traps

WASIM BIN HABIB, back from Khulna, Satkhira

59% households in 3 Shyamnagar unions had one migrated for work between 2022 and 2023

86% of them moved to other districts

Sea-level rise may displace 9 lakh people by 2050; 21 lakh by 2100

Over 49 lakh currently internally displaced due to natural disasters

When crab farming started gaining ground in Satkhira's Shyamnagar upazila around a decade ago, Matiur Rahman, a farmer in his early 40s, believed his fortunes were about to change.

Like many others in the coastal region, he converted a small portion of his rice field into a crab enclosure. He leased two bighas of land in his village in Burigoalini union to expand the new venture, hoping it would offer quick and steady returns.

But outbreaks of aquatic diseases and bitter rivalries among farm owners shattered his hopes.

"Out of the 1,200kg of crab fry I farmed in 2014, I could save only 300kg. The rest died. I became broke," he recalled.



SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

UN urges Ethiopia, Eritrea to respect border pact

AFP, Addis Ababa

The United Nations on Friday urged Ethiopia and Eritrea to respect each other's territorial integrity, voicing concern over "renewed tensions" between the two neighbouring countries.

For months, the Horn of Africa nations have traded accusations of destabilisation, raising the spectre of a new war.

Eritrea, which gained independence from Ethiopia in 1993 after a long armed struggle, accuses its landlocked neighbour of eyeing its Assab port.

Ethiopian authorities, meanwhile, say Eritrea is "actively preparing for war" and funding armed groups fighting federal forces.

UN chief Antonio Guterres urged both sides to "recommit to the vision of lasting peace and the respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity" under the Algiers Agreement, which ended a border war that killed tens of thousands between 1998 and 2000, his spokesman Stephane Dujarric said in a statement.

The two countries have had strained relations since then, with fighting flaring up again in Ethiopia's war-scarred Tigray region.



Dozens of organisations brought out a torchlight procession from the Central Shaheed Minar last night as part of the "Protirodh Jatra" to press home their nine-point demands, including the release of Baul artiste Abul Sarkar and justice for ongoing attacks on spiritual communities, the general public, and nature across the country.

PHOTO: STAR

Former Iraqi president Salih appointed UNHCR chief

AFP, Geneva

Former Iraqi president Barham Salih will become the next United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, a UN source told AFP on Friday, taking over an agency tackling swingeing budget cuts.

Salih was president of Iraq from 2018 to 2022. He will take over as UN refugees chief next month from Filippo Grandi, who is leaving at the end of December after 10 years in the post.

The Geneva-based UNHCR, like many other UN agencies, has been hit by drastic international aid cuts. It has shed nearly 5,000 jobs this year — more than a quarter of its workforce.

Salih was a longstanding top official of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), the second-largest Kurdish Iraqi party.

A moderate and veteran Kurdish politician, Salih's long political career has included several senior positions in the Iraqi government and in the country's autonomous Kurdistan region after the 2003 US-led invasion that toppled longtime ruler Saddam Hussein.

Salih was also part of an interim authority established by the United States following the invasion.

He was one of Iraq's deputy prime ministers from 2006 to 2009, then served as the Kurdish prime minister from 2009 to 2012.

Fluent in English, Arabic and Kurdish, UK-educated Salih served for four years as Iraq's president — a largely ceremonial office traditionally held by a Kurd since 2005.

Dhaka-8 aspirant Hadi shot

FROM PAGE 1

Md Rafi, an Inqilab Moncho activist who was in another rickshaw behind Hadi's, said, "After Juma prayers, we were heading to the High Court area for lunch. At Bijoyagar, two men on a motorcycle fired at Hadi and then fled."

Hadi was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital around 2:40pm and later shifted to Evercare Hospital.

DMCH Director Brigadier General Asaduzzaman said Hadi underwent surgery at the hospital. "He suffered a bullet wound to the head, as well as injuries to his chest and leg. The leg injury is believed to have resulted from falling off the rickshaw after being shot."

Dr Zahid Raihan, head of the neurosurgery department at Dhaka Medical College, said Hadi's overall condition is extremely critical.

"He has suffered two cardiac arrests. He has lost a massive amount of blood. After completing the surgery, we must say that we cannot express any optimism about his condition. He remains in the worst possible state ... though still alive. From here on, it is in God's hands."

"The bullet entered from one side and exited through the other. However, some bullet fragments have remained inside the brain. During the operation, we found and collected a few of those fragments. They were very small."

Dr Abu Zafar, director general of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), said, "When Hadi arrived at DMCH, his Glasgow Coma Scale (GCS) was at its lowest, which ranges from 3 to 15. Thanks to the doctors' efforts, his condition has improved somewhat. He is currently on artificial ventilation."

The GCS is a neurological tool scoring consciousness from 3 (deep coma) to 15 (fully alert) based on three responses: eye opening, verbal response, and motor response.

Dr Zafar said the bullet entered from Hadi's right side near his ear and exited from the left side. Typically, bullet wounds are smaller at the entry point and larger at the exit, and that was the case here.

"Brain injuries cause swelling and increased pressure inside the skull, which is extremely dangerous."

Neurosurgeon Dr Zahid Raihan and his team performed a decompressive craniectomy, removing a part of the skull to relieve the pressure.

Initially, the government had decided to transfer Hadi to the Combined Military Hospital, but his family requested that he be taken to Evercare Hospital instead. Authorities coordinated with Evercare Hospital and arranged the transfer around 7:30pm.

Meanwhile, Paltan Police Station's Officer-in-Charge Mostafa Kamal Khan told this newspaper that as of 11:45pm yesterday, no case had been filed and no arrests made over the shooting.

"However, multiple teams from this station, along with other law enforcement agencies, are working to apprehend the attackers. We are treating the matter with the highest priority."

Meanwhile, Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus expressed concern over the incident and directed law enforcement agencies to carry out a thorough and swift investigation to identify all those involved and bring them to justice.

Political leaders also condemned the attack. BNP acting chairman

Tarique Rahman, Secretary General Mirza Fakhurul Islam Alamgir, Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman, and National Citizen Party Convener Nahid Islam called for the immediate arrest of the attackers.

Hadi studied political science at Dhaka University in 2010–2011 academic session and came to prominence for his role in the anti-discrimination student movement.

Following the July mass uprising last year, he founded the cultural and political platform Inqilab Moncho on August 13.

ASSAILANTS STALKED HIM
Officials of law enforcement agencies suspect the assailants had been following Hadi since the morning. With fewer crowds on Box Culvert Road at that time, they seized the opportunity to carry out the attack.

"We are collecting CCTV footage from all the places he visited this morning. Analysing this footage should help identify the suspects," a senior Detective Branch official told

BNP candidate for Dhaka-8, visited the hospital to see Hadi. Supporters of Hadi and various political groups who gathered outside Dhaka Medical College Hospital chanted slogans such as "Bhua, Bhua" (fake, fake), which escalated tensions.

Jubo Dal and Chhatra Dal members escorted Mirza Abbas out of the premises.

Among others, Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman, Amar Bangladesh (AB) Party General Secretary Barrister Asaduzzaman Fuad, National Citizen Party (NCP) Convener Nahid Islam, Senior Joint Member Secretary Tasnim Jara, and Chief Organiser (South) Hasnat Abdullah also visited DMCH.

Despite the deployment of army and police personnel, ambulances and patient vehicles struggled to access the emergency department due to the large crowd. Hundreds of activists from different political groups assembled outside the hospital, disrupting patient care.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

CCTV footage shows a motorcycle pulling up to the right side of a rickshaw carrying Hadi moments before he was shot by the pillion rider.

The Daily Star.

Investigators said shooting a moving target from a motorcycle is extremely difficult. The shooter managed to do exactly that with a single bullet, suggesting professional expertise.

MM Al Minhaj, health and environment secretary of Dhaka University Central Students' Union (Ducsu) and a member of Hadi's public relations team, told The Daily Star that two unidentified men had been tailing Hadi since morning.

"When Hadi's PR team was filming, those two prevented us from recording. We suspect they are behind the attack," he said.

At the scene in the afternoon, bloodstains were visible on one side of the road, with a bullet casing lying nearby. Around 4:00pm, the CID's crime scene unit arrived and cordoned off the area.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police said officers visited the scene immediately after the shooting, and collected and analysed nearby CCTV footage. They are working diligently to identify and arrest those responsible.

The Detective Branch is conducting search operations in suspected locations and on persons of interest.

Taleb Rahman, DMP spokesperson, said, "We believe the perpetrators will be swiftly brought to justice, as in other recent high-profile cases."

The DMP urged the public to remain calm and report any relevant information to the nearest police station or via the emergency hotline 999.

Around 4:00pm, Mirza Abbas, the

Hadi, who announced his candidacy on Facebook on September 14, had posted on the morning of the attack, "Since I don't have any posters or festoons in Dhaka-8, there's no pressure of them being torn down either. Juma Mubarak from in front of the ACC."

Dhaka-8 includes the Motijheel, Shahbagh, Ramna, Paltan, and Shahjahanpur areas.

The attack on Hadi has sparked protests across the country. Various political groups and organisations condemned the attack and staged demonstrations in Dhaka, Narayanganj, Munshiganj, Gazipur, Jhalakathi, Jhenaidah, Kushtia, and Chattogram. Students at various universities around the country also protested on their respective campuses.

This attack follows a spate of targeted killings and daylight shootings in crowded areas, raising serious concerns about law and order ahead of the national election. Just the day before, a businessman was shot dead in broad daylight in Old Dhaka's Shyambazar area.

In recent weeks, two men linked to a criminal gang were gunned down outside the Khulna Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, and on November 17 in Dhaka's Mirpur, Golam Kibria, member secretary of Pallabi Thana Jubo Dal, was shot dead inside a shop.

Earlier, listed top criminal Tariq Saif Mamun was killed near Dhaka's busiest court area, and last month, Chattogram's underworld figure Sarwar Hossain Babla was assassinated during a voter outreach event.

Families pushed into migration, debt traps

FROM PAGE 1

With debts mounting, Matiur headed for Dhaka city in mid 2016. He began pulling a rickshaw to survive. Two years later, he returned home and tried his luck again in aquaculture. This time, he invested in shrimp farming, using his small savings and loans from relatives and a local NGO.

But natural disaster struck in quick succession. Cyclone Bulbul in November 2019 and Cyclone Amphan in May 2020 tore through the coast and breached his ponds, washing away everything he had.

"I lost the Tk 3 lakh I had paid in advance for the lease. My fish, my income, my dreams, everything was gone," he said.

"I had no option but to head back to Dhaka and start pulling rickshaw again."

Matiur's story is eerily familiar. Across Bangladesh's southwestern coast, rising salinity, driven by sea-level rise, repeated cyclones, and tidal floods, is triggering a wave of migration and displacement.

As fields turn barren and local jobs dry up, men, especially from marginalised or landless families, leave their ancestral lands in search of work, adding to the growing flow of climate-affected workers in the informal labour force. They move to nearby districts or cities to pull rickshaws or work as labourers in brick kilns, construction sites and farms. Back home, women shoulder the burden of keeping families together with dwindling resources.

A 2023 study by Ovihashi Karmi Unnayan Program (OKUP) found that 59 percent of households in Shyamnagar's three unions had at least one member who migrated for work.

Of them, 86 percent moved to different districts while 14 percent went abroad. Among the internal migrants, 93 percent engaged in short-term "seasonal migration" and 7 percent in "longer-term migration".

The OKUP report said migration decisions in the Sundarbans region are rarely voluntary; they are "mostly triggered by a compulsion to pay off loans and rebuild lives in the context of persistent threats by climate-induced disasters".

A special report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimates that by 2050, sea-level rises may lead to migration of around nine lakh people in Bangladesh. By 2100, the number could reach 21 lakh — mostly internal migrants — with profound implications for nutrition, shelter and employment in affected areas.

Some families become displaced after losing their homes and livelihoods to recurring disasters, forcing them to move to other districts and live in shanties under inhumane conditions. Beyond poverty, they face various problems, from unsafe water and poor sanitation to persistent health problems, with little support to rebuild their lives.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that more than 49 lakh people in Bangladesh are now internally displaced due to natural disasters.

Culprits will be brought to justice

FROM PAGE 1

Earlier in the day, Yunus directed the authorities concerned to ensure the best possible medical care for Hadi, an independent MP candidate for Dhaka-8 and spokesperson of Inqilab Moncho, who was shot in broad daylight in the Paltan area.

At last night's meeting, Yunus said the attack is a deliberate strike at Bangladesh's democratic progress and that through this act, the defeated forces have dared to challenge the very existence of the country.

"We will foil any such attempts at any cost. Attacks of this nature on the nation by evil forces will not be tolerated."

The agency launched a comprehensive nationwide assessment of disaster-induced displacement on December 10.

The assessment covering all 64 districts found that two out of three internally displaced people had to leave ancestral land before April 2020. One in four were displaced between April 2020 and April 2024.

According to the Global Internal Displacement Report 2025, Bangladesh is one of the five countries that reported the highest number of internally displaced people due to natural disasters, with 24 lakh people displaced last year.

LEAVING HOMES FOR SURVIVAL

Salinity intrusion has contaminated freshwater sources, degraded soils, and squeezed incomes from traditional farming across the coastal villages, driving many to migrate to district towns like Satkhira, Khulna, Jashore, Dhaka and Chattogram either temporarily or permanently. When cyclones strike, the crisis deepens.

Shariful Alam, a small farmer from Shyamnagar upazila, knows this all too well. His farmland remained submerged in saline water for months after Cyclone Aila hit the country in 2009.

Even after the water receded, the salinity level in his land was too high to plant rice for several years. When he finally managed to cultivate paddy, the harvest was so low that it didn't even cover the production costs.

"I started working in a fish hatchery in Shyamnagar but couldn't earn enough. I had to leave home to survive," he said.

Shariful first moved to Satkhira sadar upazila and worked as a labourer in a brick kiln. He then went to Khulna in search of steadier work.

A 2024 study by the Department of Environment found that 23 cyclones hit the coastal belt between 2000 and 2020 — 10 in the 2000s and 13 in the 2010s.

A recent synthesis by the International Centre for Climate Change and Development counted 185 extreme weather events in Bangladesh between 2000 and 2019, making it the world's seventh most climate-vulnerable country.

For many cash-strapped families, brick kilns have become a predictable fallback. Each year, kiln owners offer advance payments to families in salinity-hit areas before the season starts, binding those already burdened by crop failures or failed shrimp ventures to gruelling work for three to six months.

Mohammad Mozaffar from Khulna's Koyra upazila is one of them.

He began working at a kiln in Savar in 2021 after years of struggle as a day labourer. Later, his father and brother joined him.

For a six-month contract, the kiln owner paid him Tk 1 lakh in advance. He returns home once every three months during the production season starting in October. For the rest of the year, he works in shrimp farms and occasionally ventures into the Sundarbans to catch fish for 10 to 15 days at a stretch.

Stating that this attack is part of a conspiracy to derail the national election and the referendum, he added, "Under no circumstances will we allow such conspiracies to succeed. No matter the challenges or storms ahead, no force will be able to sabotage the upcoming election."

"Together with the people of this country, we will ensure a peaceful election through our collective strength."

The chief adviser ordered immediate and appropriate measures along the borders, saying, "It must be ensured that the attackers cannot leave the country under any circumstances."

Mozaffar fell ill while working at the kiln in September this year and had to return home. It took him 20 days to recover. Even so, he must go back to the brick kiln.

"If I don't rejoin work, my father and brother will be in trouble. What else can I do? We have no other asset or land except our ancestral home."

Back in the village, his wife, Shirina Akhter, keeps the household running. "I can't work because I have to look after my two daughters and mother-in-law," she said, sitting on the floor of their tin-roofed earthen home.

"It's very difficult to run the family alone... I have to manage everything. We don't even have enough drinking water. Life is full of hardship."

For Akhed Ali Gazi, migration was a matter of necessity.

Unable to find work in his village in Shyamnagar upazila, the 55-year-old moved to Jashore with his family more than two decades ago.

Since then, he has been pulling rickshaws, raising five children and arranging their marriages.

"People think we left for Jashore seeking opportunities, but the truth is, we had no choice."

He hopes to return home one day. "I want to spend my last days on my forefathers' land... I wish to be laid to rest beside my parents."

OKUP Chairperson Shakirul Islam said many seasonal migrants, employed in agricultural farms, brick kilns or other informal sectors, face exploitation, deprivation, and human rights abuses — with virtually no recourse.

Those who are permanently displaced often end up in slums in nearby districts, where they live in harsh conditions, he added.

"Long-term support is scarce. Government assistance usually comes only in the immediate aftermath of major cyclones or floods, with no sustained improvements in the lives and livelihoods of affected communities," Shakirul said.

"As a result, many fall into debt traps. They take one loan to repay another."

Another segment of these people takes large loans to migrate overseas, only to fall into an even deeper debt cycle. Many end up undocumented and unable to find work; yet they cannot return home because of mounting debts.

Experts warn that more families will be pushed to the edge unless the government strengthens long-term freshwater management and promotes salinity-resilient agriculture. It is also essential to recognise climate-displaced people in social protection policies.

Shakirul said there is little coordination between the ministries working on the issue — and the same is true for NGOs and civil society.

"We need stronger, more unified coordination to ensure safe migration pathways, especially in global advocacy," he added.

[Our Khulna Correspondent Dipankar Roy and Satkhira Correspondent also contributed to this report]

He also said that those who may have become potential targets due to their involvement in the July uprising must be given due security consideration.

The meeting decided that a special hotline will be launched within the next few days to prevent any untoward incidents during the election period and to enable rapid response.

It was also decided to intensify operations to recover illegal weapons and to search locations where suspects may be hiding.

The chief adviser will soon meet with major political leaders to discuss the evolving situation.



A bee collects nectar from a field of blooming yellow mustard flowers on a sunny afternoon in the Mongolkot area of Keshabpur, Jashore. As bees move from flower to flower in search of nectar and pollen, they support honey production and help boost crop yields through pollination. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Asif Mahmud to run for Dhaka-10 as independent

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuyain has announced that he will contest the upcoming 13th National Parliamentary Election as an independent candidate from the Dhaka-10 constituency.

He made the announcement in a post on his verified Facebook page yesterday.

After the announcement, he sought everyone's cooperation and support in a video message, saying, "I do not have the backing of any major political party, numerous dedicated activists, or the financial resources required by this conventional system. I am only relying on your cooperation and support."

He also called for "yes" votes in the referendum, describing it as an opportunity for national reforms.

However, before this announcement, the inclusion of Asif and Mahfuj Alam in the NCP was almost confirmed until Thursday night, according to NCP sources.

Top NCP leaders said Asif had sought a significant role within the central executive committee, a

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

From hope to horror

The dark reality of illegal migration to Europe

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Akbar Samrat, a 25-year-old electrician from Chandpur, sold all his property and took loans with the hope of securing a high-paying job in Greece.

But his dream soon descended into a nightmare when he fell victim to a human trafficking network.

It began when Mohammad Sharif, a man from his neighbourhood, promised him a lucrative job abroad. Sharif and his accomplice, Nazir Hossain, convinced Akbar to pay Tk 15 lakh for the opportunity.

Trusting them, Akbar handed over his passport and paid Tk 8 lakh upfront.

In July, Sharif arranged for Akbar to stay in Dhaka for 14 days before sending him to Dubai. From there, the journey continued through Egypt and eventually to Libya.

Once they arrived in Libya, the situation took a dark turn.

He was handed over to armed mafia members who seized his belongings and subjected him to severe torture. Akbar was held in a bunker with five others for three days without food or water.

The traffickers later moved them to a prison-like facility and demanded a large ransom, warning they would not be released otherwise. Meanwhile, Nazir kept in contact with Akbar's family in Bangladesh through WhatsApp.

Desperate for his release, Akbar's family sold property, borrowed more money, and managed to raise an additional Tk 11 lakh to pay the ransom. Even

after the payment, Akbar and the others were not freed immediately but were instead handed over to Libyan police.

After spending 45 days in captivity, Akbar and the others were rescued with support from the International Organization for

AT A GLANCE

▶▶ Bangladeshis top the list of people entering Europe illegally via the Mediterranean

▶▶ 18,034 Bangladeshis reached Italy by sea until October this year, higher than previous years

▶▶ Most trafficking victims come from three regions: Madaripur-Shariatpur, Sylhet-Sunamganj, and Narsingdi-Bhairab

▶▶ Libya remains a major transit point where migrants are detained and tortured for ransom

EXPERTS CALL FOR

▶▶ Targeted awareness in identified high-risk regions

▶▶ Investigations to dismantle entire trafficking networks

▶▶ Coordinated action against syndicate members operating abroad

▶▶ Expand safe, legal migration pathways

Migration (IOM) and returned to Bangladesh in mid-October.

