

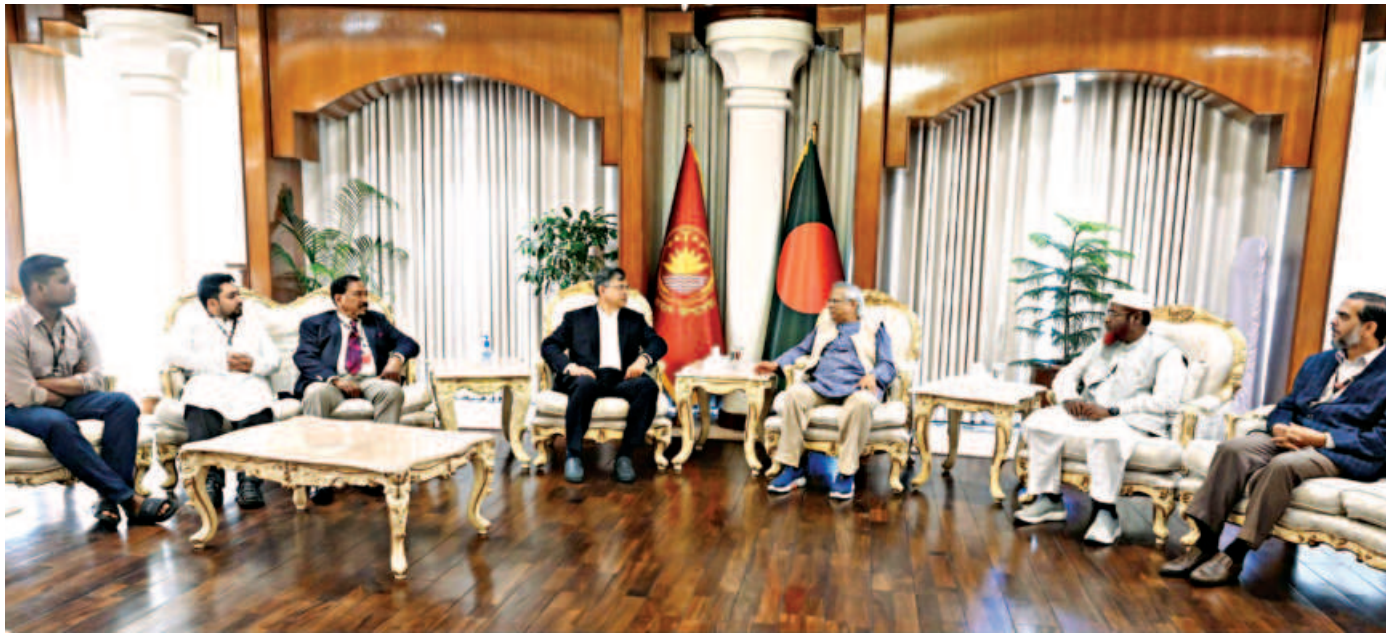
## 'IS attack' kills 3 US personnel in Syria; 3 hurt

REUTERS

Two US Army soldiers and a civilian interpreter were killed in Syria yesterday by a suspected Islamic State attacker who targeted a convoy of American and Syrian forces before being shot dead, the US military said.

The attack was barely a month after Syria announced it had signed an agreement with the US led coalition against IS, which coincided with Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa's visit to White House.

The attacker was a member of the Syrian security forces, three local officials told Reuters.



Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus at a meeting with leaders of BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, and National Citizen Party at the State Guest House Jamuna in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

## Khaleda's condition remains unchanged

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia remains in critical condition in the intensive care unit of Evercare Hospital in Dhaka, where she has been receiving treatment for the past 20 days. The BNP Media Cell said last night that her condition stays unchanged.

The former PM has been placed on "elective ventilator support" to help rest her lungs and other organs, according to her doctors on Thursday.

Khaleda has developed several additional complications, including ineffective endocarditis, acute pancreatitis, and severe bacterial and fungal infections.

On Thursday, her medical board confirmed that she is also undergoing regular dialysis due to kidney dysfunction. Doctors diagnosed acute pancreatitis on November 27, and treatment for it is ongoing.

