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The July 36 Expressway, also known as the 300 Feet Road, area was brimming with people yesterday afternoon, when BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman delivered his address to the nation shortly after arriving in Dhaka from London, marking an end to his 17 years in exile.

PHOTO: STAR

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# 'I HAVE A PLAN'

Says Tarique, pleads for cooperation to build a Bangladesh safe for all, irrespective of faiths and regions

#### STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman has called for calm and cooperation to implement his plan for the nation, in his first speech on Bangladeshi soil in close to two decades.

"Standing on Bangladesh soil today, as a member of the Bangladeshi Nationalist Party, I want to say before all of you that I have a plan for the people of my country, for my country," he said while addressing party members and the nation at a reception in the capital yesterday.

Before making the remark, Tarique recalled the historic speech delivered 62 years ago by American civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. On August 27, 1963, addressing a massive gathering at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, King spoke of his vision for a US free from racial discrimination and said, "I have a dream."

Tarique said that he doesn't have a dream but a plan. The plan is aimed at serving the people's interests, driving development and changing the fortunes of ordinary people.

"If this plan and these actions are to be implemented, then I will need the cooperation of every person present in

this sea of people, and of all those who represent the democratic forces across Bangladesh. If you stand by us and support us, God willing, we will be able to implement this plan."

walks of life -- including students -- had protected Bangladesh's independence and sovereignty in 2024.

"Today, the people of Bangladesh want to regain their right to speak. They



PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Beginning his address with the words, "Dear Bangladesh", Tarique said just as the people of the country had achieved independence in 1971, citizens from all

want their democratic rights restored. They want to receive their fair rights based on merit."

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## CONTRACEPTIVE USE OVER THE YEARS



SOURCE: DGFP

CONTRACEPTIVE	CONSUMPTION SEPT 2025	CONSUMPTION SEPT 2024	CONSUMPTION SEPT 2019
Condom	41.52 lakh	47.65 lakh	97.48 lakh
Oral pill	24.36 lakh	6.50 lakh	66.49 lakh
Injectable	5.21 lakh	5.14 lakh	8.85 lakh
Implants	25,943	33,345	41,295
IUD	5,416	8,362	14,887

#### TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The government's family planning programme has been hit by a fund crunch and manpower shortage, with the supply of contraceptives dwindling steadily over the last few years, say officials.

The Directorate General of Family Planning (DGFP) may not be able to distribute condoms -- the most widely used contraceptive -- for at least a month early next year, as stocks are likely to run out in 39 days.

The development comes at a time

when the country has seen a rise in the total fertility rate (TFR) for the first time in 50 years, with officials and experts warning that TFR could increase further due to the shortage of contraceptives.

A recent national survey revealed that the use of contraceptives and access to modern contraception have declined, indicating a direct link between the rise in TFR and the shortage of contraceptives.

Government-led programmes helped reduce TFR to 2.3 in 2012 from 6.3 in 1975. The Population

Policy 2012 set a target of bringing down TFR to 2.1 within 2015 by raising the contraceptive prevalence rate to 72 percent.

However, the government could not achieve the target and the rate remained stagnant for more than a decade till 2023.

The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2025, published last month, showed that TFR rose to 2.4 from 2.3 last year.

The use of contraceptives by married women aged 15 to 49

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## 'NCP leaning towards seat-sharing deal with Jamaat'

SHAMIMA RITA

The National Citizen Party is increasingly tilting toward a seat-sharing arrangement with Jamaat-e-Islami, as party leaders fear that a deal with the BNP would yield too few seats and create cracks within their newly formed alliance.

Several senior NCP leaders, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Jamaat has so far agreed to give up 30 seats for NCP to contest in the February general election, substantially more than what the BNP is prepared to offer.

They said the BNP initially indicated it might concede six to seven seats, but in final negotiations, the offer would likely shrink to no more than three.

The BNP, they added, also imposed conditions requiring the NCP to dissolve itself or break the Gomontak Songskar Jote to join the party.

"We are holding discussions with both the BNP and Jamaat, but we are moving forward with the understanding with Jamaat," said a senior NCP leader.

However, he noted that further talks with the BNP could still take place as its acting chairman Tarique Rahman returned to the country yesterday after 17 years in exile.

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## A bride for 17 days, Salma's life ends too soon

Lakshmipur BNP leader loses another daughter to arson

SHAHEEN MOLLAH



Just 17 days ago, 18-year-old Salma Akter Smriti got married over the phone to an expatriate living in Oman. The couple had planned for a formal wedding reception in Bangladesh during Ramadan, once he returned.

But all the wedding planning and accompanying joys came to a sudden halt on December 19, when a group of miscreants locked Salma's family inside their home in Bhabaniganj of Lakshmipur Sadar, and set it ablaze.