"We paid instalments, then interest, and now we're drowned in debt. People are threatening us for money. We can't tolerate this anymore," Akbar told The Daily Star yesterday.

"I have two sons -- one is four and the other is one year old. I don't know how to overcome this crisis."

At least 18 others, like Akbar, were deceived by Nazir's trafficking network within a year, according to officials from the Trafficking in Human Being (THB) Unit of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID).

The syndicate collected an estimated Tk 3.5 crore from hopeful migrants, said Mostafizur Rahman, additional superintendent of police at the THB unit.

The updates came following the arrest of Nazir, 55, near Dhaka airport on Wednesday.

Mostafizur said Nazir and his associates trafficked people by promising jobs in Greece and sending them through Dubai, Egypt, and Libya, only to trap them in a cycle of abuse and extortion.

Nazir is accused in at least two human trafficking cases.

Investigators found that the traffickers gave victims' families several bank account numbers to deposit the ransom. "The syndicate has members in Libya and Greece. A member based in Greece would lure victims by convincing them that he was living a luxurious lifestyle there," said Mostafizur.

He said the suspect's father even received Tk 8 lakh from one victim's family. Police are now trying to arrest other members of the network, he added.

Investigators said after collecting ransom from fortune seekers detained in Libya, traffickers sent them on dangerous

SEE PAGE 4 COL 8

Why is dengue still prevalent in winter?

HELEMUL ALAM

Dengue, once thought to be confined to the monsoon season, now continues to pose a significant health threat throughout the winter months.

According to data from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) over the last five years, 4,685 dengue cases were reported in the first 10 days of December this year alone. In comparison, December 2024 saw 9,745 cases, November 2023 had 9,288, and December 2022 recorded 5,024 cases. The numbers were notably lower in previous years -- 1,207 in 2021 and just 231 in December 2020.

Experts stress the importance of four key factors -- scientific mosquito control, public citizen responsibility, and administrative action -- in the fight against dengue.

"Typically, when temperatures fall from mid-November to February, Aedes mosquito breeding declines, leading to a



REASONS

Warmer temperatures

Climate change

Breeding in unexpected spots

Inadequate cleaning

Delayed rainy season

RECOMMENDATIONS

Targeted fogging

Intensive cleanup campaigns

Community involvement

Regular monitoring

Proper waste disposal

awareness, coordinated

in the fight against

dengue.

"Typically, when temperatures fall from mid-November to February, Aedes mosquito breeding declines, leading to a

drop in dengue transmission. But the situation in 2025 is different," said entomologist Professor Kabirul Bashar.

Bashar explained that global climate change is disrupting normal temperature patterns. Winter temperatures are now warmer, which allows the Aedes mosquito's life cycle to continue without interruption.

"Aedes mosquitoes thrive at temperatures between 25°C and 30°C. Even in winter, temperatures in Bangladesh often remain within this range," he added.

Climate change is also impacting Aedes breeding behaviour. Years of research indicate that the mosquitoes are now breeding not only in small outdoor containers but also in drains, clogged

sewage lines, and even building basements.

Bashar further stated that the Breteau Index -- an indicator of Aedes mosquito density -- remains above 20 in many areas, which is extremely concerning. When this index exceeds 20, the risk of both dengue

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

Country's situation doesn't reflect July spirit

Prof Anu Muhammad tells rally

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The current national situation does not reflect the July spirit, as people's expectations are being broken and discriminatory groups are becoming active, said Prof Anu Muhammad, a member of the Democratic Rights Committee, yesterday.

He was addressing a rally titled "Resistance March", organised by 80 organisations at the Central Shaheed Minar.

Prof Anu Muhammad said the interim government also does not represent the spirit of the uprising, accusing it of supporting religious fascism and signing agreements that serve corporate and imperial interests.

About the arrest of Baul Abul Sarkar, he said the charges against him are false and unjust.

He condemned the shooting of Osman Hadi and attack on Dhaka University Prof Akam Jamal Uddin.

The gathering began at 4:00pm with a one-minute silence marking the 145th birth anniversary of Maulana Bhashani.

At the event, organisers presented nine demands, including the release of Abul Sarkar, withdrawal

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It's a path towards truth, accountability

Says UN expert on exhumation, forensic analysis of July martyrs

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The scientific exhumation and forensic analysis of 114 unidentified bodies of people killed during the July uprising marks a key step in helping families of the missing access truth, justice, and accountability, a UN expert said yesterday.

"This is the first large-scale forensic recovery, analysis, and identification operation carried out in Bangladesh according to international human rights and forensic standards," said Morris Tidball-Binz, UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary executions.

The forensic examination is being conducted on site in a temporary mortuary set up by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), following international forensic and human rights standards, says a statement from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

The process, expected to take several days, includes DNA analysis to identify the deceased scientifically.

In July 2025, Tidball-Binz, also a forensic doctor, visited Dhaka with support from the OHCHR to provide technical advice on forensic investigations to the authorities, including CID and medico-legal services.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

CID partners with foreign firm to recover MTFE scammed funds

TOUSIF KAIUM and MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) is preparing to repatriate a portion of the money laundered through MTFE, a Canada-based trading platform that scammed thousands of Bangladeshi investors with promises of high returns from cryptocurrency and forex trading.

CID officials say this will be the first time laundered funds held abroad are being returned to Bangladesh.

An agreement has already been signed with Asset Reality Limited, a global firm that manages seized digital and crypto assets, to recover the money.

"We have made significant progress. We completed everything from our side. Hopefully, we can recover the money very soon," said CID Chief Md Sibgat Ullah.

HOW THE SCAM OPERATED
MTFE, or Metaverse Foreign Exchange, expanded rapidly in Bangladesh through a multi-level marketing (MLM) system.

Local "team leaders" recruited thousands of investors -- many of

whom were educated and tech-savvy -- encouraging them to deposit savings or borrow money to invest.

The platform opened locally around June 2022 and saw major growth in early 2023. Users created virtual trading accounts and deposited virtual dollars.

MTFE manipulated the system to fabricate profits and losses, giving investors the impression that real trading was taking place. Initially, it paid high returns to build trust.

By mid-2023, MTFE abruptly blocked withdrawals and disappeared.

Investigators later confirmed that the virtual currency displayed in users' accounts was entirely fake. Investors' money was funneled into MTFE-linked wallets, then transferred to MTFE's central accounts and moved onward to various crypto wallets, including on the exchange OKX.

According to CID and newspaper reports, around Tk 11,000 crore was siphoned off, most of it from Bangladeshi users.

The agency estimates that around

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2



Candidates glance through their notes before entering the exam hall as the MBBS and BDS admission tests for 2025-26 session were held yesterday. The photo was taken at the Residential Model School and College centre in Mohammadpur, Dhaka.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

It's a path

FROM PAGE 3

His assistance helped plan the large-scale recovery, documentation, and identification of victims of the July uprising, in line with international standards, particularly the Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death.

On December 1, 2025, a member of the Forensic Advisory Group, summoned by the special rapporteur, travelled to Bangladesh to support the final preparations and oversee the exhumations, which began on December 7, 2025.

The bodies correspond to people killed during the uprising, who were recovered from the streets of Dhaka and buried at Rayerbazar cemetery by the charity Anjuman Mufidul Islam. While efforts were made at the time to respect the dead and protect their dignity, identification was not possible.

"In addition to helping families attain truth and justice, this investigation is a unique opportunity to strengthen Bangladesh's medico-legal and forensic capacity according to international standards such as the Minnesota Protocol," Tidball-Binz said.

According to an OHCHR report, approximately 1,400 people were killed during protests in Bangladesh between July 15 and August 5, 2024. Most deaths were caused by security forces, and 12-13 percent of those killed were children.

The report described the violence as part of a systematic effort by the then government to suppress dissent, resulting in widespread human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings and arbitrary arrests.

Last month, Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal sentenced the deposed prime minister, Sheikh Hasina and her cabinet minister, Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal, to death for crimes against humanity.

RAJKANDI RESERVE FOREST Illegal constructions threaten biodiversity

MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

The Rajkandi Forest Range, one of the country's richest natural forests and home to rare wildlife, dense vegetation, and bamboo groves, is under growing threat due to the construction of unapproved structures within its boundaries.

For decades, only mud houses were permitted for the residents of Kalenji village, located inside the Rajkandi Forest Range in Kamalganj upazila, Moulvibazar. These villagers have been appointed by the Forest Department as caretakers of the forest.

However, a recent visit revealed that around 100 families were living in the area, with several brick-built structures along the roadside. Some of these houses appear to have been constructed recently, allegedly with the knowledge of certain forest officials.

The forest spans 20,270 acres, covering the Adampur, Kurma, and Kamarchhara beats, and is part of the Indo-Burma biodiversity hotspot. It is home to 549 species of flowering plants from 123 families, as recorded in a 2018 study published in the Bangladesh Journal of Plant Taxonomy.

The forest also hosts rare species such as golden cats, Asiatic black bears, serows, pangolins, small-clawed otters, and nearly 300 bird species, many of which are listed

under the CITES convention of 1973.

Local residents claim that such constructions would not be possible without official approval. At least three families – those of Nurnabi, Abdul Nabi, and Moheb Ullah – have reportedly built new houses in violation of forest laws. However, the homeowners declined to comment when approached.

The villagers also accused forest officials of turning a blind eye to the issue. "Forest officers visit daily. Nothing happens without their knowledge. This means someone is allowing the construction of brick houses," said Mohammad Idris, a farmer.

Nurul Mohaimin Milton, general secretary of the Bangladesh



PHOTO: STAR

Abdul Karim, a local resident, said, "While we have been living here for generations in mud houses, some people managed to build pucca houses in recent years. We don't know how they got permission."

Sufia Begum, another villager, expressed concern about the forest's future: "Earlier, the forest was dense and full of animals. Now, new houses are being built, and trees are disappearing. We fear the forest will disappear one day."

Environmental Journalists' Association in Moulvibazar, called for immediate action, including enhanced surveillance, demolition of illegal structures, and the rehabilitation of affected families to prevent irreversible damage to the forest.

Rajkandi Forest Range Officer Md Mamunur Rashid acknowledged the issue, stating, "Pucca houses are not permitted inside the reserved forest. I will look into the matter."

CID partners with foreign firm to recover

FROM PAGE 3

five lakh people from Dhaka, Barishal, Rajshahi, Cumilla, Naogaon, Kushtia, Brahmanbaria, and Sakhira may have been affected.

CASE FILING AND VICTIM'S ACCOUNT
One of the victims, Maruf Rahaman Mahim from South Banasree in Khilgaon, said he was persuaded to invest by Mobashirul Ebad, the husband of his mother's friend.

Ebad promised that an investment of \$201 would generate \$5 profit per day, five days a week, along with commissions for recruiting new investors.

In June 2023, Mahim created an account under

his mother's name and handed Tk 28,000 to Ebad. Soon after, he saw \$205 credited to the account, followed by daily profits. His balance eventually rose to \$456.

However, Ebad discouraged him from withdrawing the money and instead handed him Tk 50,000 in cash.

On August 16, 2023, Mahim logged into his MTFE account and found the balance had dropped to \$0. He could no longer reach Ebad, who had flown to Dubai two days earlier.

Mahim filed a case with Khilgaon Police Station on August 28, 2023, under the Digital Security Act, accusing MTFE founding chairman

Mohammad Masud Alam, MTFE "ambassador" Ebad, and 50-60 unnamed individuals. The case was later transferred to CID.

HOW INVESTIGATORS TRACKED THE MONEY
CID learned through the investigation that Sri Lankan authorities had recovered MTFE-linked funds from the cryptocurrency exchange OKX.

CID then contacted OKX, which requested documentation. With assistance from the US Embassy in Dhaka, investigators confiscated crypto assets worth Tk 45 crore stored in MTFE-linked wallets on the platform.

To repatriate the funds, CID signed an agreement

with Asset Reality Limited on November 11.

The company will receive the confiscated crypto from OKX, liquidate it, and transfer the money to Bangladesh, charging a 2.5 percent fee. A Sonali Bank account has been opened to receive the funds.

"The seized funds are currently held as cryptocurrency in an OKX wallet. Since crypto is not legal in Bangladesh, we cannot bring it back directly. Asset Reality will convert the funds into dollars and send them to us," the CID chief said.

He added that a portion will be sent first as a test run, followed by the remaining amount in phases.

Asif Mahmud

FROM PAGE 3

position ranked between third and fifth, after the convener and member secretary.

As all these posts were already occupied, the party was unable to accommodate his request. Even creating a new position would have required time to formalise procedures and establish relevant rules, they said.

Meanwhile, sources said Nasreen Sultana Mily, joint general secretary of AB Party – one of the three components of the NCP-led Gonotantik Sangskar Jote – also intends to contest the election from Dhaka-10.

Overall, the prospect of Asif Mahmud joining the NCP has become increasingly uncertain.

On the other hand, the BNP has already nominated Sheikh Rabiul Alam, a member of its executive committee, for the Dhaka-10 constituency.

Asif, previously at the helm of LGRD and sports ministries, handed his resignation from the adviser post to Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus on December 10.

On November 9, Asif registered as a voter under the Dhaka-10 constituency.

Originally from Cumilla, Asif joined the interim government as a student representative on August 8 last year.

PRAYER TIMING
DECEMBER 13

Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 5-15 12-45 3-45 5-19 7-00
JAMAAT 5-50 1-15 4-00 5-22 7-30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

Why is dengue still

FROM PAGE 3

and chikungunya increases sharply, which explains why infections persist even in winter.

Referring to a joint study by Dhaka North City Corporation and Jahangirnagar University, Bashar noted that while rainwater accumulation diminishes in winter, many locations still hold water throughout the year.

These include water stored in basements of buildings under construction, buckets or drums kept for water storage, particularly near bathrooms, Wasa meter chambers, car-washing areas inside high-rise parking spaces, and blocked drains and sewers.

"These locations become significant breeding sites during winter. Without rainfall, Aedes mosquitoes target these spots to lay their eggs, leading to concentrated outbreaks in certain areas or households – what we call scientific 'hotspots'," he explained.

A recent survey identified breeding sources, with 16.67 percent of cases found in basements or parking areas, 12.96 percent in plastic buckets and water meter holes, and 9.26 percent in gate channels. Other common breeding sites included plastic drums, flower tubs, water tanks, and metal containers.

The survey also highlighted the productivity of these containers in breeding adult mosquitoes. The highest productivity was found in flooded floors (47.27 percent), followed by basements or parking areas (16.80 percent) and sealable plastic drums (14.74 percent).

"If these hotspots are not controlled, dengue transmission will continue through winter," Bashar warned.

To combat winter dengue, he recommended that local government institutions implement hotspot-based control strategies. After identifying the addresses of infected patients, rapid fogging should be carried out in those areas to prevent the spread of infected mosquitoes.

Fogging outside these zones, however, is unnecessary

and medically unsound.

Hospitals treating dengue patients should also conduct regular fogging, and patients should be kept under mosquito nets to prevent mosquitoes from biting them and becoming virus carriers.

Bashar suggested that a 15-day intensive cleanup campaign focusing on eliminating breeding sites could significantly reduce infections by December. However, he stressed that city corporations cannot succeed alone—public participation is crucial.

He advised that any household container storing water should be scrubbed with soap or detergent every three days. Bathroom buckets, plant pots, and AC trays can all become breeding grounds.

Dengue has acted like an epidemic in Dhaka for years. To prevent similar outbreaks in Rajshahi, Khulna, Barishal, and Chattogram, local administrations must remain vigilant, he said.

Entomologist GM Saifur Rahman noted that although dengue cases are gradually declining, they will not disappear soon.

"Containers that previously held water may still contain eggs even when dry. These must be properly disposed of, and active breeding sites need immediate destruction," Rahman explained.

He added that authorities have a narrow window to act.

"If preventive measures are implemented now, they may delay the usual dengue surge that follows the first rains in March or April," he said.

From hope

FROM PAGE 3

boat journeys to Italy across the Mediterranean Sea. While some reached Europe, many died tragically on the way.

Officials say that Bangladesh currently ranks highest among all nationalities attempting to enter Europe illegally by crossing the Mediterranean.

This year, 18,034 Bangladeshis were identified while entering Italy by sea until October, compared to 14,397 in 2024 and 14,285 in 2023, according to the EU border agency Frontex.

Shariful Hasan, associate director of BRAC's Migration and Youth Platform, told The Daily Star that many Bangladeshis attempt to reach Europe via Libya, where traffickers detain and torture them for ransom.

"This year the situation has reached unprecedented levels," he said.

He noted that most victims come from three regions: Madaripur-Shariatpur, Sylhet-Sunamganj, and Narsingdi-Bhairab.

Their routes typically include Dubai, Egypt, and then Libya, he said.

Shariful stressed that the government must raise awareness in these regions.

"Law enforcement must not only arrest one or two members of the syndicate but investigate and take action against the entire network whenever new information arises," Shariful said.

Action must also be taken against those operating abroad, he added.

He urged the government to implement measures that would allow people to travel to Europe through legal channels, helping them avoid illegal routes.

Country's situation

FROM PAGE 3

of false cases, and the resignation of the home and cultural advisers.

They also called for investigations into attacks on Baul, Sufi, mazar, and other culture-friendly communities, along with the arrest and punishment of those responsible.

Other demands included reinstating the recruitment of music and physical education teachers in primary schools; ensuring

state protection for cultural and religious events such as pala gaan, drama, jatra, fairs, and urs; and protecting freedom of expression.

The organisers urged an end to state support for "fascist activities in the name of religion". They also demanded action against violence based on gender, profession, ethnicity, ideology, or personal lifestyle. A torch procession was held after the cultural gathering.

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E-mail: eebrhd@gmail.com
Reference No: 35.01.0108.400.16.049.25-2172 Date: 11-12-2025

e-Tender Notice (Re-Tender)

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (www.eprocure.gov.bd) for the procurement of:

Sl No	Package Description	Tender Document Last Selling Date & Time	Tender Closing & Opening Date & Time	Tender Security Submission Last Date & Time
1	e-GP/ADP/01/WP-02A/EE/BRD/2025-2026 (Re-Tender). (ID-1193200) Remaining works of Construction of 10 Nos PC/RCC Girder Bridges at different location on Fakirhat (Diabari) Madrashaghat-Mollahat (Boalia) Road (Z-8409) of Road Division, Bagerhat under "Construction of Concrete Bridges in Existing Narrow & Damaged Concrete Bridge/ Bailey Bridge on Highway under Khulna Zone" Project during the year 2025-2026 (WP-02(A)).	28-12-2025 05:00 PM	29-12-2025 13:00 PM	29-12-2025 12:00 PM

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted.
To submit e-Tender, registration required in the National e-GP System Portal (www.eprocure.gov.bd).
The fees for downloading the e-Tender document from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered bank branches up to 28 December 2025, at 05:00 PM.
Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

(Md. Ashrafur Islam Pk.)
ID No-602162
Executive Engineer, RHD
Road Division, Bagerhat.

GD-2727

কিশোরগঞ্জ বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়
কিশোরগঞ্জ-২৩০০
তারিখ ২৭ অগ্রহায়ণ, ১৪৩২ বাংলা
১২ ডিসেম্বর, ২০২৫ খ্রি.

স্মারক নং-কিবি/জনবল/শিক্ষক/২০২৫/৭৫২

সংশোধিত নিয়োগ বিজ্ঞপ্তি

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- নিয়োগ সংক্রান্ত সকল বিষয়ে কর্তৃপক্ষের সিদ্ধান্তই চূড়ান্ত বলে বিবেচিত হবে।

রেজিস্ট্রার
কিশোরগঞ্জ বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়

GD-2725

Germany blames Russia for polls interference

AFP, Berlin

Germany yesterday accused Russia of cyberattacks targeting its air traffic control and February's general election, and said it had summoned the Russian ambassador to protest.

A foreign ministry spokesman said German security services had proof that hacker groups run by Russia's military intelligence service GRU were responsible for the attacks and influence operations.

"Based on comprehensive analysis by the German intelligence services, we have been able to clearly identify the handwriting behind it and prove Moscow's responsibility," said the spokesman.

"We can now clearly attribute the cyberattack against German Air Safety in August 2024 to the hacker collective APT28, also known as Fancy Bear," he told a regular press briefing.

He also said Russia had sought to influence February's parliamentary election, which was won by the conservatives of Chancellor Friedrich Merz, with the far-right AfD scoring its best-ever result in second place.



This undated handout photograph released by the National Police of Ukraine yesterday shows an aerial view of heavily damaged residential buildings and a church in the frontline town of Kostyantynivka, Donetsk region.

PHOTO: AFP

Spanish PM slams US 'extrajudicial ops' off Venezuela

AFP, Rome

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez condemned as "unacceptable" the "extrajudicial operations" carried out by the United States on alleged drug-trafficking boats off Venezuela, in an interview published yesterday.