Khaleda, 80, has long been battling multiple health complications, including liver cirrhosis, arthritis, diabetes, and chronic issues affecting her kidneys, lungs, heart, and eyes.



## Shooting spate raises concerns

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Mamun was gunned down and killed near the Dhaka Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court in Old Dhaka. Also in November, Jubo Dal leader Golam Kibria was murdered in Dhaka's Pallabi, while listed criminal Sarwar Hossain Babla was killed in Chattogram.

Police sources say several top-listed criminals, released on bail after the August 5 changeover, have reactivated their gangs and contributed to the recent spike in violent crimes.

There have also been concerns over missing weapons looted during the July uprising last year, when at least 5,753 firearms and 651,609 rounds of ammunition were taken from police stations and outposts across the country.

Although most of the firearms (4,426) and ammunition (around 395,000 rounds) have been recovered, the rest are yet to be retrieved, said AHM Shahadat Hossain, assistant inspector general (media) at Police Headquarters.

Tawohidul Haque, an associate professor at the Institute of Social Welfare and Research at Dhaka University, said that despite a number of attacks and intra-party clashes ahead of the announcement of the election schedule, law enforcers failed to take proactive measures.

"The agencies are not effectively addressing the challenges, and there is also underutilisation of resources at various levels. This encourages criminals to act with impunity," he told The Daily Star yesterday, underscoring the need for preventive measures as the election nears.

Ashraf Huda, a former inspector general of police, pointed out that intelligence failure is a key factor behind the surge in crimes.

"Every incident in this country has happened due to intelligence failure. Unfortunately, the performance of our intelligence agencies is not up to the mark," he told this paper yesterday.

Political parties have also voiced concerns in the wake of the recent shootings, especially after the assassination bid on Hadi, who is now undergoing treatment at Evercare Hospital. They also questioned the government's ability to rein in violence and targeted killings.

BNP Standing Committee member Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain called out the government's failure to recover illegal firearms. "It poses a serious risk to law and order ahead of the elections," he told The Daily Star on Friday.

National Citizen Party Convener Nahid Islam echoed his view and said the government is "consistently failing" to provide adequate security to the public.

"If the government cannot provide security or bring the perpetrators to book, we will have to take action against them," he told reporters on Friday, after visiting Hadi at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

He warned that the government's failure to act could lead to further unrest and jeopardise the safety of political activists and the general public.

The lack of security, especially for those involved in political activism, has added to fears, Nahid said, highlighting the increasing threats to those who participated in the July uprising and the families of the martyrs.

"The safety of the general public is also at risk due to the government's failure to control law and order."

Contacted, Khondoker Rafiqul Islam, additional inspector general (crime and operations) at Police Headquarters, said they have already started preparing a list of criminals across the country. "We will decide on the next course of action once the list is finalised," he said.

Omar Faruk, a professor at Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University, said the rise in crimes reflects the police force's weakness and its ongoing struggle to regain public confidence.

Several listed criminals, out on bail after the August 5 changeover, are now committing crimes, including murder and kidnapping. Many are linked to political leaders seeking to exert influence in the run-up to the election, he said.

"If the rising trend in crimes continues, it may be difficult for police to maintain law and order during the next polls."

### CRIMES REMAIN HIGH

The interim government has repeatedly insisted that law and order has steadily improved since the uprising, but the situation on the ground belies the claim.

Murders in broad daylight, muggings, and extortion persist, while the re-emergence of underground gangs has stoked public fears.

Data from Police Headquarters show that major crimes rose sharply in the first 10 months of this year.

For example, murder cases rose to 3,230 between January and October this year from 3,017 during the same

period in 2024. Dacoity and robbery cases also jumped to 2,257 from 1,492.

Kidnapping cases nearly doubled during the same period – from 501 to 921 – while burglary and theft cases jumped to 10,714 from 7,210. Cases involving crimes against women and children rose to 18,947 from 14,914.

Data from rights organisation Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) show a rise in mob violence over the past year. At least 165 people were killed by mobs between January and October this year, while the number was 96 from August to December in 2024, it said. Dhaka division saw 72 deaths – the highest – followed by 28 in Chattogram.