While she, her father -- Belal Hossain, a businessman and assistant organising secretary of Bhabaniganj Union BNP -- and her 14-year-old sister Samia Akter Bithi suffered severe burns, her seven-year-old sister Ayesha Akter died on the spot.

After battling for her life for six days with 90 percent burns, Salma passed away around 12:30am yesterday in the ICU of the National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery, said resident surgeon Shaon Bin Rahman.

Salma's relatives yesterday received the

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## Tarique returns to a roaring reception

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Six thousand, three hundred and fourteen days.

As the plane carrying the BNP acting chairman entered Bangladeshi airspace, Tarique Rahman wrote on his verified Facebook page that it had been this many days since he was last under Bangladesh's skies.

Tarique had left Bangladesh on September 11, 2008 -- a bruised and battered man, who had faced torture for over a year and a half in the hands of a military-backed caretaker government after his arrest in March 2007.

Archival news reports from that year said he had suffered fractures to the spine and fallen sick during multiple court appearances, before the courts finally granted him bail on medical grounds on August 28, 2008. He was freed from jail on bail on September 3 that year.

Returning home yesterday, he stood tall as he received a hero's welcome.

As his flight -- Biman Bangladesh Airlines flight BG202 tracked on plane-spotting websites by nearly 50,000 people -- taxied on the tarmac of the capital's Hazrat

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

## JUDICIARY IN 2025

## Key reforms rolled out but case backlog persists

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

Over the past year, the judiciary has seen several key reforms, including the establishment of the Supreme Court Secretariat aimed at safeguarding its autonomy, but no progress has been made in reducing the case backlog.

The authority over promotions, postings, and transfers of lower court judges was shifted from the law ministry to the SC Secretariat through an ordinance issued last month.

To expedite case disposal, the law ministry separated civil and criminal courts in September so that district court judges no longer have to handle both types of cases simultaneously.

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The separation of civil and criminal courts at the district level, along with court digitisation initiatives, will improve public access to justice.

Imran Siddiq, SC lawyer

# 'Feels like Eid'

## BNP grassroots invigorated by Tarique's speech

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

BNP leaders and activists are energised by the party's Acting Chairman Tarique Rahman's speech, which has brought new hope and clear direction ahead of the upcoming election.

For the past 17 years, grassroots leaders and activists had mainly heard Tarique's messages through video or written statements. Hearing him speak in person for the first time in years made many party members emotional and more confident.

Hearing the party's second in-command speak directly after a long time sent a positive signal, said Mohammad Mojibur Rahman, a professor at Dhaka University's Institute of Education and Research.

"His speech came at an important time ahead of the election. Now it depends on how leaders and activists understand and follow his message," he said.

Internal problems and divisions within the party could be resolved following the speech, and his guidance could also help reduce dissatisfaction over party nominations, said Al Masud Hasanuzzaman, former professor of government and politics at Jahangirnagar University.

"The speech made grassroots leaders and activists more confident and enthusiastic," he added.

Many grassroots activists shared their reactions after Tarique's speech.

BNP activist Jasim Uddin from Pirojganj upazila in Thakurgaon said he could not see Tarique clearly due to the large crowd, but hearing his speech made him happy.

"He asked us to stay united and walk the difficult path ahead together - his words inspired me," Jasim said.

Jubo Dal leader Didar Mia from Manikganj said he was excited to see Tarique even for a brief moment.

"He spoke and used words in a way that reminded me of Khaleda Zia. He asked us not to fall into any trap or provocation," he said.

Tarique urged party leaders and activists to remain patient and united, setting aside internal problems ahead of the election, said Kawser Hossain, activist from Kuakata Poura BNP.

Hearing Tarique speak in person removed longstanding uncertainty among party members, said Chhakra Dal leader Rashed Khan from Munshiganj.

"Our leader has returned. This will strengthen the party's organisational activities," he said.

Tarique's return also addressed critics who had questioned his absence, said BNP leader Shakil Hossain from Gaffargaon in Mymensingh.

"He spoke about equality for all people, regardless of religion or identity, and warned us to remain cautious so

that no internal disorder is created," he said.

Tarique Rahman focused on public safety, especially for women, said Parveen Akter, a BNP activist from Dhaka's Shyamnagar ward.

"He said the country is not safe for



**He [Tarique Rahman] spoke and used words in a way that reminded me of Khaleda Zia. He asked us not to fall into any trap or provocation. Didar Mia, Jubo Dal leader from Manikganj**

everyone right now and that an elected government is needed," she said.

The large gathering itself demonstrated BNP's strength, said Jubo Dal activist Kawser Hossain from Keraniganj.

He began his speech with the words 'Dear Bangladesh', which shows the party puts the country first," he said.

"We need to explain the party's plans to voters and address our weaknesses," he said.

Many party members said his return and speech would give the BNP a strong push in its efforts to win the polls.