Speaking to Italy's L'Espresso magazine, the Socialist premier urged a peaceful resolution to the growing crisis between President Donald Trump's administration and Caracas, which have sparked fears of an open conflict.

Asked about what the reporter characterised as US extrajudicial killings in international waters, Sanchez said: "The questioning of international law is, once again, worrying."

He said the operations fuel criticism that the West is inconsistent and applies "double standards" on defending international law.

"In my opinion, these extrajudicial operations are unacceptable, they undermine international law."

The United States imposed sanctions Thursday against relatives of Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro and six companies shipping the South American country's oil.

President Donald Trump's administration has been piling pressure on Venezuela for months, with a major naval buildup in the region that has been accompanied by deadly strikes on alleged drug-trafficking boats, killing nearly 90 people.

Trump 'extremely frustrated' with Kyiv, Moscow

EU set to indefinitely freeze Russian assets

AGENCIES

US President Donald Trump is "extremely frustrated" with both Kyiv and Moscow, his spokeswoman said Thursday, as negotiations on ending Russia's nearly four-year war against its neighbour have faltered.

"The president is extremely frustrated with both sides of this war," Karoline Leavitt told reporters. "He doesn't want any more talk. He wants action. He wants this war to come to an end."

Leavitt added: "His special envoy, (Steve) Witkoff, and his team continue to talk with both sides, literally as we speak."

Earlier in the week, Trump expressed impatience with Ukraine and its European allies France, Britain and Germany, saying "strong words" were exchanged in a phone call with the leaders.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said further talks were planned this weekend and that an international meeting on Ukraine



could take place early next week, but that American participation was not guaranteed.

Meanwhile, the EU yesterday looked set to indefinitely freeze Russian central bank assets held in Europe, removing a big obstacle to using the cash to help Ukraine defend itself against Moscow's invasion.

EU governments aim to sign off by 1600 GMT, through a qualified majority vote, on a plan to immobilise 210 billion euros (\$246 billion) worth of Russian sovereign assets for as long as needed to

prevent major economic disruption to the EU economy.

A qualified majority among EU governments means the support of at least 15 of the 27 member states representing 65% of the EU population.

The new freeze, which would stay in place "until there is no longer an immediate threat to the economic interests of the Union", will replace the current system which requires a roll-over of the freeze every six months by unanimity.

The indefinite asset freeze is meant to help convince Belgium to support the EU's plan to use the frozen Russian cash to extend a loan of up to 165 billion euros to Ukraine to cover its military and civilian budget needs in 2026 and 2027.

The loan would be paid back by Ukraine only when Russia pays Kyiv war damages, making the loan effectively a grant that advances future Russian reparations payments.

Series of Israeli strikes hit Lebanon

AFP, Beirut

A series of Israeli strikes hit south and east Lebanon yesterday, state media reported, as Israel's army said it was targeting Hezbollah sites, the latest such raids despite a year-old ceasefire.

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency (NNA) reported strikes in around a dozen locations, including up to around 30 kilometres (20 miles) from the Israeli border, citing at times "heavy raids".

Israel has kept up strikes on Lebanon despite a November 2024 ceasefire and has also kept troops in five areas it deems strategic.

The Israeli military said in a statement that its forces "struck a training and qualification compound" used by Hezbollah's elite Radwan Force where operatives "underwent shooting exercises and additional training on the use of various types of weapons".

ChatGPT blamed for US murder-suicide in lawsuit

AFP, Washington

The estate of an 83-year-old Connecticut woman filed a wrongful death lawsuit Thursday against OpenAI and Microsoft, alleging the ChatGPT chatbot fueled her son's paranoid delusions and contributed to her murder.

Suzanne Adams was beaten and strangled to death by her 56-year-old son Stein-Erik Soelberg on August 3, in their Old Greenwich home, according to the complaint filed in California Superior Court in San Francisco. Soelberg then fatally stabbed himself.

The case joins a growing number of wrongful death lawsuits filed against OpenAI in recent months, with several alleging ChatGPT contributed to users' suicides.

In August, the parents of 16-year-old Adam Raine of Southern California sued OpenAI, claiming ChatGPT advised their son on suicide methods.

Several US lawsuits filed in November alleged ChatGPT manipulated users into dependency and self-harm, with four also involving suicide deaths.

The latest lawsuit alleges that months of conversations with ChatGPT validated and amplified Soelberg's delusional thinking, ultimately singling out his mother as a threat.

"ChatGPT told him he had 'awakened' the AI chatbot into consciousness," the complaint states, citing videos Soelberg posted to social media.

The conversations revealed that "ChatGPT eagerly accepted every seed of Stein-Erik's delusional thinking and built it out into a universe that became Stein-Erik's entire life," the lawsuit alleges.

The suit claims the chatbot reinforced Soelberg's paranoid beliefs, telling him he was being watched and that his mother's printer was a monitoring device.

When Soelberg expressed concerns that his mother had tried to poison him, ChatGPT allegedly validated these fears rather than challenging them.

The lawsuit accuses OpenAI CEO Sam Altman of rushing its GPT-4o model to market in May 2024, compressing months of safety testing into one week over objections from safety team members.



EC sets longer prep period for polls

FROM PAGE 1

by December 29. Returning officers will scrutinise these between December 30 and January 4, with January 11 set as the final day for appeals. The EC will dispose of these appeals between January 12 and 18. January 20 is the last date for withdrawing candidature, and the final list of candidates will be published on January 21.

Symbols will be allocated the next day, marking the start of the campaign period, which will continue until 7:30am

copy of their highest educational qualification, a statement on whether they are currently accused in any criminal case, details of past criminal records and judgments, if applicable.

Candidates must also provide a description of their profession or business, probable sources of income, and a statement of property or debt of their own or dependents.

Details of loans taken individually, jointly, or by dependents from banks

1972, candidates must now declare probable sources of income both at home and abroad, as well as property or debt of themselves and their dependents in Bangladesh and overseas.

The scrutiny period has also been extended.

Returning officers, who had four days to examine nomination papers in the last election, will now have six days. Candidates will get seven days to file appeals against returning officers' decisions, compared to five days previously. The EC itself will have seven days to dispose of appeals, up from six.

Hearing and disposing of appeals are a demanding process. The chief election commissioner and four other commissioners hear the cases, appellants may be represented by lawyers, and the commission must issue full written verdicts. Ahead of the 2024 polls, the EC had to dispose of 569 appeals in just six working days, forcing officials to work late into the night.

Election expert Abdul Alim welcomed the changes, saying the extra time will allow candidates to prepare their paperwork more carefully, reducing mistakes that could lead to rejection.

He said the workload of returning officers and assistant returning officers will also be substantially reduced.

During the 2024 polls, 2,716 aspirants submitted nomination papers, though most opposition parties boycotted the election. In the 2018 national polls, 3,056 nomination forms were submitted.

Although national polls are normally held every five years, this election is taking place just two years after the last one in January 2024, as the Sheikh Hasina government was ousted in August last year, and the parliament was dissolved on August 6.

ELECTION SCHEDULE			
National Polls	Schedule Date	Polling Day	Gap of Days
13th (2025)	Nov 11, 2025	Feb 12, 2026	63
12th (2024)	Nov 15, 2023	Jan 7, 2024	53
11th (2018)	Nov 8, 2018	Dec 30, 2018	51
10th (2014)	Nov 25, 2013	Jan 5, 2014	39
9th (2008)	Nov 2, 2008	Dec 29, 2008	57
8th (2001)	Aug 19, 2001	Oct 1, 2001	43
7th (1996)	April 27, 1996	June 12, 1996	46
6th (1996)	Dec 12, 1995	Feb 15, 1996	59
5th (1991)	Dec 15, 1990	Feb 27, 1991	74

on February 10.

The EC documents show that during the January 2024 polls, candidates were given 15 days to collect and submit nomination papers. This year, the period has been extended to 18 days.

Along with the usual paperwork, candidates must now submit additional documents. These include an attested

or financial institutions are also required. Candidates must disclose promises made in previous elections and how many of those were fulfilled. Independent candidates are required to submit signatures of one percent of voters from their constituency.

According to the latest amendment to the Representation of the People Order,

2 univ students killed

FROM PAGE 1

doctors declared Tahsin dead around 5:00am. Iram succumbed to his injuries about half an hour later while undergoing treatment.

Tausif, a friend of the deceased, said the two lived in the Sanarpar area and were friends. They had gone to Matuail to attend a pre-wedding ceremony with other friends and later went for a drive, when the accident occurred.

Mehedi Hasan, Topu's uncle, has filed a case against the driver.

"Topu was his mother's only child. His father died 10 years ago," Mehedi said, adding that Topu would be buried in his hometown of Chandpur after his



Tahsin Topu

Iram Ridwan

namaz-e-janaza last night.

Iram's family lives in Germany, and his body has been kept in a freezer until they arrive, Tausif said.

Contacted, DSCC Administrator Md Mahmudul Hasan said, "We have

hundreds of garbage trucks operating around the city late at night. So, it is not abnormal for that specific truck to be in that location. And as far as I know, the assigned driver was driving the vehicle.

"Whether he violated traffic rules or was at fault will be determined through the police investigation. We hope for a proper probe and are willing to provide our full support."

He added that DSCC has already contacted the victims' families to express condolences. "We have told them that we are willing to support the families in the future in any way possible."

China harming regional peace

Say US, Japan defence chiefs amid tensions

AFP, Tokyo

Beijing's actions are "not conducive to regional peace", Japan's defence minister and US counterpart Pete Hegseth agreed during a call after Chinese aircraft locked radar on Japanese jets near Taiwan, Tokyo said yesterday.

The December 6 radar incident came after comments by Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi on Taiwan that infuriated China.

It was followed this week by Chinese-Russian air patrols around Japan.

Hegseth and Shinjiro Koizumi "exchanged candid views on the increasingly severe security situation in the Indo-Pacific region, including the radar incident", the Japanese defence ministry said after the call.

They "expressed serious concern over any actions to increase regional

tensions, as China's actions are not conducive to regional peace and stability", the statement added.

Koizumi said on X he told Hegseth that China was "disseminating information that is completely contrary to the facts" about the radar incident.

"However, Japan has made clear that it does not seek escalation and that we are responding calmly while making necessary rebuttals, and we are keeping the door open for dialogue," Koizumi added.

Hegseth's office said they had "discussed... China's military activities" among other issues including "Japan's efforts to increase its defense spending and strengthen its capabilities".

Takaichi had indicated on November 7 that Japan would intervene with military force in any Chinese attack on Taiwan, which Beijing claims as its own and has not ruled out seizing by force.



Italy's Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni welcomes Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas at Palazzo Chigi before their meeting in Rome yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Pakistan's ex-spy chief to appeal 14-year term: lawyer

AFP, Islamabad

The former head of Pakistan's powerful spy agency will appeal a 14-year hard labour sentence on charges including abuse of power, his lawyer said Friday, decrying a "sham" military trial.

Faiz Hameed, who ran Inter-Services Intelligence during the tenure of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan, was detained in 2024 following claims he raided the businesses of a real estate developer in a shake-down attempt, according to Supreme Court documents.

The army said on Thursday that a military court had convicted him of several charges including "engaging in political activities" and causing "wrongful loss to persons", sentencing him to 14 years of "rigorous imprisonment".

The former spy chief's lawyer Ali Ashfaq told AFP that he planned to appeal the prison sentence "within the next few days".

The lawyer said he had not yet received a copy of the military court ruling, and that Faiz Hameed's defence team or family had not been notified in advance "to ensure the presence or availability of lawyers at the time of the judgement". "My client categorically rejects the charges from the beginning of such sham trial proceedings," Ashfaq added.

A test Bangladesh cannot afford to fail

Election schedule marks a defining moment for our democratic future

After the historic mass uprising of 2024, Bangladesh has now arrived at a crucial stage in its democratic transition. The announcement of the election schedule by Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin on Thursday marks a significant turning point, finally dispelling the uncertainties that had long clouded the electoral process. February 12, the scheduled date, will oversee a twin vote: one to elect public representatives to the next parliament and another to decide, through a referendum, on constitutional amendments that will have far-reaching implications for the country's governance and the future of our democracy.

It is reassuring that the interim government has pledged full support to ensure that both the election and the referendum are conducted in a festive, participatory, and fair manner. Political parties seeking the people's mandate have also welcomed the announcement. As campaigning gathers momentum, we hope all parties and candidates will adhere to the electoral code of conduct with utmost sincerity to maintain a congenial atmosphere. Respect for differing opinions, peaceful engagement, and democratic behaviour are essential for stabilising the country. Any language or behaviour that fuels tension or division must be avoided and discouraged.

Businesses and development partners, many of whom held back investment decisions while awaiting signs of stability, may now feel some relief. However, sustaining business confidence will require preserving peace and maintaining law and order during the campaign, on voting day, and in the aftermath.

With the poll schedule announced, the country now enters an exciting yet delicate phase. Ensuring peaceful campaigning, providing equal opportunities to all contesting parties and candidates, and guaranteeing that citizens can exercise their rights freely and without fear are imperative for credible elections. As the primary responsibility for this rests with the Election Commission, we must remind it that the nation cannot afford a repeat of the last three elections—held in 2014, 2018, and 2024—of the chaotic and violent events that had preceded them.

It is worth recalling that this opportunity for a democratic transition has come at the cost of enormous sacrifices made by the youth. Expectations therefore rest heavily on the credibility of the process. The commission must take firm and decisive action against any irregularities, violations of election rules, or weaknesses in the organisation of the election. It must fulfil its constitutional responsibilities independently, impartially, and with full professionalism. Its actions, as well as that of the interim government and the political parties, will be crucial in restoring public confidence in elections. We need this process to succeed so that the nation can finally embark on a new trajectory towards effective democracy, good governance, and sustainable economic progress.

Reopen closed train stations in the west

Resolve persistent manpower crisis and other barriers

We are concerned about the widespread disruption of railway services in the West Zone, causing immense hardship for residents and travellers across Jashore, Jhenidah, Kushiya, Meherpur, and Chuadanga. According to a report by this daily, 58 out of the 162 railway stations in this zone remain closed, leaving only 104 operational. The closures, stemming from severe manpower shortages, have affected stations from Yeasinpur in Ishwardi (closed since March 25, 1993) to Mirpur in Khulna (closed on March 11, 2025). For the travellers, especially those from remote areas, the suspension of train stops has cut off a reliable, relatively cheap mode of transport for long-distance journeys.

Due to poor road connectivity in many places under the zone, trains have long served as a lifeline for local communities, facilitating both travel and transport of agricultural produce. The closure of train stations means farmer are being forced to sell crops at lower prices in nearby markets due to their inability to transport goods to distant markets, resulting in financial losses. Students and professionals are also struggling with daily commutes. Local residents have talked about the mounting difficulties caused by station closures, saying that reopening those would significantly ease travel for both students and the general public. For those travelling from Dhaka to remote areas, their journeys have become considerably complicated and costly. Until these stations are reopened, rural communities will continue to face hardship and remain largely isolated.

Unfortunately, the railway's Eastern Zone has also been suffering from a similar deficit. An earlier report in this daily revealed that at least 54 out of 243 stations in that zone were closed over the past two decades due to staff shortages, mainly of station masters and pointsmen. Against a sanctioned workforce of 22,358, only 11,522 staff members were employed. Manpower shortages forced the authorities to operate many stations with retired station masters on a contractual basis, while most operational stations were running with only half the required workforce.

We urge the government to address this crisis with priority. Opening and properly operationalising now-closed stations is essential for economic activity, education, and social mobility in these regions. To that end, the authorities must take effective measures to resolve the railway's persistent manpower crisis. Enhancing staff efficiency is also crucial. Moreover, Bangladesh Railway has long been struggling with dirty trains and stations, irregular schedules, ticket black marketeering, and recurring technical failures, all of which require a comprehensive intervention. With the right policy initiatives, proper implementation, and functioning accountability mechanisms, the railway can be transformed into a reliable, efficient, and passenger-friendly service.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Saddam Hussein captured

On this day in 2003, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was captured by US forces during the Iraq War; three years later he was found guilty of crimes against humanity and was executed.

PRIORITISING REFORMS OVER GOVERNANCE

Putting the cart before the horse



Prof. Rehman Sobhan, one of Bangladesh's most distinguished economists and a celebrated public intellectual, is founder and chairman of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD).

REHMAN SOBHAN

To misquote Shakespeare,

"The fault, dear Yunus, lies not in our laws but in their implementation."

The cart before the horse

Every day our newspapers carry some story or op-ed article about why laws or regulations are not being implemented, projects are facing cost and time overruns, and completed projects are not delivering the outputs of products and services that they were expected to deliver. For instance, The Daily Star, on the front page of its November 25 issue, carried a story about how earthquake shocks may lead to building collapses across Dhaka due to the failure to observe and enforce building regulations. It also ran a report showing how women continue to be exposed to violence, both physical and digital, in spite of the numerous agencies and initiatives that have been put in place to provide them with protection.

Hardly a day goes by without some report of illicit land grabbing or encroachment on water bodies and other natural resources, in clear violation of the laws and

In all of those cases cited above, laws, policies, and regulations already on the statute books are being ignored or abused. Implementation agencies, regulatory bodies, judicial institutions, and law enforcement agencies tend to demonstrate little capacity to discharge their designated responsibilities. While such forms of governance failure were rife across the ousted Hasina government, and also those of its predecessors, we have sadly observed little noticeable improvement in addressing such governance malfunctions under the incumbent interim government.

regulations already in place. Failures in administrative compliance are compounded by reports of violence against vulnerable groups while law enforcement agencies remain ineffective. Governance inertia extends to judicial inaction or to the practice of one-eyed justice, where people continue to be incarcerated and denied bail for political or even personal reasons, and languish in jail without exposure to due process.

In all of those cases cited above, laws, policies, and regulations already on the statute books—generated by various reform initiatives undertaken by successive governments—are being ignored or abused. Implementation agencies, regulatory bodies, judicial institutions, and law enforcement agencies tend to demonstrate little capacity to discharge their designated responsibilities.

While such forms of governance failure were rife across the ousted Hasina government, and also those of its predecessors, we have sadly observed little noticeable improvement in addressing such governance malfunctions under the incumbent interim government of Prof. Muhammad Yunus. The government has instead demonstrated, perhaps inspired by the expectations of the student-led mass uprising, a preoccupation with commissioning a plethora of reform initiatives related to the constitution, public administration, the judiciary, electoral system, police, Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), healthcare, local government, women's concerns, the economy, and so on.

While much time was devoted to preparing and then building a consensus around the reforms (the



FILE VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

latter covering the first six of the reform areas cited above), less time appears to have been invested by the National Consensus Commission (NCC) and the interim government in substantively diagnosing and addressing the myriad governance failures that had provided the basis for some of those reforms. Closer attention to why laws and regulations relating to women's rights, the environment, or the banking sector—in place for many years—have not been properly implemented would have given us a better insight into our priorities and likely better guided the actions of the interim government. Such an understanding would have provided a clearer idea of how, and by whom, the reforms would eventually have to be implemented.

A quest for legitimacy

What little political capital was available to the interim government appears to have been misspent in securing commitments from the political parties to enact particular reforms. Measures to commit or bind a prospective elected regime to implement the reforms proposed by a medley of commissions, and

reform priorities are more likely to emerge out of the dialectic between the ruling party and the opposition, based on their respective elective strength in the House.

Once the elected government decides to adopt a particular reform or set of reforms, they will need to operationalise this through legislation. This will apply to such constitutional issues as an Upper House, which can only be set up through a constitutional amendment drafted by the elected government in parliament. Preparing such a bill will require detailing the small print of the amendment for incorporation into legislation, which will also involve consultations with bureaucrats and concerned stakeholders who will be involved in the actual logistics and administration of a prospective Upper House. This will further involve such issues as the modalities of identifying who will be put up by their respective parties, the possible composition in terms of gender and other identity issues, the specific powers located within the House, its budget, and administrative arrangements.

The tabled legislation will then be

Whatever may be the outcome of the referendum, it is far from clear whether an elected government will feel committed to enact the full package of 48 reforms. An incoming government, hopefully elected through a free and fair election, may feel inclined to enact reforms that are politically convenient for them. Regardless of what the parties say now, the priorities set for them by their voters, expressed through an election manifesto and articulated in parliament by their elected representatives, will be expected to receive precedence over any referendum imposed on them by an unelected interim government.

prioritised by the NCC, appear to be based on hope triumphing over experience. In its anxiety to invest the reform agenda with some legitimacy, the government has annexed a proposal for a referendum held along with the forthcoming national elections, now scheduled to take place on February 12. Through the referendum, voters will be expected to express their opinion by voting "yes" or "no" to a set of four blanket propositions that obscure a more complex sub-text of 48 proposals containing the meat of the reform agenda.