According to PHQ records, police members themselves have come under at least 723 attacks by mobs or suspected criminals in the 15 months since August 2024, with 531 of them occurring this year alone.

On October 4, for example, an additional superintendent of police was injured in Narsingdi when a mob attacked officers and snatched away two suspects detained for extorting money from vehicles.

Hours later, police launched a drive and arrested seven people after a case was filed over the assault.

The same day, three law enforcers were assaulted and a police vehicle was vandalised by a mob in Sylhet as they tried to rescue a man who allegedly recorded a video on a mobile phone without permission. Additional forces had to be deployed at the scene to bring the situation under control. Later, eight people were arrested.

"Officers are still coming under attack while carrying out their duties. In some cases, they are confined to their stations by mobs demanding the release of detainees," Inspector General of Police Baharul Alam told The Daily Star on December 6.

"How could one expect the force to operate at full capacity under such circumstances?" he added.

He also said that many of the cases filed in recent months involve incidents that occurred during the tenure of the previous government. This means the current figures do not fully reflect the recent crime situation.

Asked about law and order, the police chief said, "I am trying to rebuild confidence among officers so that they play their due role in maintaining law and order. Despite all the limitations, the force is confident that it will be able to play its due role in ensuring a free, fair, and credible election."

## EC circular omits

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9(1) of the act, they shall be disqualified from being elected or being a member of parliament.

This provision was added through an ordinance issued this October.

Election Commissioner Abdur Rahmani Masud told this newspaper the circular includes provisions from the constitution and the RPO. "Since another law imposes a bar on certain individuals from contesting, that should also be added to the circular. We will look into the matter."

He attributed the omission to officials working in haste.

Badiul Alam Majumdar, secretary of Shushashonno Jonno Nagorik and former chief of the now-defunct Electoral System Reforms Commission, said the disqualification clause in the ICT act should not only be included in the circular but also incorporated into the RPO.

Election expert and member of the reform commission Abdul Alim stressed that the provision is part of

the law and must be reflected in the circular. "If you omit this, how will people know about it? Candidates are usually not aware of the full details of the law. They learn about what qualifies and disqualifies them from the circular. They'll be confused without this, I hope the EC will amend the circular."

According to the constitution, any Bangladeshi citizen aged 25 and above is qualified to contest the national polls.

A person shall be disqualified from running if he or she is declared of unsound mind by a competent court; acquires the citizenship of, or affirms or acknowledges allegiance to, a foreign state; or has been, on conviction for a criminal offence involving moral turpitude, sentenced to imprisonment for a term of no less than two years, unless a period of five years has elapsed since release.

An aspirant will also be disqualified if he or she was convicted of any offence under the Bangladesh Collaborators

(Special Tribunals) Order, 1972; or holds any office of profit in the service of the Republic other than an office which is declared by law not to disqualify its holder and other grounds.

The RPO says a person shall be disqualified for election if he or she is not listed in the electoral roll of any constituency; has been declared a fugitive by any court; or has resigned or retired from the service of the Republic, any statutory public authority, or the defence service, unless a period of three years has elapsed since the date of resignation or retirement.

He or she will also be disqualified for being a loanee, other than that of a small loan for agricultural purposes, who has defaulted in repaying before the day of submission of nomination papers any loan or instalment taken from a bank, among other grounds.

The provision disqualifying a person declared a fugitive by any court was introduced in the latest amendment to the RPO, enacted in the first week of November.

## Nation pays homage today

FROM PAGE 1

and killed them to intellectually cripple the soon-to-be-born nation.

Various programmes by the state and different political and socio-cultural organisations have been arranged to observe the day in a befitting manner.

On the eve of the day, President Mohammed Shahabuddin and Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus issued separate messages paying deep respect to the memories of the martyred

intellectuals.

As part of the state programme, both the president and chief adviser will place wreaths at the Martyred Intellectuals Memorial in Mirpur.

People from different political and social organisations and walks of life and ages will place floral wreaths at memorials in Mirpur and Rayerbazar as well as elsewhere in the country at daybreak.

Bangladesh Radio, Bangladesh Television and private TV channels will

air special programmes highlighting the sacrifices of the intellectuals for national independence.

Moreover, special prayers and services will be held at mosques, temples, churches, pagodas, and other places of worship across the country.

To preserve the sanctity of the day, the Ministry of Liberation War Affairs has requested the public to refrain from using microphones or loudspeakers in the vicinity of the memorial at Mirpur.

## Horrors of Saidpur's intellectual massacre

FROM PAGE 1

also taken from their homes.

With these abductions, Pakistani forces began executing a calculated plan to dismantle Saidpur's intellectual leadership.

Between March 25 and 31, Pakistani soldiers, assisted by Biharis, abducted at least 20 prominent intellectuals from Saidpur, including politician and physician Dr Shamsul Haque; education patron and philanthropist Jamuna Prasad Kedia; Harihar Prasad; Dr Yakub Ali; businessman Harihar Singhania; theatre actor Aminul Haque; businessman Benarasi Lala Gupta; and senior railway officials Ayez Ali, Ashraf Ali, and Abed Ali, according to the book Balarkhail Genocide.

The abductees, it said, were taken to Saidpur Cantonment, where they were subjected to 12 to 20 days of brutal torture. On April 12, they were transported to the Balarkhail killing field near Rangpur Cantonment and

On March 16, committee members hoisted the flag of independent Bangladesh for the first time at the medical hall. On March 21, when National Assembly member Abdur Rouf arrived in Saidpur with a map-embroidered flag on his vehicle, non-Bangalee youths tore it down.

Two days later, Bangalees raised the national flag across the town, triggering widespread tension. At 4:00pm, Awami League and Jamaat-e-Islami leaders addressed a meeting at Saidpur High School under Dr Zikrul's leadership to maintain calm, but it failed. Several Bangalees were killed that day.

Rumours soon spread that Dr Zikrul had been killed. Thousands of Bangalees gathered in Saidpur on the morning of March 24 until the rumour was dispelled when he appeared before the crowd.

By then, however, tensions had escalated.

Chanting "Bangalee log ham

Iffat Zaman said her father was bathing at the time and was not even allowed to wipe himself.

On April 1, Pakistani forces arrested senior railway official and cultural figure Ayez Uddin, who had hoisted the national flag at his home days earlier. His son, journalist MR Alam Jhontu, recalled hearing boots kick their door at around 3:00am after a night of fighting. "When my father opened it, the soldiers kicked him in the chest and beat him with the ends of their rifles while dragging him to the quarter guard."

The detainees were held at the quarter guard of Saidpur Cantonment. Jhontu said his sister Asma was allowed to see them twice. "Everyone was covered in blood. Some had slashed cheeks, broken limbs, ripped-out nails, or missing fingers."

On April 11, when she brought new clothes for their father, Ayez told her to take them back, saying he and the others would be given their final bath the next day.

On the afternoon of April 12, families saw blindfolded prisoners being loaded onto military trucks. That night, Pakistani forces executed the detained intellectuals and Bangalee soldiers at the Balarkhail killing field in Nisbetganj, near Rangpur Cantonment. Three people survived and later crossed into India.

Villagers who sheltered survivors recalled the massacre. Balarkhail resident and freedom fighter Shamsuddin Azad described hearing prolonged gunfire amid heavy rain and later discovering a wounded man who told him that respected people from Saidpur had been brought there and killed. "The next morning, bodies were found hastily buried."

The killings continued from March to June.

On March 23, Biharis murdered Maniruzzaman, paint-in-charge at the Saidpur railway workshop. Four days later, railway accountant and homeopathic doctor Abdul Aziz was slaughtered and his body and vehicle burned. His son Manjur Hossain said his father had refused to flee, saying he would die fighting for independence if necessary.

On June 28, abducted theatre actor Aminul Haque was handed over to Bihari leader Izhar Ahmed, who gouged out his eyes, dismembered him, and crushed his body in a jute press machine, according to his son Mizanul Haque.

Such atrocities were not confined to Saidpur.