How far the nearly 12.8 crore voters can reasonably be expected to apply their minds to such an opaquely designed referendum—and the legitimacy derived from such a process—remains questionable. Whatever the outcome of the referendum, it is far from clear whether an elected government will feel committed to enact the full package of 48 reforms. An incoming government, hopefully elected through a free and fair election, may feel inclined to enact reforms that are politically convenient for them. Regardless of what the parties say

exposed to parliamentary debate on particular clauses of the bill. This will need to include the opposition, whether on the floor of the Parliament or within a parliamentary committee, prior to a final vote to enact it into law. The post-election reform enactment process may thus be both labour- and time-intensive, with wide variations in the time required for the legislative process involving particular bills, whose introduction on the floor of the House will need to be prioritised and sequenced by the government.

The chimera of implementation

Legislating and enacting a reform proposal into law may turn out to be the least of the problems, however. The principal challenge for any government will be to implement the reforms over time and deliver the promised outcomes. It is in this area that successive governments have failed to deliver over the years, whether because of administrative incompetence or malfeasance or due to political resistance by particular groups who may be impacted by a reform. It should be kept in mind here that those who oppose a particular reform do not always do so during

the legislative process—which is more open to public scrutiny—but during the implementation stage, where the public is largely kept in the dark about what goes on behind the scenes.

Many examples can be cited where popular legislation or policies negotiated with international development partners have been

sabotaged during the implementation process. For instance, financial sector reforms negotiated with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) over the years, going back to the 1990s, remain a case in point. The current Bangladesh Bank governor is largely having to draw upon financial sector reforms that have been taken up by previous governments but have only been superficially implemented.

In such circumstances, the outcomes from a particular reform can only emerge over a protracted period of trial and error. Any realistic assessment of the reformist commitment of any regime will thus hardly be possible in 120 or even 180 days but will need to be evaluated three or four years down the line. By that time, we may get some idea of how effectively an Upper House elected through proportional representation (PR) has met the expectations of its proponents, or whether an "empowered" president is able to exercise some restraint over an elected prime minister.

Muhammad Yunus and his interim government are to be commended for their good intentions in seeking to carry out reforms that would forestall a return to the bad old days of "fascism." Given the track record of past governments—including those who have held and expect to hold office—in implementing their own laws, policies, and regulations of the time, it remains to be seen what the current reform package tabled through a referendum will eventually manage to deliver.

If any part of the interim government's reform agenda is to be implemented at all, much will depend on: the credibility, inclusivity, and eventual legitimacy of the scheduled February 2026 elections; the political compulsions of the elected ruling party to carry out particular reforms; the presence of a strong, proactive, and committed opposition willing to intelligently use the parliamentary system to oversee the implementation process; the effectiveness of parliament as an institution in exercising oversight and accountability over the machinery of government; the sincerity and capacity of the bureaucracy to implement rather than frustrate reforms; and the oversight and activism exercised by civil society and the media in tracking the reform process from enactment to implementation.

If hope is indeed to triumph over experience, we will need to look forward not just to a new government but to a new political, bureaucratic, and civic culture to bring about the social transformation we all want, and for which so many young people shed their blood during the 2024 July Uprising.

How Dhaka airport has turned into a game of Ludo



BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

Dr Shamsad Mortuza
is a professor of English at Dhaka University.

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

Dhaka airport's Terminal 3, which had a soft launch in October 2023, has completed 99 percent of its construction, according to reports. The possibility of the completion of the remaining one percent of this billion-dollar project, requiring road and IT connectivity, tantalised us for over two years. Now we are told that the location is immune to mobile signals; they'll have to undo the ceiling décor to insert networking channels. How could we have overlooked such a vital issue for years? All the local and foreign experts and their collaborators combined could not yet make Terminal 3 operational.

The Humpty Dumpty undertone in the last line alludes to a similar historical failure. A much-vaunted heavy cannon mounted by the royalists on a church wall during the English Civil War tumbled down and cracked like eggshells when the parliamentarians damaged the base. A muffled poet could express his chuckle in rhyme using a coded language. The massive fiasco of our national airport thereby makes me resort to metaphors. So, I pose this question: how many of you have engaged in a game of Ludo, only to find yourself being "eaten" by the final large snake near the finish line?

Why does the news of parts of the freshly minted Terminal 3, still unravaged by the footfalls of passengers, needing to be demolished remind me of a game of Ludo? Come to think of it, the arrival of travellers at the airport has always been like a game of Ludo. Everything is subject to chance. Occasionally, you get unexpected help from here and there, like ladders on a Ludo board. Then there are the "snakes" all around. They come disguised as customs

When can we have a serious reform of Bangladesh's aviation governance? Even a layman knows that too many agencies operate inside the airport: CAAB, Biman, customs, immigration, airport police, contractors, ground handlers, and freelance service workers. The outcome is a governance void in which everyone holds a nominal position of authority, but no one is truly held accountable.



'A terminal that is 99 percent built but zero percent useful is not a national asset. It is a national metaphor'

FILE PHOTO: JICA

officials who will label your personal goods or gifts as commercial items and levy import duties to force you to come to a "mutual understanding." There are small snakes who will volunteer to write down the arrival forms of the incoming migrant workers and demand service charges in foreign currencies. The snakes will sometimes hiss behind you with their extended tissues when you are relieving yourself after a long flight. The pythons lie in the luggage handling areas and will crush open your suitcases to extract valuables.

How many times will we have to witness passengers waiting over the loss of personal items? In most cases, the poor migrant workers, ironically referred to as remittance heroes, are the primary targets who are considered easy prey. Could we consider installing software that scans the arrival and passenger information from the boarding pass? Could we explore alternatives to handwriting information that may be difficult to read, which then requires sorting by officials? I guess they cannot fully rely on the server and need a backup stack of paper

copies. Could we consider having trained ushers and volunteers assist with writing down the disembarkation forms? It is painful that our bureaucracy remains incompatible with the global trend of digitalisation.

It is the same government that is busy discrediting the foreign handlers who have silently withdrawn from handling Terminal 3. The plan of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) managing

international shipments, possible foreign sabotage, and the integrity of secure zones. Just like the fire, the media was all ablaze for two days, and then all the news vanished. Our curiosity got smothered under the blanket of official silence. The smoke obscured yet another instance of our culture of crisis management through forgetfulness.

We find entertainment in low-level crimes, often overlooking high-level dysfunction.

in a cannibal culture. On the other hand, this presents a case for foreign operators to emerge as potential saviours. One does not need conspiracy theories to see the obvious: the local ground-handling sector is unable to meet basic operational standards, and the crisis of competence is now so glaring that any external alternative appears attractive.

Call me cynical, but when a system fails repeatedly and predictably, we reserve the

airport services in the initial phase—while the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) and Biman learn to transition to the world-class mindset required for running an international airport—seemed a no-brainer. It was a ladder for the transition that we were compelled to skip, and we fell right into the mouth of another snake on the board. A terminal that is 99 percent built but zero percent useful is not a national asset. It is a national metaphor. We are so close to being a world-class competitor, yet so far from it.

On the other side of the functional passenger terminals lies the cargo terminal. Anyone using the domestic airlines must have noticed the tangle of boxes filled with imported or about-to-export items. When the fire broke out at the cargo terminal months ago, we realised that "all was not well" in Uttara. The fire burned for hours, leading to numerous unsupported claims. There were machines for nuclear power projects, weapons for the army, and items that would help insurance scammers or bank defaulters. The fire halted flights for hours, but it did not stop our concerns regarding aviation safety,

How valiant our authorities are, catching low-paid security personnel with mobile sets tucked in various pockets of their trousers or searching the pockets of cleaners for tips. These make for excellent social media victories but do nothing to disturb the deeply embedded syndicates whose roots stretch across agencies, contractors, and unofficial actors who thrive in the cracks of institutional weakness.

When can we have a serious reform of Bangladesh's aviation governance? Even a layman knows that too many agencies operate inside the airport: CAAB, Biman, customs, immigration, airport police, contractors, ground handlers, and freelance service workers. The outcome is a governance void in which everyone holds a nominal position of authority, but no one is truly held accountable. A similar dysfunction at the shipping port has created the need for foreign companies to take over handling and management charges. The persistent failure of the local service sector presents a dual challenge: it demonstrates that the sector's vested interests will prevent foreign operators from thriving

right to suspect design, where authorities insist there are only accidents or stray incidents. What is required now is a complete overhaul of our mindset. Simply replacing one operator with another will not fix the airport's fundamental flaw. A shiny terminal does not make a modern airport. Maybe we will need some handholding and knowledge transfer at the initial stage to ensure efficient systems with trained staff and unified command structures. We need a passenger-centric governance to make the airport a welcoming place.

The Ludo metaphor can once again be useful. We need to advance slowly, square by square. We can make every improvement a ladder for the system: a new scanner, an imported trolley, a digital monitor, and a promise of cleanliness. Meanwhile, we need to avoid the snakes on the board: a connectivity dispute, a cargo fire, a bribery scandal, a foreign passenger humiliated, a viral video of lost luggage, a tout attacking a tourist, or a terminal that costs billions but cannot open. I hope the dice will provide us with the required number to reach home with the joy of winning a game.

Tony Blair and the reduction of Gaza to a political laboratory



Yusef SY Ramadan
is the ambassador of Palestine to Bangladesh.

YUSEF SY RAMADAN

For months, former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair's role has been lobbying US President Donald Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, to head a "temporary transitional authority in Gaza." The former UK PM's intense interest in taking the leadership role of a "governor of Gaza" was a red flag from the start. The Tony Blair Institute for Global Change (TBI) drew up a plan behind the scenes with Jared Kushner, who publicly stated that Gaza's "waterfront property could be very valuable." Tony Blair amassed an empire of wealth unlike any other former UK PM since leaving office, through an overlapping web of charities, advisory positions, firms, and foundations, and thus became one of the wealthiest people in the UK.

Many Western political leaders have had shady careers, but Blair has proven to be a self-serving opportunist who injects himself wherever there is a shot to become relevant in the global political scene. His involvement in the "Gaza peace plan" was in the least interest of the Palestinian people, who are being killed mercilessly in the Gaza Strip. Blair's plan revealed a hierarchy in which an international board of billionaires and businesspeople sit at the top, a long-known tactic of his to mix private enrichment with

so-called "public service" for the Palestinians. Blair sees business opportunities beneath the rubble of Gaza.

In the many periods in which he held the positions of power, Blair turned British politics into a follower of US imperialist politics to serve his own interests and position himself as a loyal lobbyist for US foreign policies. Even as PM, Blair unwaveringly supported George W Bush's plan to invade Iraq. It is even documented that Blair wrote a private note to Bush in 2002, saying, "I will be with you, whatever." The chair of Blair's own intelligence committee at the time had questioned the evidence of "weapons of mass destruction" in Iraq. However, Blair admitted that he wanted to ensure he was the US's first partner of choice. He subordinated his own government to the goals of the Bush administration. Prominent British politicians such as Jeremy Corbyn had long accused Blair of war crimes. Tony Blair's involvement must be blocked immediately because his history of corruption and failure poses a risk to the Trump administration's political timeline as it tries to manage the crisis in Gaza for its own benefit.

Right after he left office as PM, Blair's impulses behind the US invasion of Iraq led

to his appointment as representative of the Quartet to salvage the peace process between Israel and Palestine, which had begun to show signs of dying and had reached the brink of inevitable collapse. The Quartet committee consisted of the US, Russia, the European Union, and the United Nations.

During his job as Middle East envoy, Blair lobbied for the development of an oil field off the Gaza Strip, which would



Tony Blair.

FILE PHOTO: AFP

be owned and operated by British Gas. He proposed economic policies that would benefit JP Morgan, where Blair was also serving as an adviser, and drew a salary of

two million pounds per year. He intrepidly used his position to make financial gains for himself, his initiatives and those of his family's as well. In 2010, Blair used his access to Middle Eastern people of power to help his wife, Cherie Blair, raise funds for her charitable initiatives worldwide, including in Bangladesh, showing further conflict of interest.

When Israel launched a brutal war against Palestinians in Gaza in 2009, Blair, the Middle East envoy to negotiate peace for "Palestinian statehood", was silent and was said to be on holiday. It was later revealed that he was, at the time, meeting the Israeli defence minister. All that Blair did, unsurprisingly, benefited Israel's interests. While Gaza was in rubble, he received \$1 million from Tel Aviv University for his "exceptional leadership." Later in 2011, Blair created a proposal, which championed dropping Palestinians' calls for an end to illegal occupation and instead demanded that Palestinians recognise Israel as a "Jewish state." Two years later, Blair hired Netanyahu's former aide as his own private consultant, ruining his credibility that he could undertake any neutral position in the peace process. Blair's career in the Middle East went hand-in-hand with US-

Israeli policies, demonstrating a fusion of his business dealings and diplomatic dealings to profit off the backs of Palestinians.

Blair's history made many in the Middle East reserved about the US administration's choice of him as a front for their effort regarding Gaza, which finally led to his recent removal from the main executive position. The first and most important conclusion from Blair being dropped is improvisation and haste policies, as if the Gaza Strip is a field of experiments in which formulas, initiatives and even players change from day to day. Improvisation and haste positioned Blair as the CEO of the most important political project on the basis of which the future of the Middle East will be determined. The lack of sufficient consultation with those concerned, such as the partners of the US administration's project, is reflected in what happened to Blair being dropped as a major figure from the "peace council" before he began his work in Gaza. Blair's supposed appointment and quiet dismissal point to a fragile and bleak plan of field testing politics in Gaza, the result of which can lead to further uncertainty about what will happen to the region, and most importantly, the self-determination of Palestinians.

A nation without culture can't progress: KHAIRUL ANAM SHAKIL

SHARMIN JOYA

For Khairul Anam Shakil, celebrating five decades of music is not just a personal milestone; it is a reflection of Bangladesh's cultural heartbeat. As a celebrated Nazrul Sangeet exponent and General Secretary of the Bangladesh Nazrul Sangeet Sangstha (BNSS), Shakil has devoted his life to teaching, performing, and preserving the legacy of Kazi Nazrul Islam.

To celebrate his remarkable musical journey, a musical evening has been arranged, titled *Shur Shadhonar Shonali Abhijatra*. The programme will be held today at 6pm at the Chhayanaut Auditorium. Performances will feature Khairul Anam Shakil himself along with a chorus by his students with Arunranjani.

"Fifty years feels like it passed in a blink," he says with a gentle smile. "Looking back, so much has happened, yet I hardly realised how quickly the years went by. I wouldn't claim that

always there—playing at home, shaping our thoughts and identity. Chhayanaut taught us not just music, but what it means to be Bangali, and those lessons have stayed with me throughout life." In this journey he received lessons from musical maestros including Pandit Narayan Chandra Basak, Ustaad Mohammad Sagiruddin Khan, Sohrab Hossain, Sheikh Lutfar Rahman, Anjali Ray, Sanjeeda Khatun and Waheedul Haq.

His professional journey with music officially began in 1974, when he joined Bangladesh Television's adult music programmes. Yet, fame was never the goal. "I sang because I loved it. Music has always come from the heart.

Even while studying abroad, I never stopped practising. Thanks to Benu uncle, who was always with me, even abroad!"

Interestingly, Shakil studied engineering at Leeds Beckett University while continuing his music

there is still confusion about our cultural identity, especially what it means to be Bengali, particularly as a Bengali Muslim. Culture is as important as religion. A nation that does not nurture its culture cannot truly progress."

He stated that the formation of Bangladesh and its identity were shaped not just by politics, but music, alongside our rich culture, has played a leading role throughout. "Alongside religious faith, every Bengali should truly understand and embrace their language, traditions, and way of life. Doing so allows us to take pride in both our culture and religion," he said, admitting that there is still much work to be done.

He voices concern over the recent debate on the discussions on removing music and physical education from the school curriculum. "Music is not just an art; it develops the mind and shapes character. It is scientifically proven that music helps to heal and reduce stress as well. Children grow into better human beings when they experience music. Removing it is a cultural setback."

Sharing his concern, the artiste said, "To my knowledge, music has been part of our curriculum for many years, but it was never practised effectively. I've heard that the decision is due to cost-cutting, which makes me wonder—why target these subjects, which are essential for creating a morally and culturally strong generation? Moreover, students taking higher degrees in music will need a profession, won't they? If the decision remains unchanged, then where will these students work or teach?"

For Shakil, teaching is inseparable from his cultural mission. He believes children must be exposed to music and art to grow as compassionate, well-rounded individuals. "Every school should include cultural education. Parents often worry that art interferes with academics, but this is entirely wrong. Music, poetry, and art enrich the mind—they do not hinder learning."

Reflecting on his fifty-year journey, Shakil emphasises a guiding philosophy—"I can only understand the world if I first understand myself. My Bengali identity, my culture, my music—they shape who I am. If we nurture our culture and pass it to the next generation, we can walk the world proudly, not just as Bangladeshis, but as culturally enriched, globally aware citizens."



I always approached music from a place of love. Among the leading performers in Bangladesh today, I would say 60–70 per cent were my students at some point. Seeing them grow gives me immense joy.

I had an intense passion for music. However, there was a musical environment in our family. Music has been a part of my daily life, and that is how the bond grew and turned into love that has kept me going all these years."

The veteran artiste reminisced that his musical journey was destined even before he was born, as he was born in a household where music was a constant presence. His mother, Nilufar Khayer, learnt Rabindra Sangeet and continued her practice quietly after marriage, receiving instruction from esteemed teachers like Ustad Munshi Raisuddin. His maternal uncle, Mahmud Rahman Benu, a renowned figure in the world of music, became a symbol of musical resistance during the Liberation War, travelling from camp to camp performing patriotic songs, a story captured in the documentary *Mukhtir Gaan*.

It was through this environment that Shakil and his cousins were introduced to formal training at Chhayanaut. "Even when we were young, music was never forced on us. But it was

training. "It might seem unusual, but music and academics never conflicted. Many great classical musicians were also engineers." He continued, "From a young age, I developed an unusual fondness for classical music, influenced by my family... and began practising seriously at home while training at Chhayanaut. I did work for a couple of years in the UK.

Returning home, Shakil committed himself fully to teaching at Chhayanaut from 1986 onwards, a dedication he continues even today. For over forty years, he has trained generations of singers. "I never pursued music, thinking I would become exceptionally successful as an artiste. I always approached it from a place of love. Among the leading performers in Bangladesh today, I would say 60–70 per cent were my students at some point. Seeing them grow gives me immense joy."

Yet Shakil's observation during these five decades is that Bangladesh still struggles with understanding its cultural identity, which often clashes with religious bias. "If I were to speak openly, I would say that in our country,



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

NEWS

Record high C-section births raise concerns

FROM PAGE 12

observation for 36 hours and struggled for another 45 days. She developed an infection that required medication and injections for more than two weeks.

Five years later, her son is thriving, but she still feels the impact. "I still feel pain in my body. I can't sit for long periods without sudden back pain.... After my delivery, I went through depression for over two years. The pain from the cesarean remains."

While some mothers, like Eti, need caesarean delivery for medical reasons, many others, like Israt, plan for C-sections early in pregnancy.

According to the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2025, conducted by UNICEF and the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, the C-section rate in Bangladesh stands at 51.8 percent of all deliveries, raising concerns over medical practices, equity and maternal-newborn health.

The survey tracked 64,405 women aged 15–49 with a live birth in the past two years, and showed that over half of recent deliveries were surgical.

The rate has climbed sharply from 19.1 percent in 2012–13 to 36 percent in 2019, before reaching 51.8 percent in 2025. The MICS report calls these levels "alarming" and a sign of over medicalisation that strains families and health systems.

C-section rates differ widely across demographic groups. Prevalence is higher in urban areas at 56 percent, compared to 50 percent in rural areas. Wealth plays a major role: 68 percent of mothers from the richest households deliver by C-section, followed by 57 percent in the fourth wealth group, 52 percent in the middle group and 34 percent among the poorest.

Education follows a similar pattern, with 75 percent of highly educated women undergoing C-sections, compared to 35 percent among women with primary education and 29 percent among those with no schooling.

The World Health Organization

(WHO) stresses that caesarean sections should be performed only when medically necessary. Globally, C-section rates have risen without corresponding health benefits, increasing risks for both mothers and babies. WHO recommends non-clinical measures such as educating families, following evidence-based guidelines with regular audits, seeking second opinions, and ensuring adequate labour support to reduce unnecessary surgeries. It notes that population-level rates between 10 and 15 percent are considered optimal.

Dr Arefin Islam, country director of Noora Health, described the situation as "deeply alarming" for Bangladesh.

"According to WHO standards, the acceptable rate is between 10 and 15 percent. But Bangladesh is seeing a rate more than three times higher. There may be a major systemic issue driving this trend."

"From what I have observed, most C-sections take place in private hospitals, and financial incentives appear to be a key factor. Normal delivery requires more time, care and monitoring, while C-sections are quicker and more profitable for the facilities. As a result, many mothers are pushed into surgery without medical necessity."

Islam also warned of long-term consequences. "Caesarean delivery is not just a one-day procedure, it can affect a mother's health for the rest of her life. This is why mothers and families must be more aware and cautious before making such a decision."

Dr Monzur-A-Moula, junior consultant at the Maternal and Child Health Hospital, said, "We always prioritise normal delivery. Only when we detect medical complications do we recommend a C-section. One major reason behind the rise is that once a mother delivers her first child through surgery, normal delivery is usually no longer an option for subsequent births."

"Many patients are not fully aware

of when a C-section is medically required and when a normal delivery is safer. Some are afraid of labour pain and request a C-section from the start."

He added that emergency cases complicate matters further. "Sometimes we face life-threatening situations where immediate surgery is necessary. If the family insists on normal delivery despite advice, it can lead to neonatal deaths. So, the situation is extremely challenging for us."

MICS 2025 also links high C-section rates to poorer newborn outcomes. Only 18 percent of babies born by C-section were breastfed within the first hour, compared to 44 percent of babies delivered vaginally.

The report urges clearer governance of maternal health services, calling for clarity on who performs these procedures, where they occur and why. It stresses the need to educate both women and health workers on appropriate medical use of C-sections and associated risks, and recommends stronger obstetric oversight to curb unnecessary surgeries while protecting quality, safety and affordability.

The survey also calls for more data to understand how excessive surgical deliveries shape broader maternal and neonatal health indicators.

No change

FROM PAGE 12

On Thursday, the medical board overseeing her treatment confirmed that she is also undergoing regular dialysis due to kidney dysfunction.

Doctors diagnosed acute pancreatitis on November 27, and it is still being treated.

Her treatment is being carried out based on standard guidelines, according to the recommendations of both local and foreign doctors.

The BNP has urged people not to spread misinformation and has requested everyone to pray for Khaleda's swift recovery.

Parties outraged

FROM PAGE 1

Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman also voiced their concern.

Fakhrul, in a Facebook post, wished Hadi a swift recovery and urged the government to take decisive action against those responsible.

"No matter what our beliefs are, anyone who uses fear or force should be rejected," he wrote.

At a discussion at the Jatiya Press Club, Fakhrul called upon the government to ensure the safety of all candidates ahead of the polls. "We demand the immediate arrest of those responsible for the shooting."

Jamaat Ameer Shafiqur, in a Facebook post, said he was deeply concerned about the incident.

"Any violence arising from political rivalry or differences of opinion is never acceptable. I demand a quick, impartial, and transparent investigation into this incident, and I pray that Allah grants him a full recovery," he added.

National Citizen Party Convener Nahid Islam accused the government of "failing to ensure public security," saying it has consistently taken a weak stance on protecting citizens.

Speaking to reporters at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, he said: "If the government fails to provide security or bring the perpetrators to justice, we will have to take action against it."

"We demand that the perpetrators behind this conspiracy, this attack, and the shooting be arrested within the next 24 hours."

"The home adviser must be held accountable, and the Election Commission must answer for its failure," he added, stressing that the government must ensure the safety of not just Hadi but every citizen and the veterans of the July uprising.

In a statement, the NCP said it was not only an attack on a single candidate but also a direct blow to the democratic progress restored through the people's uprising. It said the incident raises serious questions about the deterioration of law and order and the fragility of the electoral environment. Despite Hadi publicly reporting threats prior to the attack, neither the government nor law enforcement agencies took effective measures to ensure his safety, it said.

The NCP demanded a full investigation into the attack, the immediate arrest of the assailants, and effective measures to ensure the security of all candidates and citizens.

Tarique to return home December 25

FROM PAGE 1

he planned to return to Bangladesh. He replied, "Very soon, Inshallah."

On November 29, in a Facebook post, Tarique said he longs to be with his ailing mother, Khaleda Zia, who had been hospitalised with multiple complications.

"At such a moment of crisis, like any child, I too have a strong longing to feel my mother's loving touch. But unlike others, the opportunity for me to make an independent decision in this regard [returning] is neither unrestricted nor fully within my control."

During Awami League's tenure, Tarique was convicted in absentia in five cases and faced around 100 lawsuits. Following the fall of the AL government, all charges against him were dropped. There are currently no pending cases against him.

On June 12, Home Affairs Adviser Lt Gen (ret'd) Md Jahangir Alam Chowdhury said there is no government bar on Tarique's return.

On November 30, Foreign Affairs Adviser Md Touhid Hossain said the government can issue a "one-time" travel pass within a day, facilitating Tarique's return to the country if he wishes.

GULSHAN HOUSES READY
According to party sources, Tarique will stay at both House 79 and House 196 in Gulshan.

The house on plot 196, built on 32 kathas of land and given to Khaleda Zia by the government in 1981, is now being prepared for her elder son, they added.

After the assassination of former president Ziaur Rahman, Tarique's father and founder of BNP, on May 31, 1981, Khaleda was allotted the house.

On June 5, the interim government officially registered the house in her name.

Party insiders said the BNP has received assurance from the government that security arrangements will be provided to Tarique upon his return.

The BNP, which is maintaining constant contact with the government, is also taking its own steps to address and secure Tarique's safety ahead of his arrival.

POLITICAL CAREER

At the age of 22, Tarique became a member of the Gabtali upazila BNP in Bogura district in 1988. He had been involved in politics even before formally joining the organisation.

He took part in the nationwide election campaign alongside his mother during the 1991 election.

In 2002, Tarique was appointed senior joint secretary general of the party.

He lost his brother, Arafat Rahman Koko, while in exile in London. During his time abroad, he was elected senior vice-chairman at the BNP's Fifth National Council in 2009 and re-elected to the position at the Sixth National Council in 2016.

Since the imprisonment of Khaleda in the Zia Orphanage Trust corruption case on February 8, 2018, Tarique has been serving as the acting chairman of the BNP.

Tarique is set to run in the 13th national parliamentary election from the Bogura-6 (Sadar) constituency.

US plan

FROM PAGE 12

before Ukraine negotiates any territorial concessions, the French presidency said yesterday.

Kyiv has long strived for EU membership and has been implementing reforms since a pro-European 2014 revolution but has struggled to eradicate endemic corruption — a core prerequisite for joining the bloc.

After completing a diplomatic tour across Europe last week, Zelensky is due in Berlin on Monday for more talks on the plan, full details of which have not been released.

Moscow on Friday indicated it was suspicious about the efforts to amend the US plan, which it has largely been supportive of and heeded to most of its core demands.

"We have an impression that this version, which is being put forward for discussion, will be worsened," Kremlin foreign policy aide Yuri Ushakov told the Kommersant business daily.



American International University-Bangladesh (AIUB) 23rd Convocation Ceremony 2025 Congratulations Graduates! *We are proud of you!*



Academic Year 2023-2024

Saturday, 13 December 2025



CHIEF ADVISER
GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF
BANGLADESH
28 Agrahayan 1432
13 December 2025



ADVISER
Ministry of Education
Government of the People's Republic
of Bangladesh

Heartfelt congratulations to the graduating students, their guardians, faculty members, staff, and the University authorities on the occasion of the 23rd Convocation of the American International University-Bangladesh (AIUB). Today, we celebrate your achievements, your perseverance, and the successful culmination of your academic journey at AIUB.

This convocation marks not an end, but the beginning of a new chapter in your life. Your years at AIUB have equipped you with the knowledge, skills, creativity, and moral compass needed to embark on that journey with confidence. The education you have received here is a powerful instrument for driving progress — one that transcends borders and contributes to building an enlightened, just, and equitable society. As you step into roles that shape industries and influence policies, let knowledge guide your judgment and empathy inform your actions.

As proud graduates of AIUB, I am confident that you will carry forward the legacy of this institution with integrity, professionalism, and pride. Let your accomplishments honor the dedication of your parents, peers, and faculty who have supported and inspired you along the way.

As we strive to build a New Bangladesh in the spirit of the July Uprising 2024, may your work embody that spirit - driving our nation toward greater progress and unity.

I wish the 23rd Convocation of the American International University- Bangladesh (AIUB) every success.

Signature

Professor Muhammad Yunus

Signature

(Dr. C R Abrar)



CHIEF GUEST
23rd Convocation
American International University-
Bangladesh



CHAIRMAN
University Grants Commission of
Bangladesh

I am happy to learn that the 23rd convocation of the American International University-Bangladesh (AIUB) is going to be held on December 13, 2025. I convey my heartfelt congratulations to the graduating students, their parents/guardians, faculty members and the management of AIUB.

Convocation, at the end of each academic year, bears immense significance in acknowledging the accomplishment of the graduating students. Bangladesh is currently experiencing a demographic dividend, with more than 60% of its about 180 million people are aged between 13 to 28 years and belong to generation Z. To turn this large already digitally informed population into nationally and internationally competitive human resources, investing in education is the key to achieving overall prosperity for the people of this country.

I would like to congratulate AIUB for its efforts in providing quality education in different fields of knowledge including information and communication technology, science, engineering, arts & humanities, business and social sciences. I hope the AIUB graduates will apply their knowledge and skills, competencies, ethical values and understanding effectively to help build a happy and prosperous Bangladesh. I wish them a bright future.

I feel extremely honored to be the chief guest of this convocation ceremony. I wish the 23rd Convocation of AIUB a grand success.

Signature

Dr. Abed Chaudhury

It gives me immense pleasure to learn that the American International University-Bangladesh (AIUB) is going to hold its 23rd Convocation on 13 December 2025. On this joyous occasion, I extend my heartfelt congratulations to all the graduating students who, through years of perseverance and dedication, have reached this significant milestone in their academic journey. My sincere appreciation also goes to the parents, guardians, faculty members, administrative and operational staff, members of the Board of Trustees, and all others whose tireless efforts have made this grand occasion possible.

Dear graduates, as you step into a world full of opportunities and challenges, I encourage you to uphold the values, knowledge, and skills you have acquired during your time at AIUB. True success lies not only in achieving your personal ambitions but also in contributing meaningfully to society and working for the greater good of humanity.

Universities are entrusted with three fundamental missions-creating knowledge through research and innovation, imparting knowledge through participatory teaching and learning, and disseminating knowledge through publications and community engagement. These missions aim to nurture competent, creative, and ethical graduates capable of providing leadership in industry, academia, and society.

Research and innovation remain key drivers of national development. By generating new ideas, technologies, and services, universities contribute to industrial growth, job creation, and socio-economic transformation. The dissemination of research outcomes through journals and books further bridges the gap between scientific discovery and practical application, ensuring that knowledge benefits both local and global communities.

In today's rapidly evolving world, characterized by technological revolutions in Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), robotics, and automation, it is imperative for universities to align their curricula with the latest advancements. I am pleased to note that AIUB has been implementing the Outcome-Based Education (OBE) framework in line with the guidelines of the University Grants Commission and has developed excellent ICT infrastructure to support teaching, learning, and research.

On behalf of the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh, I commend AIUB for its steadfast dedication to academic excellence and its role in producing skilled graduates ready to take on leadership roles in the modern world. I extend my best wishes to all the graduates for a successful, purposeful, and fulfilling career.

May the 23rd Convocation of AIUB be a grand success. May the university continue to achieve new heights and bring pride to the nation.

Signature

Professor Dr. S. M. A. Faiz

Chairman



CHAIRMAN
Board of Trustees
American International University-
Bangladesh



VICE CHANCELLOR
American International University-
Bangladesh

Today, on this joyous occasion, we celebrate the graduating class of the 23rd Convocation Ceremony of the American International University-Bangladesh (AIUB). This moment stands as a testament to the perseverance and dedication of the students, as well as the unwavering support of their families and the entire AIUB community. On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I extend my heartfelt congratulations to each and every one of you, in hope that we will continue to strive for academic excellence and holistic education that prepares our students to become competent, compassionate, and responsible global citizens.

At AIUB, we take great pride in nurturing resilience, leadership, and a spirit of determination. The journey to this day has not been without challenges, but each obstacle has strengthened your resolve to adapt, evolve, and excel. As you embark on your next chapter, carry forward the lessons, values, and experiences gained during your time here. Let your achievements serve as a reminder of what is possible when you put your mind to accomplishing your goals. Your efforts and commitment are your greatest strength moving forward.

My sincere appreciation goes to our devoted faculty members and administrative staff for their continuous efforts, and to the parents and guardians for their trust and sacrifices. None of this would be possible without your unwavering support and cooperation throughout these years.

To our graduates — your success is our pride. May you continue to uphold the ideals of AIUB and make meaningful contributions to Bangladesh and beyond.

Congratulations and all the best for the future!

Signature

Nadia Anwar
Chairman & Founder-Member
Board of Trustees, AIUB

Dear Graduates,
My heartfelt congratulations to each of you on reaching this significant milestone. As you step into the next phase of your life, let the knowledge, values and experiences you gained at AIUB, guide your decisions and strengthen your capacity to achieve your goals.

You now stand on the threshold of new opportunities. Your next steps will shape your career, character and create opportunities for future. Embrace them with integrity and confidence. Let your hard work and perseverance illuminate your path and make you dominant and famous wherever you go.

I expect that, as your alma mater, AIUB will always remain in your heart. We look forward to celebrating your future achievements and your professional contribution to the nation.

I join your families, guardians, teachers, mentors, and the entire AIUB community in sharing the pride of this moment. May your journey be enriched with purpose and illuminated by the confidence to grow, lead, and excel.

Warmest wishes for a future filled with success and meaningful achievements.

Signature

Prof. Dr. Saiful Islam
Vice Chancellor
American International University-Bangladesh



MEMBER
University Grants Commission of
Bangladesh



CONVOCATION SPEAKER
Executive Committee Member
IREG Observatory on Academic
Ranking and Excellence, Brussels

It is indeed a pleasure for me to convey my heartfelt congratulations to the graduating class of 2023-2024 of the American International University-Bangladesh (AIUB) on the occasion of its 23rd Convocation. This ceremony marks an important transition as 1,766 graduates move forward with the knowledge and skills they have gained through dedication and hard work.

Your achievement reflects years of discipline, perseverance, and hard work. It also embodies the collective commitment of your families, whose support, sacrifices, and encouragement have played an essential role in bringing you to this day. Their contribution deserves special recognition and gratitude.

The landscape of higher education is evolving rapidly, with universities increasingly aligning themselves with global standards of quality, research, and academic excellence. AIUB's continuous advancement in international rankings and ratings demonstrates the institution's efforts to remain competitive and relevant in an interconnected world - an environment in which you will now play an active role.

As you step forward, remember that society benefits most from graduates who uphold integrity, think critically, and contribute constructively to their fields. Whether you move into professional practice, public service, entrepreneurship, or further studies, your actions will shape not only your future but also the progress of your communities and the nation.

I extend my best wishes to each of you for a successful and meaningful journey ahead. May your achievements continue to reflect positively on yourselves, your families, and Bangladesh.

Signature

Professor Dr. Mohammad Anwar Hossen

Signature

Professor Dr. Habib Fardoun
Executive Committee Member
IREG Observatory on Academic Ranking and Excellence, Brussels

AIUB Graduates at a Glance



Faculty	Undergraduate	Graduate
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS)	120	22
Faculty of Business Administration (FBA)	273	219
Faculty of Engineering (FE)	238	21
Faculty of Health and Life Sciences (FHLS)	-	13
Faculty of Science and Technology (FST)	806	54
Total	1437	329
Grand Total	1766	1766

Academic Year	Undergraduate	Graduate
Khondoker Md. Sabit Hasan 21-45306-2	Undergraduate	BSc CSE
Lia Moni 22-92768-3	Graduate Program	MSc in EEE
Md. Ashraf Jamil Afgan 22-92794-3	Professional Program	MPH

FICTION

The color of red hibiscus



ILLUSTRATION: MAHMUDA EMDAD

The day the allied forces arrived the soldiers left the bunker with their hands up in the air. Neela hollered from their chamber saying that they were barely dressed and they needed some clothes. Later, in an army jeep, she remained silent when an officer asked her about home.

RAHAD ABIR

The Polish nurse at the rehabilitation center asks her to decide. Does Neela want to have an abortion or wait for the delivery? "You're almost seven months," the nurse says in English. "An abortion would be very risky."

Neela learns that she doesn't need to worry about the newborn. Some foreign organisations are working to take these babies to Europe or Canada where they will be adopted by nice families.

She is given two days to think. In the shower room Neela asks the ayah to cut off her lice-infested hair.

"Don't worry, child," the old woman says. "I will shampoo it every day and within a week your hair will look lovely again."

The ayah inquires about her family. Family? How would Neela know if they are alive or dead? The rehab office will write them a letter if she provides the address, the ayah tells her.

"What month is it now?" Neela asks. "December?"

It has been nine months away from home.

That night, as Neela strokes her swollen belly, she thinks about her last afternoon with Zahed; she makes believe that the little being inside her is the fruit of their love. That afternoon, weeks before the war broke out, they were walking along the dighi pond. Zahed told her they would get married the following year. An intern at Rajshahi Medical College, he was going to become a full-fledged doctor soon. Neela herself would go to college.

"Neela, say something," Zahed said, brushing the beads of perspiration off her upper lip.

She blushed, couldn't look into his eyes.

"You don't like the groom?"

Her cheeks dimpled with a tight, shy smile.

"Why are you smiling?"

"We'll have two kids," she said. "One boy, one girl."

Zahed shook with laughter. "We're not married yet, and you're thinking about kids!"

**

On the night of Neela's 16th birthday, March 25, 1971, the Pakistani army began a crackdown in the major cities across East Pakistan. Three days later when her family was packing the necessary items to depart for their ancestral village, a jeep stopped in front of their home in Rajshahi. Her father, a homeopathic doctor, thought he had a visitor, but it was the city councillor, flanked by a pair of men. "Doctor shaheb," the councillor said to him. "Neela knows English. She is needed to do some interpreting for the military."

Before her father could respond, the two men grabbed her hands and dragged her toward the jeep. She heard her mother screaming, and saw another man kicking her father to the ground.

The jeep raced down the empty streets, then pulled into the forecourt of a mansion, next to several parked military vehicles. The councillor said something to an armed soldier in Urdu. The soldier escorted Neela through a

passageway and deposited her into a small room. The door slammed shut behind her.

She banged on the door. "Let me out!"

The door flew open, and the soldier set the muzzle of his rifle against her head. "Another sound," he said, "and I'll blow your brains out!"

Neela stood by the window, sobbing, and watching the last gold light of the day. Her father, she thought, might be out now in search of her. If news reached Zahed, he would find a way to get her out of here.

Long after dark, she was lying in bed. Her eyes flickered with the sound of the door opening. A fat officer with lots of badges on his uniform walked in. She huddled under the coverlet.

The officer fired up his pipe and regarded her. "You're such a beautiful girl," he said. "Take off your clothes."

A week or so later, she was transported to a shabby camp. No single cell this time, but a hall-like space where 15 girls and women from mid-teens to over 40 were crammed into the room. The smell of unwashed bodies and a suffocating odour from the bathroom filled the air. Windows were shuttered with nails. A dim light bulb was hanging from the middle of the ceiling.

One night some drunken soldiers barged in and raped a Hindu girl in front of all of them. Eyes shut, Neela covered her ears to avoid hearing the cries. The following morning, the Hindu girl was found hanging from the bathroom window. She'd used her salwar as a noose.

Once the dead body was removed, two

soldiers came and confiscated whatever the girls were wearing, beating and stripping them all naked. They laughed and said, "That's how you will live now, you bloody Bengali whores." For a long while Neela could not look at the others.

Three days unclothed, and then petticoats and blouses—clothes too scant to tie a noose—are thrown into the room. And an order came not to close the lavatory door under any circumstances.

Neela, like other girls, scratched her tangled hair and clammy skin all the time. They had showers once a month, twice if lucky. No one spoke; they whispered. Sometimes even the hushed voices angered the guards outside the door.

Months later Neela and four other girls were brought to another camp. There, the old woman who brought their food talked in a low tone. Neela learned that they were in the city of Bogra, and it was September. That night they heard gunfire. "Bengalis are fighting," the old woman told them over breakfast.

Some nights the military men did not come at all. "The bastards are scared now," said a tall woman. "The Bengali guerillas are winning." She said that her husband was an army captain. A week before the Massacre of March 25, her husband, along with many other Bengali officers stationed at Dhaka Cantonment, was transferred to Rawalpindi. After he disappeared from there, she was taken into a camp last August.

"Where is he now?" Neela asked.

"He fled West Pakistan to join the

war," the tall woman said.

Late one night, amidst the sound of heavy gunfire, Neela and three other girls were moved to a bunker. As days passed, food became scarce. Some days they had only water.

One day a soldier who was fond of her told her that things would be over soon. "We've decided to surrender," he said. "We are waiting for the Indian allied forces to come and take us as prisoners. Just like you girls."