On the first night, several Dhaka University teachers – Anudvaipayan Bhattacharya, Professor Dr Fazlur Rahman, Dr Muhammad Muqtadir, A R Khan Khadim, Sharafat Ali, Professor Govinda Chandra Dev, and Professor Muniruzzaman – were martyred in a brushfire. Professor Jyotirmoy Guhathakurta, wounded the next day, died on March 30, followed by the killing of Professor Jogesh Chandra Ghosh on April 4.

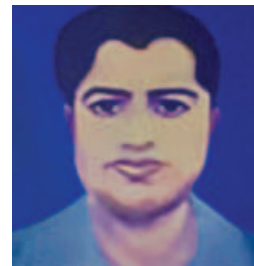
Outside Dhaka, language movement activist Dharendra Nath Dutta was abducted and killed on March 29. Rajshahi University professors Sukharanjan Samaddar and Habibur Rahman were murdered on April 14 and 15. Nuton Chandra Singh was killed on April 23, and philanthropist Ranada Prasad Saha on May 7.

A renewed campaign began on November 15, culminating between December 10 and 15 with the killing of journalists, academics, physicians, and writer Shahidullah Kaiser. On December 16, DU professor Abul Kalam Azad was killed, the last intellectual martyred. Only a handful of bodies were later recovered from Rayerbazar.

Contacted by The Daily Star, genocide researcher and National University history department associate professor Dr Ahmed Sharif said, "The Saidpur intellectual killings were the result of a flawless plan by Biharis and Pakistanis. Their primary objective was to empty Saidpur of intellectuals so that no pro-Liberation War public opinion could emerge."



Dr Zikrul Haque



Dr MA Aziz



Dr SM Yakub



Dr Shamsul Haque



Ayez Uddin



Aminul Haque



Tulsiram Agarwal



Benarasi Lala Gupta



Jamuna Prasad Kediya

executed by brushfire.

The Saidpur intellectual killings are documented in several works, notably Balarkhail Genocide by Ahmed Sharif and The Northern Genocide of 1971 by Manik Mohammad Razzak.

This correspondent visited Saidpur and Rangpur in November and spoke to at least 20 people, including family members of the martyred intellectuals, freedom fighters, and eyewitnesses. Their testimonies describe a carefully coordinated massacre.

Historians, Liberation War researchers, and local residents say Saidpur had been one of northern Bengal's most progressive towns since the British period, with strong educational, cultural, and commercial foundations.

Employment and business opportunities drew Biharis and Marwaris to the town alongside Bangalees.

After Partition, Bangalees and Marwaris largely maintained cordial relations, but hostility grew between Bangalees and Biharis. From the 1960s, Saidpur's political climate remained tense, worsening after Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's March 7 speech.

In the second week of March, the All-Party Resistance Committee of Saidpur Thana was formed with Dr Zikrul as its convener. His Ziaratullah Medical Hall served as the committee's office, while prominent citizens also gathered at the town's historic Shilpa Sahitya Sangsad to discuss the struggle for independence.

log ko marne aaya" (Bangalees have come to kill us), Biharis armed themselves and killed many Bangalees. Intellectual Mahatab Beg was martyred that day after arriving with villagers from Chirirbandar, and the town's situation rapidly deteriorated.

From early March 25, Biharis began shooting Bangalees on sight, while Pakistani gunfire claimed many more lives. A night curfew was imposed, followed by the systematic abduction of intellectuals.

### HOW THE KILLINGS WERE EXECUTED

According to Balarkhail Genocide and testimonies from elderly residents, freedom fighters, and genocide researchers, meetings were held in the second week of March at Saidpur College, led by Principal Motin Hashmi of Quaid-e-Azam (now Suhrawardy) College, alongside Bihari leaders. These meetings produced lists of targeted intellectuals, which were sent to Saidpur Cantonment.

Two days after the first abductions, Pakistani forces picked up Saidpur Thana Awami League vice-president and physician Dr Shamsul Haque.

His son Liaqat Hossain told The Daily Star that Biharis broke into their home and that from March 25 onward, intellectuals were effectively trapped, with armed patrols on the streets and threats of death for anyone attempting to flee.

The same day, Pakistani soldiers abducted National Awami Party Saidpur Thana president and physician SM Yakub. His daughter