The day the allied forces arrived the soldiers left the bunker with their hands up in the air. Neela hollered from their chamber saying that they were barely dressed and they needed some clothes. Later, in an army jeep, she remained silent when an officer asked her about home.

"We can arrange transportation to get you girls home," he said.

Neela clutched her stomach. "I have no home."

"A rehabilitation center has been opened in Dhaka," he said. "We will send you there."

This is an excerpt. Read the full story on *The Daily Star* and *Star Books and Literature's* websites.

This story was originally published in *Prairie Schooner*, Vol. 95, No. 4 (WINTER 2021).

Rahad Abir's debut novel *Bengal Hound* won the *Georgia Author of the Year Award* for literary fiction. He is the recipient of the *Charles Pick Fellowship* at the University of East Anglia and the *Marguerite McGlinn Prize for Fiction*.

FICTION

Aquatic deity

ABDULLAH ZAHID

Shimulia was a remote village. A girl from this village was named Madhurilata. The origin of this name remained a mystery to most of the villagers. Nevertheless, they affectionately referred to her as Madhu, which meant honey.

Zaheer, a devout follower of Tagore and a son of the village, had achieved a remarkable feat by becoming the first person in 10 villages to pass matriculation and secure admission to Gurudayal College, Kishoreganj. During a visit to a distant relative's house, he had first laid eyes on a newborn girl and had been struck by her purity and innocence. He had named her after Tagore's eldest daughter, Madhurilata—that had been the mystery of the name.

Madhu grew up amidst the simplicity of village life, but her development had taken an unusual turn. Despite her physical growth, she had remained mentally trapped in the innocence of a six- or seven-year-old, a condition known as intellectual disability. Her speech had been soft and childlike, her actions mirroring those of a much younger child. However, her physical appearance had continued to flourish, her cheeks becoming plump and her stature healthy.

Her body, like an unstoppable force, had continued its march to maturity. Her mother, burdened with worry, had tightly bound Madhu's chest, attempting to shield her from the prying eyes of the world. Despite her mother's efforts, Madhu had entered womanhood, her body developing as expected. This had brought forth a new set of challenges,

especially during her menstrual cycle, causing her mother endless anguish.

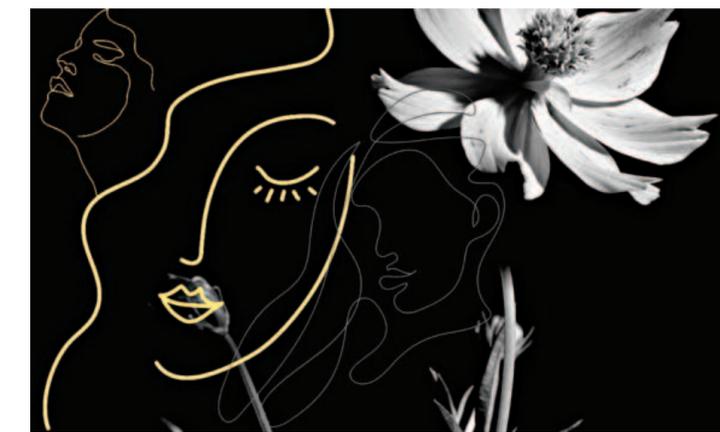
To protect Madhu from harm, her mother had kept a vigilant eye on her, yet the village had posed its own dangers. Some individuals, taking advantage of Madhu's vulnerability, had dared to lay hands on her body, causing her mother great distress. Unable to confine her daughter at home, she had allowed Madhu to roam freely but had watched her constantly.

Madhu's only fear had stemmed from a traumatic experience with injections, which had instilled in her a deep-seated dread. At the mere mention of someone coming to administer a shot, she would cry out for her mother and flee back home to seek comfort in her embrace.

Thus, amidst the tranquility of village life, Madhu's journey had unfolded in a delicate balance between innocence and vulnerability, fiercely guarded by a mother's love from the harsh realities of the world.

One morning, Madhu had been playing with other boys and girls in front of Zaheer's house, eagerly awaiting Zaheer's visit with his family later that day. They had known that when Zaheer arrived home, he would bring batasha, or sugar candy, from the Pulerghat market—a treat that Zaheer's mother usually distributed among the children. That day, the group of village children had gathered in front of Zaheer's house, full of anticipation for the sweets.

Zaheer, who had earned a BA degree from Gurudayal College, worked as a teacher at a



DESIGN: MAISHA SYEDA

school in Kishoreganj. He was married to a woman from a wealthy family in the city, and they had a son named Ayan, who was eight-years-old.

It had been the year 1971. On March 1, Pakistan's military ruler, President Yahya Khan, had announced the suspension of the scheduled session of the National Assembly, sparking violent protests among Bangalis. Political tension had gripped the nation. Zaheer's school had been closed indefinitely due to the political unrest.

Zaheer's family had planned to travel to Shimulia village and stay there for a few days while the school remained closed. At that time, rickshaws had been the only convenient means of transportation to the village. As the rickshaw had departed from Kishoreganj without a hood, its passengers—Zaheer's wife, Nirjhar, and their son, Ayan—had ridden in the open air.

When the rickshaw had reached Pulerghat market, the rickshaw puller had raised the hood and covered it with a sari cloth. This precaution

had been taken because the villagers might gossip about Nirjhar traveling without a veil, implying that she lacked modesty while riding in an open rickshaw. Nirjhar, being a "city girl", had anticipated such gossip but had remained unbothered by it.

Zaheer had not gone in the rickshaw but had ridden his Mister bicycle alongside it. He usually arrived a bit earlier and spent time in front of a roadside shop or sat on a bench, chatting with acquaintances. When the rickshaw arrived with the rest of the family, they continued the journey. On reaching the Pulerghat market, the rickshaw had stopped in front of the mosque, under the shade of a jackfruit tree, for a substantial break. The rickshaw puller had closed the mouth of the mosque's tube well with his hand, drunk some water, and rinsed his mouth. Zaheer had treated him with roshogolla and tea with nimki from Gauranga's restaurant. He had also bought batasha from there for home. Ayan had been eagerly anticipating this trip ever since he had learned about it.

This is an excerpt. Read the full story on *The Daily Star* and *Star Books and Literature's* websites.

Abdullah Zahid is a Bangladeshi-American writer, librarian, and cultural commentator based in New York. He began his literary journey as a columnist for *Jaijaidin*, where his widely-read column "Manhattan Diary" was later published as a book of the same name. The second edition of the book was released in 2024.

Women's team set for major event sans international matches, again

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is again relying on domestic tournaments and a short preparation camp instead of international fixtures to prepare the women's team for the upcoming ICC Women's T20 World Cup Qualifiers – repeating the approach taken before this year's Women's World Cup in India, which it later admitted was a mistake.

Before the 50-over World Cup, Bangladesh went nearly five months without international cricket, a gap that seemingly contributed to narrow defeats against Sri Lanka, England, and South Africa.

Although the BCB, players, and coaching staff had publicly cited this as a key shortcoming, the team is in the same situation heading into the qualifiers event, scheduled in Nepal from January 18 to February 1.

Since returning from the World Cup in October – where Bangladesh won only one match and finished second from bottom – the players have featured in one T20 domestic competition, the eight-team T20 competition Women's National Cricket League in November.

However, several national stars, including captain Nigar Sultana Joty, Marufa Akter, and Nahida Akter, skipped the competition due to various reasons.

The cricketers will next take part in the four-team Women's Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL), set to be held in Rajshahi from December 15 to 25, also



in T20 format.

Bangladesh were initially slated to tour India during this window for three WODIs and three WT20Is, but after the hosts postponed the series indefinitely, the BCB did not set up any alternative international engagement.

Women's team's chief selector Sazzad Ahmed Shipon said the board is planning a week-long training camp – either in Dhaka or outside the capital – to finalise preparations before the team departs for Nepal on January 12.

"There is less than three weeks [after BCL and before the team's departure]. If any series is played, things get tight.

That's why we are playing the BCL in T20 format [last edition was held in the three-day format] so that the players get used to the format," Shipon told The Daily Star on Friday.

According to the qualifiers' fixture, Bangladesh, placed in Group A, will open their campaign in the 10-team tournament against the USA on January 18, followed by matches against Papua New Guinea, Namibia and Ireland on January 20, 22 and 24 respectively.

The top three teams from Group A and B will advance to the Super Six stage, and the top four teams will qualify for the Women's T20 World Cup, set to be held

in England from June 12 to July 5 – the largest edition yet, featuring 12 teams.

A probable reason behind the board's seemingly casual approach regarding the team's preparation is that Bangladesh have regularly featured in the event since 2014 and have consistently qualified through the qualifiers. Still, given the nature of the shortest format, heading into the qualifiers undercooked is a risky proposition.

Moreover, if the Tigresses qualify for the mega event, they will most likely head into it underprepared, with only one FTP-sanctioned home series – three WODIs and three T20Is against Sri Lanka in April – scheduled before the World Cup.

The players are supposed to take part in two domestic tournaments before the Sri Lanka series – the proposed three or four-team Women's Bangladesh Premier League (WBPL) in February, announced by BCB president Aminul Islam Bulbul, and the 50-over Women's Dhaka Premier League (WDPL) starting in March.

However, the feasibility of hosting the Women's BPL in February remains unclear with the national elections on February 12 and Ramadan approaching soon after.

"The team will return on February 2 from Nepal. After that, two tournaments are supposed to happen... I don't think it's viable to arrange another series after that. The time is very short," Shipon said, adding that the board can't hold the Women's DPL in the 20-over format as it can't impose that decision on the clubs.

SHORT CORNER



Messi to unveil 21-metre statue of himself on India 'GOAT' tour

Lionel Messi will unveil a 21-metre (70-foot) statue of himself in India on Saturday as he embarks on a three-day tour of the country that has sparked a fan frenzy. The iron sculpture in Kolkata is part of a so-called GOAT Tour that will take in four Indian cities and a possible meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

U-17s beat Sri Lanka to clinch one-day series

Left-arm pacer Atiqur Akash delivered a stellar performance as the Bangladesh under-17 team defeated Sri Lanka by five wickets in the third and final one-dayer, sealing a 2-1 series victory at the Bir Shrestha Shaheed Flight Lieutenant Matur Rahman Cricket Stadium in Chattogram on Friday.

Women's U-19 suffer series defeat to Pakistan

Bangladesh U-19 women's team suffered a 3-2 series defeat against their Pakistani counterparts after losing the fifth and final T20 by six wickets at the Cox's Bazar Academy Ground yesterday.

**Read full stories on The Daily Star's website

UNDER-19S ASIA CUP

Junior Tigers begin title defence against Afghanistan

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh are set to begin the defence of their Under-19s Asia Cup title in their Group B fixture against Afghanistan at ICC Academy Ground A in the UAE today.

The junior Tigers have lifted the trophy in the past two editions, but head coach Naveed Nawaz instructed his players to focus on playing as a team and enjoying the matches to avoid pressure.

"We were discussing the processes we have put in place. The main thing is to enjoy everything during the Asia Cup and work together as a team. Make sure no one is left alone, enjoy each other's success, and when pressure comes, we should be able to come on top," Naveed said on Tuesday, a day before the team's departure from the country.

Bangladesh have been placed in Group B alongside Afghanistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. The U-19 Asia Cup began on Friday with both India and Pakistan registering big margin wins against UAE and Malaysia, respectively.

India opener Vaibhav Suryavanshi lit up the tournament with a 95-ball 171 as India posted a mammoth 433 for six in 50 overs. UAE were restricted to 199 for seven as India claimed a 234-run win. Pakistan started with a 297-run victory over Malaysia after Sameer Minhas' 148-ball 177 and Ahmed Hussain's 132.

DHAKA FIRST DIVISION LEAGUE

Walkovers loom as domestic cricket crisis deepens

SPORTS REPORTER

The domestic arena of Bangladesh cricket has long been mired in controversies and irregularities, despite repeated calls from experts and the media to strengthen its core in order to improve the country's cricketing structure. That crisis appears to have deepened this season, with four of the five opening-day fixtures tomorrow expected to result in walkovers as several clubs could skip the games in protest against alleged irregularities in the most recent Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) elections.

The Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolis (CCDM) announced the fixtures on Thursday, listing all 20 participating clubs, even though some teams have shown no intention of turning up, with eight teams skipping last month's players' transfer window. Only the opening day match between Bangladesh Police Cricket Club and Old DOHS Sports Club is expected to begin as scheduled at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur.

Relegated Premier League clubs usually play promoted First Division teams in the opening fixtures. Interestingly, the Police-Old DOHS fixture does not fall under that format but was arranged nonetheless, with a CCDM official explaining the committee

OPENING DAY FIXTURES

- Partex Sporting Club vs Baridhara Dazzlers (PKSP-2)
- Gazi Tyres Cricket Academy vs Dhaka United (BKSP-3)
- Amber Sporting Club vs Kalabagan Krira Chakra (BKSP-4)
- Bangladesh Police Cricket Club vs Old DOHS Sports Club (SBNCS)
- Lalmatia Club vs Dhanmondi Cricket Club (SCG)

wanted to schedule at least one match "which will take place."

Former Bangladesh captain Tamim Iqbal, a councillor of Old DOHS Sports Club, has allowed his team to participate, even though they were among the 45 clubs that had protested alleged irregularities in the BCB elections. The league had already been postponed several times before the latest dates and fixture list were finalised, and a CCDM official confirmed there would be no further delays.

"The league will start; there is no more opportunity to postpone," the official said. Any team failing to

show up will automatically concede a walkover, with the opposition receiving full points. "When the league ends, the teams which did not play will be relegated and no relegation league will be held," the official added, noting that fixtures were prepared with all 20 clubs so that no side would be excluded.

Partex Sporting Club, scheduled to face Baridhara Dazzlers on Sunday at PKSP, are not expected to take the field. The club's general secretary, Sajjad Hossain, said they are "not going to play because the situation is muddy at the moment." Some sources suggested that certain clubs may also be waiting to see how the political landscape shifts ahead of the upcoming national elections.

Partex, however, initially showed interest in participating in the league. "We had no objection to playing the league, but the situation is not right. If all the teams don't participate, what's the use of playing? We have no objections regarding the BCB elections or other things," the official said. Partex also objected to beginning the season with the First Division, arguing that the season traditionally starts with the Third Division and then moves upward.

The fault lines that emerged during the last BCB elections continue to influence the game, leaving a domestic structure long in need of stability facing an even shakier start this year.



Jacob Duffy led the way with a superb 5-38 as New Zealand cruised to a nine-wicket win over the West Indies in the second Test in Wellington on Friday, giving the hosts a 1-0 lead in the three-match series following a draw in the opener. Duffy, securing his second five-wicket haul in just his third Test -- also his second in consecutive matches -- helped skittle the visitors for 128 after Lunch on Day 3. Despite missing several frontline quicks and losing Blair Tickner to a dislocated shoulder on the opening day, the makeshift Black Caps attack still ripped through the West Indies lineup to set up a modest chase of 56. Devon Conway (28*) and Kane Williamson (16*) guided New Zealand home before Tea, sealing the dominant victory.

PHOTO: AFP



Bashundhara Kings forward Rakib Hossain celebrates his 15th-minute strike against Mohammedan during their Bangladesh Football League fixture at the Kings Arena on Friday. Dorielton Gomes added a stoppage-time goal as the five-time champions won 2-0 to move five points clear at the top of the table, while defending champions Mohammedan remained in fourth, nine points adrift.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

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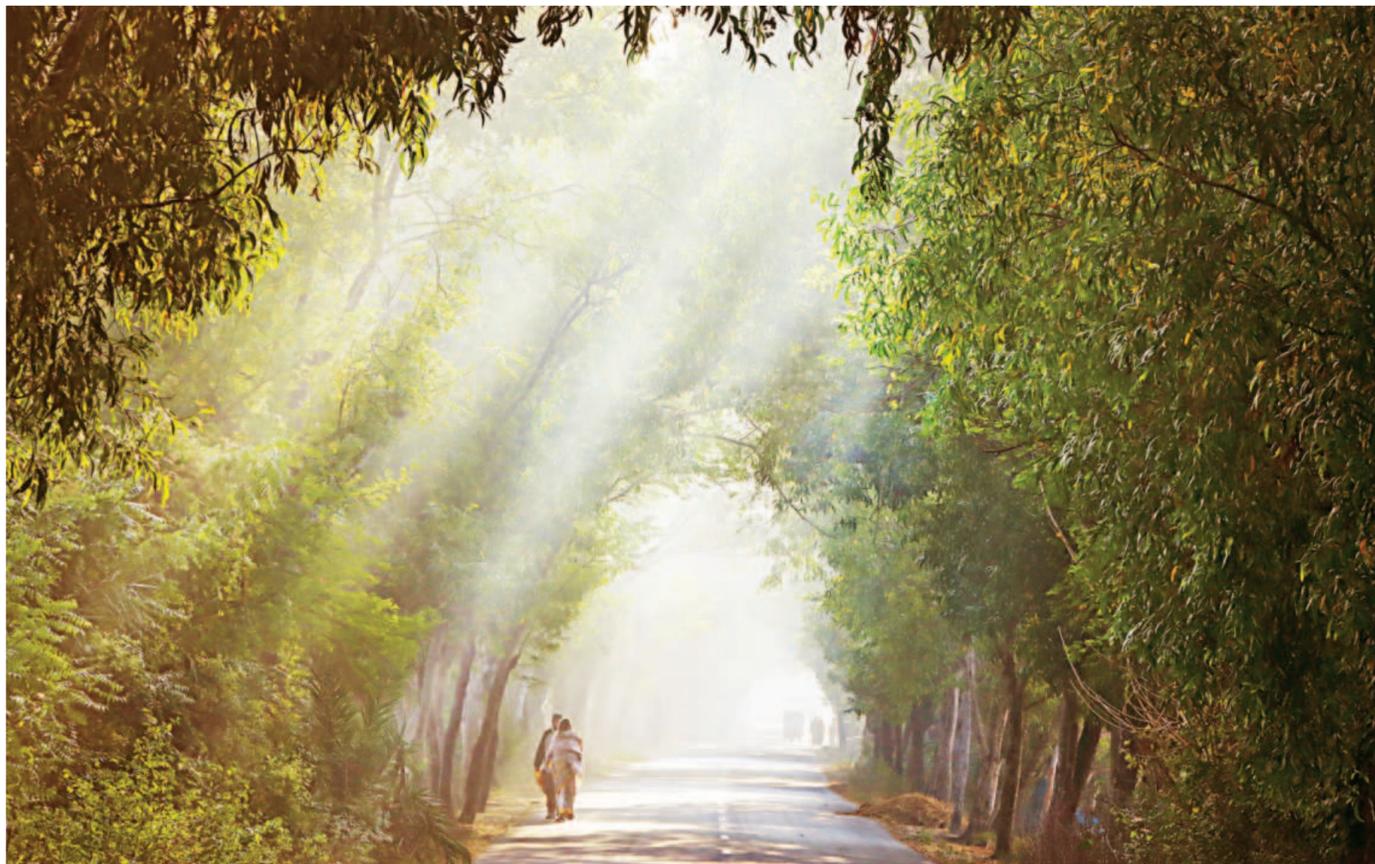
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FIRST LIGHT... Soft rays of sunlight shimmer through the mist, casting a gentle glow over this serene woodland street on a cool winter morning. The photo was taken yesterday in Khulna's Botiaghata. PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN



Tears flow as Sazid is laid to rest

SHOHANUR RAHMAN RAFI, *ajshahi*

Koelhat village in Rajshahi was shrouded with grief yesterday as hundreds of people bade farewell to two-year-old Sazid, who died after being trapped for over 30 hours in an abandoned shaft.

Sazid's janaza was held at 10:30am in his village in Panchandar union of Tanore upazila. He was then buried in the village graveyard.

Villagers kept pouring in, some to pray, others to get one final glimpse of the child.

At home, his mother Runa Khatun was seen trembling and crying. Relatives sat around her, trying to comfort each other.

Runa and her husband, Rakibul Islam, married ten years ago. They have three sons. The eldest is nine, the youngest three months old. Sazid was their middle child.

Rakibul works in Gazipur. Runa stays in the village with the children and his parents.

"Sazid was the most curious and playful one," Runa said, reminiscing about her departed child before breaking down again.



PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

Sazid's family members break down in tears as the two-year-old was laid to rest in his village home yesterday.

The incident happened around noon on Wednesday. A soil-laden trolley sank into the ground.

Runa, holding Sazid's hand, walked towards the spot. "He screamed 'Ma!' and slipped into the opening," she recalled. She thought Sazid had fallen into the pond. Then she heard faint cries -- "Ma, ma!" -- from the shaft. She called the neighbours.

Locals said the shaft was one of several groundwater test holes dug earlier by a man named Kochir Uddin, searching for a suitable tube-well point. None were sealed later. Kochir fled the area within an hour of the incident.

Rescuers dug for hours, but the soil kept collapsing. Tanore Fire Service In Charge Abdur Rouf said the child was eventually found at a depth of 45 feet.

"Before we arrived, locals tried to conduct the rescue themselves, causing the upper layers of soil to cave in. This blocked the shaft significantly, and the oxygen we supplied could not reach him," Abdur Rouf said.

Sazid was taken to Tanore Upazila Health Complex. Dr Barnabus Hasdak declared him dead at 9:40pm on Thursday.

At the grave, his father Rakibul said, "If the shaft had been closed, this would not have happened. If my child had been even 10 or 15 feet down, he might have been saved. But he was 40 feet below for 32 hours. I want justice so that no other family faces this."

Relatives echoed Rakibul's demand.

Sazid's aunt, Shefali, said, "Leaving a hole uncovered like this is a crime. We want justice for Sazid."

US plan sees Kyiv joining EU in 2027

AFP, Kyiv

Ukraine would join the European Union as early as January 2027 under the latest US plan to end the war with Russia, a senior source familiar with the matter told AFP yesterday.

The complicated EU accession process usually takes years and requires a unanimous vote from all 27 members of the bloc, and some countries, most notably Hungary, have consistently voiced opposition to Ukraine joining.

The idea of a speedy accession is included in the latest version of a US-led plan to end the war, which would also see Ukraine cede land to Russia, and has triggered a diplomatic frenzy across Europe in recent weeks.

"It's stated there but it's a matter for negotiation, and the Americans support it," the senior official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said, referring to the US plan.

Meanwhile, Europeans and Ukrainians are asking the United States to provide them with "security

SEE PAGE 8 COL 6

Record high C-section births raise concerns

Experts cite financial incentives, low awareness

ALARMING RISE

C-section rate rises 51.8% in 2025 from 19.1 in 2012-13

WHO recommends 10-15%

Higher among urban, wealthy and educated mothers

WHAT'S DRIVING IT

Profit incentives in private hospitals

Fear of labour pain; early surgical requests

Low awareness of when C-sections are necessary

WHY IT MATTERS

Unnecessary C-sections don't improve outcomes

Higher risk of infection, long-term pain, depression

Lower early breast feeding rates

TANGILA TASNIM

Israt Jahan, a 21-year-old student of Dhaka University, gave birth to a girl a year ago. Conceiving shortly after her marriage, she chose to undergo a C-section for delivery.

"I wasn't actually prepared for the baby. When I got to know I was pregnant, I was happy but nervous as well. I had a lot of support from everyone, including my husband. But after check-ups, I decided to go for caesarean delivery."

Citing concern for her unborn child's safety, she said, "I know normal delivery is a good option. But what if it hurt my baby? I didn't want to take any risk. Since we have other options, why would I go for the tougher one?"

On the other hand, 28-year-old Eti Chowdhury had no choice but a C-section.

A mother of a five-year-old boy, her pregnancy journey during the Covid-19 pandemic was particularly difficult. As her due date neared, a premature membrane rupture caused pain and amniotic fluid leakage. After waiting for the pain to ease throughout the day of delivery, doctors decided a C-section was necessary.

"I tried my best to go through a normal delivery, but when the pain became too much to handle, I agreed to the surgery," Eti said.

After the operation, she was kept under

SEE PAGE 8 COL 1

No change in Khaleda Zia's condition

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's condition remained unchanged, with no signs of improvement nor any deterioration as of last night, according to her doctors.

She continued to receive treatment at the intensive care unit of Evercare Hospital in Dhaka.

Earlier, on Thursday, the doctors confirmed that she is getting "elective ventilator support" to rest her lungs and other organs.



Elective ventilator support means putting a patient on a ventilator as a planned, non-emergency medical step -- not because they are in sudden respiratory failure, but because doctors believe the patient's organs need rest or support.

The 80-year-old former prime minister has long been battling multiple health issues, including liver cirrhosis. She was admitted to the hospital on November 23 with infections in her heart and lungs.

She has recently developed several additional complications, including infective endocarditis, acute pancreatitis, and severe bacterial and fungal infections.

SEE PAGE 8 COL 3

Ancient undersea wall found off French coast

AFP, Brest

Divers have discovered a long submerged wall some 7,000 years old under the sea off western France, scientists said Thursday.

Some 120 metres long, it was found off the Ile de Sein in Brittany along with a dozen smaller manmade structures from the same period.



"This is a very interesting discovery that opens up new prospects for underwater archaeology, helping us better understand how coastal societies were organised," Yvan Pailler, professor of archaeology at the University of Western Brittany, told AFP.

He co-authored a study on the find, published in the International Journal of Nautical Archaeology.



BOTTLENECK ON ATISH DIPANKAR ROAD... Illegally parked cargo vehicles occupy half the width of Atish Dipankar Road in the capital, forcing traffic into a single lane and creating a major bottleneck in the area. PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Thai PM dissolves House, paving way for elections

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's prime minister dissolved parliament yesterday, paving the way for general elections early next year as deadly border clashes continue with neighbour Cambodia.

The move comes earlier than expected and just three months after Anutin Charnvirakul -- of the conservative Bhumjaithai party -- became prime minister when his predecessor was removed from office over an ethics violation.

"The House of Representatives is dissolved to hold a new general election for members of the House," a decree published in the Royal Gazette on Friday said.

Anutin was widely expected to wait until after Christmas to dissolve parliament.

"Since the administration is a minority government and domestic political conditions are fraught with multiple challenges, the government cannot continue administering state affairs continuously, efficiently, and with stability," the Royal Gazette said, citing a report received from Anutin.

"Therefore, the appropriate solution is to dissolve the House of Representatives and hold a new general election."

HANDCRAFTING HERITAGE

How one family keeps the 'TEPA PUTUL' tradition alive



In Rajshahi, only one family continues the craft; in Tangail, Somodarani Pal keeps it alive; in Kishoreganj, Sunil Pal does the same. Bijli says only a handful of artisans remain, though perhaps some practise quietly elsewhere. The tradition is on the verge of disappearance.

RAFFAT BINTE RASHID

Rag dolls made from tattered saris and handmade clay dolls called tepa putul were once the few tangible belongings young girls in rural Bangladesh ever had.

Silt and clay collected from riverbeds, along with scraps found around their homesteads, were the materials village children used to craft their own toys. They kept them with utmost care in shoeboxes or rusted tin containers.

But these are stories of once upon a time. Today, the face of toys has changed, and with it, the fate of traditional toys and crafts.

With imported culture flooding the market and the aggressive rise of plastic products, even village shelves are now filled with mass-produced items.

These seemingly insignificant clay dolls, tepa putul, once found across pastoral Bangladesh, along with other artisanal items, have now become part of our lost craft heritage.

I met Subodh Kumar Pal, a tepa putul artisan, at an upmarket fair in Dhaka last year. Since then, I have followed his work, and he eventually took me to his village, Boshontopur Palpara in Rajshahi.

I am fascinated by heritage and folk keepsakes, and tepa putul is one cultural legacy I want to hold on to. Crafted by pressing raw clay with fingertips, dried in



the sun, and then fired, tepa putul derives its name from the Bengali words tepa (pressing) and putul (doll), a nod to its simple finger-moulding process.

Figures of a mother and child, brides and grooms, farming families, or deities make up these rustic dolls. Unpainted and adorned only with ornamental clay markings, they are fine specimens of

Bengal's folk artistry.

These crafts are not only cultural markers but also vital to the livelihoods of artisan communities.

A HEREDITARY CRAFT

Subodh's small family – his son Shojib Kumar Pal and wife Bijli Rani Pal – is the only one in Rajshahi still making tepa putul.

There are other potter families in the village, but each specialises in a different traditional craft. His neighbour, for instance, only makes Shoker er Hari or Hobby pots, decorative vessels used to store food or carry sweets during weddings and rituals.

Subodh, however, carries the torch for clay dolls. Bijli Rani has been making traditional clay dolls for 18 years and insists the craft requires a joyful mind.

"To do this kind of work, your mind must be in a good place. If the heart is heavy, the work won't turn out well. You must keep yourself happy," she says.

Her journey into mrit shilpo, the art of clay crafts, was shaped by her husband's family. Her father was a doll maker as well, though her mother never practised the craft. Bijli embraced it after marriage, continuing a fragile lineage of artisans.

An intricate doll can take two to

three days to finish, while smaller ones are often made in batches of eight or ten over two days.

"The dolls that require painstaking work are priced at Tk 100 to Tk 400 depending on size, and Tk 3,000 to Tk 5,000 for the large ones. But profits are limited. People don't want to pay much for these delicate items. Only collectors who value heritage pay their true worth. Most prefer cheaper products," Subodh says.

In Rajshahi, only one family continues the craft; in Tangail, Somodarani Pal keeps it alive; in Kishoreganj, Sunil Pal does the same. Bijli says only a handful of artisans remain, though perhaps some practise quietly elsewhere. The tradition is on the verge of disappearance.

HAND-CRAFTING THEIR SURVIVAL PLAN

Sales in Subodh's village are modest, so the family relies on fairs in Dhaka, Sylhet, and government-sponsored exhibitions.

"I am gearing up for Independence Day, the Zainul Mela, and other fairs in Dhaka this December. These events are essential for our survival," he says.

These seemingly insignificant clay dolls, tepa putul, once found across pastoral Bangladesh, along with other artisanal items, have now become part of our lost craft heritage.

Bijli and Subodh express deep gratitude to the organisers of the Zainul Mela and the Charukala (Fine Arts) authorities, who offer food, lodging, respect, and excellent sales opportunities – almost a lifeline for niche crafts.

"They value us the most. Without such fairs, our craft would have gone extinct years ago," they say.

"If Charukala stops including clay dolls in their fairs, we will lose

everything," Bijli warns.

The challenges facing mrit shilpo are many. The widespread use of plastic for household items has eroded the market for clay products. Cooking pots, bowls, plates, and even matir chari – large clay tubs used for feeding cattle – have all been replaced by plastic alternatives.

Clay items are becoming rare, and their value is diminishing.

The financial strain on artisans remains a pressing issue. It takes almost three days of labour to complete one large doll. Every step is done by hand – moulding, polishing, finishing, and designing – and even collecting raw clay requires effort. River silt, once freely available, now requires payment to collect.

Most potters work independently, stocking items for yearly fairs, which remain their primary income source. Commissioned orders are rare. This raises the hard questions: how do they manage daily expenses, or pay helpers?

"The truth is, if I don't work, I don't eat. Courier services refuse to take responsibility for fragile clay items, which limits distribution and our income," Subodh says.

Clay crafts require time and artistic freedom. Electric wheels may help with larger items like pitchers or tubs, but they cannot replace the artisan's touch. Delicate work still relies entirely on hand finishing and creative insight.

Tepa putul is more than craftwork; it is a heritage skill passed down through generations. Subodh showed me an archetype of the first tepa putul made by his great grandfather. The red-fired clay figure had only a pressed outline and simple dots for eyes. Over generations, intricate designs were added, shaping the doll we recognise today.

Subodh believes his son will eventually add his own creativity to this age-old tradition.

The story of Subodh and Bijli is emblematic of Bangladesh's endangered mrit shilpo. Their words reflect resilience and vulnerability. They reveal a devotion to craft despite low margins, cultural neglect, and systemic obstacles.

This tradition is sustained by festivals, a fragile network of artisans, and the stubborn persistence of those who refuse to let crafts like tepa putul vanish.

It is a way of life rooted in joy, patience, and heritage. Unfortunately, its future is threatened by rapid urbanisation and the social turmoil of the present.



What the new labour ordinance means for workers

In conversation with Taslima Akhter, President of Garments Workers Solidarity and Member of the NTCC and Labour Reform Commission 2024

Several important demands and long-standing aspirations of workers remain unfulfilled. For example, despite repeated calls from workers, the national minimum wage commission and a framework for determining a national minimum wage were not included in the ordinance.

The Daily Star (TDS): How do you assess the Labour Ordinance 2025?

Taslima Akhter (TA): A large proportion of those who lost their lives in the 2024 mass uprising were working people. Students, workers, and women – thousands sacrificed their lives, and we believe that the 2024 mass uprising laid the foundation for the Labour Ordinance 2025.

A total of 125 sections have been amended or revised in the ordinance. In my view, the interim government has attempted to strike a balance between the demands of both workers and owners. Although some disagreements remain between the two sides, whatever progress has been achieved is, I believe, significant for workers and for the labour sector as a whole.

For the first time, National Tripartite Consultative Council (NTCC), formed after the mass uprising, had the opportunity, space, and sincerity to work free from political influence. The NTCC brought together the views of workers, employers, and the government. In the past, the NTCC had never spent so much time or held such extensive discussions on labour law.

TDS: How will the Ordinance be implemented?

TA: This Ordinance now functions



PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

advancement of workers and the labour sector, the government and both parties – workers and employers – must undertake extensive outreach so the law can be applied properly. The language of the labour law remains so complex that even educated people struggle to understand it, let alone workers. It is urgently necessary to simplify its legal terminology and present the law clearly in Bangla so that everyone can grasp and apply it.

TDS: Do you think the Ordinance will meaningfully expand workers' rights and opportunities?

TA: Let me begin with some of the gains that have received less attention. One of our key proposals was to replace the word *mohila* with *nari* throughout the labour law. The word *mohila* originates from *mohol*, the inner quarters of traditional households, and historically reinforced the notion that women's work holds lesser value. Both employers and workers agreed to this change. In the Labour Ordinance 2025, the word *nari* has now been substituted for *mohila* across the law.

This time, a new clause – 345A – has been introduced to prohibit discrimination against workers. Here, discrimination refers to any form of distinction, exclusion, or lesser treatment based on race, colour, gender, religion, political opinion, nationality, social status, or disability – practices that undermine equality of opportunity and treatment at work. Alongside the existing clause on equal pay for equal work, new clauses 345A, 345B, and 345C have been added to expand and clarify the definitions and forms of discrimination.

Section 332, previously titled Behaviour towards women, has been renamed to emphasise the responsibility of all to prevent violence in the world of work and at the workplace. Although we repeatedly submitted written recommendations to replace subjective terms such as decency, modesty, and obscenity, those changes were not adopted. However, a new section – 332A – establishes committees for the resolution of discrimination, violence, and harassment, in line with the 2009 High Court guidelines and our long-standing demands. In addition, Clause 12(b) of Section 2 has incorporated a definition of gender-based violence and harassment in the workplace. These changes also align with ILO Convention 190.

At the same time, Bangladesh has ratified a total of three ILO conventions – Convention No. 190 and Conventions Nos. 155 and 187 (both of which aim to ensure workers' safety, health, and protection in the workplace, though they differ in emphasis and scope). The core principles of these conventions have also been reflected in our national laws.

TDS: Union registration can now begin with just 20 workers. Employers fear this may create instability. What is your view?

TA: I don't see it that way. In fact, I believe the new Ordinance will enhance workers' freedom of association and help stabilise the labour sector. Workers will be able to negotiate in a more democratic work environment.

It also provides a pathway for Bangladesh to move past longstanding

ILO complaints. Ultimately, a stable workforce and improved workplace relations will encourage foreign investment.

For many years, the workers have demanded easing registration requirements and shifting from percentage-based requirements to a fixed numerical threshold. Under the old law, union registration required the consent of 20% of workers in an establishment and 30% in an industrial group. The entire process had become highly politicised.

The Ordinance now allows union formation across five tiers:

- 20 to 300 workers = 20 members
- 301 to 500 workers = 40 members
- 501 to 1,500 workers = 100 members
- 1,501 to 3,000 workers = 300 members
- Above 3,000 workers = 400 members

Other registration conditions have also been simplified. Although some complexities remain, the process is now far easier than before.

TDS: What other important additions or deletions do you see in the Ordinance?

TA: Several significant changes have been made among the 125 amended sections. Some notable ones include:

- Bangladesh has approximately 7.5-8 crore (75-80 million) workers, of whom only 15% were legally recognised as "workers". The demand for recognising all workers and ensuring social protection was raised in both the Labour Commission and the NTCC, though not fully achieved. However, for the first time, domestic workers have been recognised as workers (Section

2/9B). This is a major step forward, allowing domestic workers to form organisations.

- Section 118(1): Festival holidays have increased from 11 to 13 days.

- Minimum wage, Section 139(6): Instead of revision every five years, wages must now be revised every three years.

- Death compensation (Section 19): Eligibility has been reduced from two years of continuous service to one year.

- Lay-off compensation (Section 16): Previously required one year of continuous service; now workers will qualify after three months.

- Resignation benefits (Section 27/4): Previously, anyone with less than five consecutive years of service received no benefits. Now:

- o After one year of service: 7 days' wages per year

- o From 3 to 10 years: 15 days' wages per year

- o More than 10 years: 30 days' wages per year or gratuity

- Employment Injury Scheme Fund (Section 151A): A new fund will be established for compensation due to workplace accidents.

- Provident Fund is now mandatory in establishments with 100 or more workers. Earlier, it was optional.

- The definition of worker has been expanded, Section 2(65).

TDS: What key issues were left out of the Ordinance?

TA: Several important demands and long-standing aspirations of workers remain unfulfilled. For example, despite repeated calls from workers, the national minimum wage commission and a framework for determining a national minimum wage were not included in the ordinance.

Maternity leave still remains discriminatory across the public and private sectors. Government employees receive 180 days of leave. We had proposed extending maternity leave to 180 days for all workers. Instead, the existing 112 days have been increased to only 120 days – a mere eight-day rise.

Even after the tragedies of Rana Plaza and Tazreen, demands to revise compensation standards were not fulfilled. The current Ordinance has not clearly defined or increased penalties for deaths caused by negligence or for structural killings.

We believe it is unrealistic to expect all demands to be met at once. The amendment of 125 sections is already a major achievement in our legislative history and sets a new precedent. Reforming labour laws is an ongoing process.

The interview was taken by Md Raihan Raju of The Daily Star.



Taslima Akhter

as law. After the election, the newly elected parliament will begin the process of converting the Ordinance into permanent legislation. Until then, this is the law – and it must not remain confined to paper. Practical implementation must begin now.

Issues raised by us or by employers, where we still have questions or objections, should be addressed through continued engagement in the coming days. The interim government must quickly take initiatives during its remaining tenure to clarify the ambiguous areas through rules and regulations.

At the same time, for the

SONGS OF THE SOUL

Baul Binoy Sutradhar's inner world

SAIFUR RABBI

Across rural Bangladesh, far from the attention of cities and cultural institutions, countless artists live lives of quiet brilliance. They create not for recognition but out of devotion – shaping songs, verses, and stories that nurture the inner life of their communities. Their work enriches the nation, yet their names remain unknown. Among these luminous but unsung figures is Binoy Chandra Sutradhar, a Baul whose creativity has flourished in silence for decades.

Locally, Binoy is known as a charan-kobi – a wandering bard whose songs carry the pulse of the land. The soil he walks on, the colours and rhythms of village life, the rituals and faiths that shape rural Bangladesh, even the mysteries of creation and the Creator – all of these find their way into his music. He writes the songs he sings, and he sings the world he inhabits.

Born in 1954 in Paikpara Union under Chunarughat Upazila of Habiganj district, Binoy was the son of a local farmer, Sudhir Chandra Sutradhar, and Snehahata Sutradhar. Before he was even seven, he lost his father, a loss that cast the family into deep hardship. His education ended at Class Five in the village pathshala, after which he was compelled into carpentry.

Binoy's initiation into music was almost accidental – humming to himself as he travelled from village to village for carpentry work, and lingering to watch kavigan performances on his way home. Raised in a deeply spiritual household, he developed a love for devotional songs.

In his own union, Abdul Mannan Chairman – a beloved local singer whose



Baul Binoy Chandra Sutradhar performs with his ensemble during a village music gathering.

songs explored nature, humanity, and love – became his first mentor. After completing his daily carpentry work, Binoy would attend Mannan Chairman's musical gatherings, immersing himself in the songs and their contemplative depth. Years of patient practice eventually made him Mannan Chairman's dedicated violinist, performing beside him at village gatherings – playing the violin, lending his voice, and slowly entering the wider world of music.

Through his mentorship, Binoy absorbed Baul and folk traditions. He also began

taking part in kirtan and Haribasara sessions in village temples. In these gatherings, he learned various classical devotional forms – Chandidas, Dwijkanai, Ramprasad, among others – and soon he began performing in religious assemblies. Encouraged by local admirers who recognised his promise, he pursued studies in grammar and poetics, and with community support attained formal recognition in devotional scholarship, further enriching his musical stature.

Binoy undertook work on the medieval poet Chandidas' padavali kirtan, reviving

several lost compositions. Performing these lyrical masterpieces – rich in literary value and rendered with refined melody, rhythm, and cadence – he earned widespread acclaim from devotees and enthusiasts alike.

The relationship between humanity and nature, Creator and creation, profoundly shaped Binoy's philosophy. Inspired by Mannan Chairman, he began composing his own songs. Themes such as human love, the identity of humankind beyond religious boundaries, communal harmony, universal spirituality, the wonder of creation and social crises occupy central places in his work.

Among his notable compositions are:

- Keno aslam ei mayar deshe, dinbandhure, keno aslam ei mayar deshe
- Khodar naam roiyacho bhuliya, sonar Adam
- Keu hobe na sange sathi
- Shikkha jatir merudanda, shikkha jatir pran...

– Tumi anadir adi, probhu Niranjan, giyecho brahmand srijija doyal... He has written nearly a thousand songs to date, many of which are now performed by his disciples in various cultural gatherings. Yet none of his works have been formally compiled or published – they exist only as handwritten manuscripts. He has expressed his sincere hope that someone with goodwill and initiative will help preserve his oeuvre in book form.

When asked about the philosophy that anchors his life and music, Binoy said that everything begins with recognising the divinity within oneself. "Divine energy resides within every being," he explained. "Real spiritual attainment begins with knowing oneself. The great

sages – from the charyapad poets to Lalou, and from Nazrul to Tagore, and down to Baul Karim of the Bhati region – all shared one essential teaching: know yourself, recognise yourself, love one another."

His thoughts drifted to the present world – fractured by tension, mistrust, and relentless conflict.

"Today's troubled world is consumed by conflict – communal hatred, interpersonal violence, selfishness, greed. If we can discover our true selves, we discover the Creator, who lives within us. His voice, His tune – these are expressions of our own soul. Our failure to know ourselves is the root of our suffering."

Binoy's spiritual reflections sit alongside the quietly weathered realities of his own life. The father of six children, he spoke candidly of the hardships he endured – the dreams he held for his children, and the financial struggles that shadowed those dreams. Through loans, labour, and sacrifice, he managed to arrange their marriages. What he could not give in wealth, he tried to give in values.

"I only hoped they would grow into good human beings," he said simply.

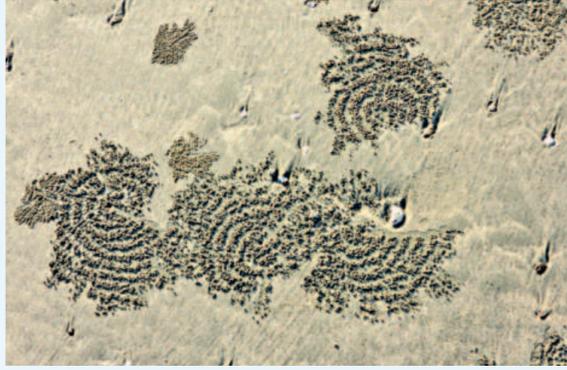
In the end, when asked what he wished for himself, his answer was characteristically unadorned – a reflection of the man he has always been.

"I am an insignificant man," he said softly. "I want to live by the simple identity of being human. I sing my own songs, compose my own tunes, and try to offer society a message of harmony. I want to continue my musical struggle for a world built on love, peace, and serenity."

Saifur Rabbi is a contributor to Slow Reads, The Daily Star.



A beautiful lagoon has formed inside the middle island of the Cheradia islands, where birds take refuge.



Artworks of sand bubbler or soldier crabs.



Raha Forest, mainly formed of Lummitzera racemosa dwarf mangrove trees, occurs only at the southern stony tip of the main island. This is a unique feature of the island.

SAINT MARTIN'S ISLAND IS DYING

Can we still save it?

REZA KHAN

Saint Martin's Island — often romanticised as Bangladesh's "coral island" — is today a fragile, degraded ecosystem pushed to the edge by decades of governmental neglect, unregulated development, and unchecked tourism. Contrary to widespread belief, the island is not naturally a coral island, but rather a coral-bearing ecosystem whose unique geology and biodiversity once made it a national jewel. That ecological asset is now severely degraded, much of it the result of preventable impacts.

A PARADISE LOST THROUGH YEARS OF MISMANAGEMENT

When I first visited the island in 1980, Saint Martin's had barely 3,000 residents, a single dilapidated cyclone shelter, and only a few hundred winter visitors. Today, the population has swelled to nearly 12,000, with hundreds of thousands of tourists arriving each season — an influx the island was never ecologically equipped to manage.

Despite a long-standing ban on construction, government offices, hotels, chalets, and private houses continue to mushroom illegally. Freshwater ponds, mangrove patches, native groves, lagoons, and sandstone boulder fields have been bulldozed or looted. Centuries-old coral rocks — some taller than a person — have been removed for construction, leaving the shoreline exposed to erosion and storm surges.

Overfishing has nearly emptied the surrounding waters, forcing restaurants and resorts to import fish from the mainland during peak season. Uncontrolled mass tourism has turned the island into a dumping ground for plastic and polythene waste, with little meaningful government clean-up or enforcement.

The result is a landscape where the natural defences that once protected the island are now dismantled, replaced by chaotic, profit-driven development that serves neither residents nor the environment.

A FAILURE TO MANAGE THE ISLAND'S MOST BASIC NEEDS

The island sits on an impenetrable shell-shaped bedrock, which traps rainwater underground — a fragile hydrological system that once sustained both people and wildlife. But with thousands of homes and an explosion of tourist facilities using toilets and washrooms, human waste now has nowhere to go. Sewage cannot seep into the sea; instead, it infiltrates shallow groundwater sources used for drinking, cooking, and bathing.

Unprocessed wastewater, agricultural chemicals, and insecticides are accumulating in the soil — a looming public health disaster that the government has yet to address with any seriousness.

Meanwhile, erosion, saltwater intrusion, and rising high-tide levels have destroyed croplands, flooded homes,

and overwhelmed freshwater sources. Many areas that once supported natural vegetation can no longer grow crops at all.

For years, the island has needed real management, full-time conservation staff, enforcement, and planning. Instead, it has received fragmented policies, weak enforcement, short-term fixes, and political interference that prioritises tourism revenue over ecological survival.

A RARE POSITIVE STEP: THE NINE-MONTH VISITOR BAN

Despite decades of mismanagement, the government — specifically the Environmental Adviser — took a bold and commendable step in 2025 by imposing a nine-month ban on tourist entry from February to October. This decision, although long overdue, allowed the island's battered ecosystems a chance to breathe. And the results were visible:

Flourishing vegetation

Keora or screw pine (Pandanus), Raha Bon or Lummitzera racemosa, Baen or Avicennia marina, Premna odorata, Bola or Hibiscus tiliaceus, Pipul or Thespesia populnea, Nishinda or Vitex trifolia, and other native plant species have rebounded noticeably in villages, fallows, open fields, and old coral-boulder zones.

Renewed life on the beaches

Tiny beach crabs — bubbler and soldier crabs — have returned, reshaping the sand with their intricate beadwork as the tide recedes. Their artwork was quite visible, as many tourist-empty beaches had excessive accumulations of shells, corals, and flotsam. Crabs were at home there too, while birds were busy munching on some of them.

Marine revival

On November 22, 2025, an Olive Ridley turtle nested earlier than usual — a hopeful sign that reduced human disturbance has improved beach conditions. One Ridley mother laid 115 eggs in a nest. These eggs were removed by environmental workers and deposited in artificial turtle nests at hatcheries within the premises of the Environment Department. Once hatched, all hatchlings will be released back to the sea after 60 to 100 days of laying.

Vegetation recovery on Cheradia

The southern two islands of the Cheradia cluster, usually overcrowded by tourists and noise, have shown the strongest ecological recovery due to the extended quiet period. There has been excessive

growth of native plants in the three disjunct islands jointly called Cheradia or Sera Dwip, representing the south-easternmost corner of the country.

These positive outcomes prove a simple truth: when humans step back, Saint Martin's heals itself.

The challenge now is whether the government will use this momentum to implement real, permanent protection — or allow the island to slide back towards irreversible damage.

PERSISTENT PROBLEMS: SIGNS OF CONTINUED NEGLIGENCE

Despite the ban, illegal construction still continues. Bright lights from shoreline resorts continue to disorient turtle hatchlings. The island's exploding stray dog population threatens nesting turtles, digs up eggs, and disrupts wildlife. Rubbish continues to pile up, despite cosmetic or half-hearted clean-up attempts.

These failures highlight a deeper issue: Saint Martin's still lacks a functioning management system. The island needs full-time conservation personnel, trained wildlife wardens, real enforcement authority, and science-based regulations — not seasonal restrictions and symbolic declarations.

WHAT MUST BE DONE IMMEDIATELY

The survival of Saint Martin's now depends on urgent, science-backed, enforceable action:

Environmental management

- Daily, mandatory trash collection and proper disposal following national and international protocols
- Ban all motorised vehicles, buggies, and motorcycles on beaches and near coral-bearing rock zones
- Prohibit boats from anchoring outside designated areas
- Impose a permanent ban on concrete construction, except essential jetties, cyclone shelters, and harbours
- Mandatory use of solar power and rainwater harvesting
- A mini desalination or mobile desalination plant must be established for supplying freshwater to the residents and the limited visitors
- All organic waste and sewage outputs must be treated and composted as fertilisers to be used by the islanders for manuring crop and vegetable fields
- Construct a proper harbour for fishing boat landing and for anchoring local boats — effectively a "cyclone shelter" for boats
- A wildlife/biodiversity volunteer force should be established by involving local

school and madrasah students, as well as unemployed youth, to work as vigilantes supporting environmental and wildlife managers

- Shopkeepers and villagers need to be trained in the judicious use of water, electricity, and in sorting trash into proper containers

- There must be strict prohibition on the utilisation of all forms of stones on the island and in the nearshore area

- Visitors must not be allowed to carry any object or article of Saint Martin's origin, and no shop should be permitted to sell items made of shells or corals

- Villagers need to be trained in making handicrafts and curios from limited quantities of dead shells and flotsam collected from designated beaches under strict control. These can be sold in specially marked stalls to be manned by local men or women. All products must bear a Saint Martin's seal of approval issued by the Environment Department

- To prevent wave surges and saline-water intrusion, a thick wall of Keora forest must be created along the island's boundary, with an inner layer of Nishinda (Vitex trifolia) plantation

- The government must not plant any exotic plant species outside private compounds. The Environment Department must immediately remove the coconut and Acacia saplings it has planted in the central of the three Cheradia islands

- All existing lagoon mouths should be excavated so that both tides can reach the furthest ends of each lagoon. There must not be any construction of buildings or other structures within the perimeters of the lagoon. This will prevent stagnant water from expelling foul odours and becoming breeding grounds for mosquitoes. It will also encourage good fish breeding, which in turn attracts birds

Wildlife protection

- Declare all three Cheradia islands a strict "No-Go Zone," except for researchers and authorised officials

- Ban all fishing within one kilometre of the island

- Remove or sterilise stray dogs; strictly regulate domestic dogs through registration, leashing, and vaccination

- Remove sandbags from turtle-nesting beaches and ensure 24/7 protection of turtle nests

- Ensure round-the-clock patrolling and wildlife monitoring by trained government staff

Sustainable tourism

- Enforce the 2,000-visitor daily limit as is currently done

- All residents, vendors, and researchers should have permanent passes to ensure movement to and from the island, Shahparir Dwip, or Teknaf

- All local boats must have Saint Martin's registration

- Continue the February–October closure annually — ideally from March to October. During this period, the poorer segment of islanders should be provided with subsidies, as is done for Hilsa fishers on the mainland

- Mandate QR-coded passes and approved tourist vessels only

- Ban night-time lights, noise, and beach activities

- Strictly prohibit harming or disturbing marine turtles, crabs, corals, birds, and other wildlife

- Ban polythene and aggressively limit single-use plastics

- For internal movement through designated brick-lined roads, solar-powered or battery-led three-wheelers may be permitted

THE TIME FOR HALF-MEASURES IS OVER

The people of Bangladesh — and future generations — deserve to inherit a living, breathing Saint Martin's Island, not a degraded skeleton of what it once was. While the nine-month visitor ban has produced measurable ecological benefits, it is not enough. Protecting this island requires political will, long-term planning, and a permanent, science-based management system backed by adequate funding and year-round enforcement.

Saint Martin's is not just a tourism spot. It is a national ecological heritage site. Its loss would be irreversible — and history will judge those who failed to act when action was still possible. The government must decide: Will it save Saint Martin's Island, or will it preside over its collapse? The window for saving this unique ecosystem is narrow — but it is still open.

Dr Reza Khan is a wildlife biologist and conservationist with over four decades of experience in wildlife research, zoo management, and biodiversity conservation in Bangladesh and the United Arab Emirates. He has worked extensively in wildlife rescue, sanctuary management, and community-based conservation initiatives.



Pacific Golden Plover resting at the lagoon.



Tourist facilities occupying the west beach of Saint Martin's Island, where marine turtles lay their eggs.



JAFLONG KHASIA PUNJI

Touring more like a local, less like a tourist

Stay briefly with the ethnic people, explore their culture, music, and cuisine, and support community-led tourism and livelihoods

In recent years, community-based tourism (CBT) has gained global recognition as a sustainable alternative to mass travel. In traditional tourism, a large share of profit often leaves local hands. But CBT keeps visitors within indigenous communities. Guests stay in homestays, experience the culture directly and buy local goods

TANGILA TASNIM

The fastest way to sense the pulse of a place is to meet its people. Arrange a stay in their home, and you might leave with a friendship that lasts a lifetime. This is the kind of experience unfolding inside the clustered households of the Khasia punji at Jallong in Sylhet.

Travellers already know Jallong for its flowing river, vast stone beds and the grand view of the Meghalaya hills. Many drive to the northeastern city of Sylhet, head further north to Jallong, visit the scenic Khasia settlement near the Bangladesh-India border, then return to the town for the night.

Nowadays, a different welcome awaits. On the banks of the Piyain river, the punji, meaning village, has opened its door to visitors early this year.

Guests now can enjoy the quiet of the hills, listen to Khasia music in the evening, taste home cooking, stay overnight and immerse themselves in the life of the community more like a local than a passing tourist.

The experience begins almost immediately upon arrival.

By the riverside, a group of Khasia hosts may already be waiting. From here, the trek starts. The path winds through patches of forest where sunlight slips in thin, soft beams.

The punji soon appears, a cluster of houses raised on stilts. A member of



PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

there is cycling. Boating caters to those who prefer calm. Evening brings cultural performances, where songs rise into the night and linger long after they fade.

A NEW KIND OF TRAVEL

In recent years, community-based tourism (CBT) has gained global recognition as a sustainable alternative to mass travel.

In traditional tourism, a large share of profit often leaves local hands. But CBT keeps visitors within indigenous communities. Guests stay in homestays, experience the culture directly and buy local goods.

The result is fairer income for marginalised groups and protection of their identity. Success here is measured not only by numbers but by fairness, community voice, youth opportunity and the safeguarding of biodiversity.

Inside the punji, the homestay experience opens a window into a world many Bangladeshis know only from schoolbooks. Guests receive a traditional welcome, learn about Khasia customs and stay in rooms priced between Tk 1,500 and Tk 2,500 a night.

Life in the punji offers a rare look at matrilineal Khasia society, where women play central roles in household leadership, in governance and as guardians of property and lineage. Visitors share meals – both Begali and local dishes – with host families, join evening bonfires and listen to stories that carry generations of memory.

The Destination Management Committee (DMC), made up of local representatives, organises cultural performances that showcase authentic Khasia music, dance and storytelling.

Apart from homestays, tourists explore the Khasia Museum, attend weaving workshops and visit historic sites including the palace of the Jainta King and Nokslar Jamindar Palace.

Nature lovers find waterfalls such as the scenic Mayabi Waterfall, quiet tea gardens and the clear waters of the Dawki River. Activities include boating and fishing on the Piyain river, guided treks through Mokampunji, cycling routes, orchard walks, betel leaf gardens and forest trails that mix adventure with culture.

A MEMORABLE VISIT

For visitor Jannatul Maowa, who travelled the punji and took a homestay,

the memory was transformative.

"Since it was my first time staying in a homestay, the experience felt truly mesmerising," she said. "Sharing a roof and having meals with people I had only read about in my childhood Bangladesh studies book felt almost surreal."

"What impressed me most was their warm and friendly hospitality, as well as the innocence and sincerity of the tour guides who stayed with us throughout the trip," said Jannatul.

"And of course, the scenic beauty of the selfie zone, a bamboo platform where visitors can sit with the majestic Meghalaya mountains standing like a silent guard behind, made the experience even more unforgettable," she added.

Every visitor who arrives strengthens this growing network. Homestay owners, guides, artisans, transport workers, cooks and young entrepreneurs all earn a share.

Although the community began hosting visitors only in April and financial records are still being gathered, early benefits are already visible.

The DMC ensures that tourism remains safe, beneficial to locals and genuine. It oversees homestay standards, guest reception, cultural events, sanitation, waste management and fair revenue sharing.

By creating jobs for youth and women in guiding, hospitality, food services, cycling, boat hire and crafts, the committee keeps tourism income within the punji, lifting living standards and strengthening the local economy.

A COMMUNITY STEPS FORWARD

Welcome Lymba, headman of the punji and secretary of the DMC, recalled a long path to change.

"Jallong has seen tourists for decades, yet our community never benefited because we had no knowledge, training, or infrastructure for tourism. After 65 meetings, we realised that community-based tourism could protect our culture while improving livelihoods."

With help from the Tourism Board

and development partners, families are preparing homestays, upgrading basic facilities and learning hospitality skills. Challenges remain, including financial limits, guest security and proper washrooms, but the momentum is clear.

"With continued support," he said, "we hope to build a sustainable, community-led future for our punji."

The ProGRESS Project, a joint initiative of the government and the International Labour Organization (ILO) funded by Canada, supports this initiative. It strengthens the local economy, preserves indigenous culture, creates opportunities for youth and women and encourages entrepreneurship.

Through training, stronger institutions and better coordination, ProGRESS aims to turn Khasia punji into a sustainable tourism destination.

Twelve guides have been trained so far, with more support underway.

Alexius Chicham, senior programme officer at ILO Bangladesh, said, "From our observation that tourists often visit but locals do not benefit, we planned to promote community-based tourism in Khasia punji and train locals as tour guides. If fully implemented, this can help the tourism industry generate real economic gains."

One of the newly trained guides is Sevenly Khongstei, who welcomes visitors.

"When tourists arrive, our job begins right at the riverbank. We receive them, welcome them, and guide them into the community," he said.

The punji receives both homestay guests and day visitors. Homestay guests are welcomed with paan supari garlands and a drink before exploring the museum, nature trails, Lama punji, cycling routes and cultural shows. Day visitors enjoy a shorter version of the experience.

Sevenly said international interest is rising from France, Italy, the United States and beyond, with many surprised to see community-led tourism thriving in such a remote area. The guide team

includes seven women and five men, mostly students or recent graduates.

NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH, WOMEN

Before CBT, many in the ethnic community were unemployed or had left school. Sevenly himself, an accounting graduate from Sylhet Government College, acknowledged the change.

"None of us knew guiding could be a profession. Now we earn a small but steady income, which supports our families. Tourism has given us confidence, new communication skills, and a different understanding of our own culture."

As homestay tourism expands, Jallong's infrastructure has improved to some extent as well. Roads, sanitation and waste management are becoming better.

Older Khasia residents often reflect that visitors once came and went while their lives stayed unchanged. Today, that is beginning to change.

CBT advances several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by reducing poverty, empowering women, creating jobs, supporting small enterprises and encouraging eco-friendly practices. It aligns with Bangladesh's ambition for sustainable growth, linking tourism with rural development and cultural preservation.

Similar CBT efforts are emerging in Kamalganj in Moulvibazar, Kalinchi in Shyamnagar and Kagajikhola in Bandarban with assistance from the Bangladesh Tourism Board and UNDP Bangladesh.

Kabil Mian, deputy director of the Bangladesh Tourism Board, believes CBT can deepen inclusion. "Community-based tourism can help bring marginalised groups like the Khasia into the mainstream economy. Our goal is to encourage tourists to visit the Khasia punji, learn about their culture, and ensure the community benefits financially."

According to the official, many people fear entering ethnic settlements, and the communities themselves feel unsure about hosting outsiders.

"The Tourism Board is acting as a bridge, training local guides, improving facilities and supporting homestays, so both visitors and residents gain confidence, and the area can develop into a sustainable tourism site," he added.



the host family greets you with paan-supari and a garland.

The village is tidy, unlike many rural scenes elsewhere. One-storey homes here are above the ground to keep out dampness and insects.

Climb the stairs to your room. It is simple: a bed, a table, a light, a fan, an attached washroom and, to your surprise, a functioning Wi-Fi. Feels like almost nothing unnecessary, yet nothing is missing.

Leave your bags and take a moment. A Khasia guide, often a young resident of the punji, is usually waiting outside. The first stop is the Khasia Museum, followed by other attractions.

For those who want a quicker pace,