Meanwhile, grassroots leaders and activists from across the country gathered in large numbers to see Tarique, saying the moment marked the end of years of waiting.

Sixty-year-old Ruhul Amin arrived in Dhaka from Bhaluka in Mymensingh yesterday morning at 4:00am.

"I saw Khaleda Zia at a programme in Mymensingh in 2008. Today, her son Tarique is returning, so I came to see him. It was very cold, and at my age, it was difficult. But I can endure this much hardship for the party," he added.

Toyeb Ali Babu, the upazila BNP general secretary from Nilphamari, said he reached the venue around 4:00am after travelling overnight by train.

"Today feels like Eid for us," he said.

Arifil Islam, a BNP supporter from Nilphamari, said: "It's my first time in Dhaka. I don't know the city. I will try to see my leader."

## A bride for 17 days, Salma's life ends

FROM PAGE 1  
body from the hospital.

Belal received treatment at Lakshmipur Sadar Hospital, while Samia received treatment with her sister in Dhaka.

Salma's mother Nazma, and their two sons - four-month-old Abir and six-year-old Habib - managed to escape without major injuries.

Speaking to The Daily Star

**"They were preparing for the formal reception to be held in Ramadan. And then this happened.... What was the fault of my daughters?"**

Belal Hossain, father of Salma

yesterday, Belal said Salma was an HSC first-year student at Bhabaniganj Degree College and also a kindergarten teacher. She married Yasin Arif, who has been living in Oman since 2019, just 17 days ago.

"They were preparing for the formal reception to be held in Ramadan. And then this happened.... What was the fault of my daughters?"

"They [the miscreants] locked the house because they wanted to kill us... Both doors of my house were locked. I had to break open the tin fence to get my wife and children out."

While waiting to get out, the flames had caught up with Ayesha, who screamed, "Abbu, save me! Take me with you!"

Belal broke down as he recalled, "The fire was so intense that despite hearing my daughter's cries, I could not save her. What can be more tragic for a father?"

On December 23, he filed a case with Lakshmipur Sadar Model Police Station against unnamed accused in connection with the incident.

The station's Officer in Charge Md Wahid Parvez said they recovered two locks from garbage near the house. "We're trying to identify those responsible and investigating whether Belal had any rivals."

## 'I have a plan'

FROM PAGE 1  
The BNP leader also called for a country that embraces all citizens, from the hill tracts to the plains, regardless of religion or identity.

Tarique's main goal is to create a Bangladesh where everyone can leave their home and return safely.

Emphasising law and order, he urged people to remain calm and reject violence or provocation, regardless of political affiliation or religious identity.

In his 15-minute speech, Tarique said they want peace in the country three times.

"Peace and security must be ensured for everyone, of every age, profession and faith," he said.

He mentioned Sharif Osman bin Hadi, Inquilab Monch's spokesman, who was gunned down about a fortnight ago.

Tarique said Hadi wanted democracy and economic rights, and to repay the "debt of blood" owed to those martyred, the nation must build the Bangladesh they envisioned.

Without naming specific nations, Tarique warned that "agents of hegemonic powers are still plotting conspiracies".

He urged the public, especially the youth, to remain "patient and vigilant".

The responsibility lies with the younger generation to lead the country and build a beautiful nation on a democratic and economic foundation.

Urging calm in the face of "provocation", he concluded with a prayer, asking for divine guidance and mercy to help build the Bangladesh people aspire to.

"Let us all take a pledge together

that those who take charge of running the country in the coming days will try their best to govern in line with the righteousness of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)."

He also sought prayers for his mother Khaleda Zia before ending the event.

"As a son, my heart is lying beside my mother's bed in that hospital room. But I cannot abandon the people who have given their lives for the people of this country. That is why I am standing here today to express my gratitude to you before going to the hospital."

With slogans alongside party leaders and supporters: "Let us all pledge together - together, we will work, together, we will build our Bangladesh," he added.

Earlier, in a welcome speech, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul

Islam Alamgir said: "Today is a day of joy for us. Under Tarique's leadership, we hope to win the election on February 12 and establish democracy and the rule of law."

He also sought prayers for his mother Khaleda Zia before ending the event.

After Fakhrul's remarks, the convener of the reception committee and a member of the party's standing committee, delivered brief speeches.

The other standing committee members present on the reception stage included Khandakar Mosharraf Hossain, Mirza Abbas, Gayseshwar Chandra Roy, Dr Abdul Moyeen Khan, Nazrul Islam Khan, Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, Selima Rahman, Iqbal Hasan Mahmud, Hafiz Uddin Ahmed and AZM Zahid Hossain.

Leaders from different political parties, especially the partners of the party's simultaneous movement, were also present.

Shafiqur to run from Dhaka-15

Collects nomination form

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman established a collection form for Dhaka-15 constituency to participate in the 13th national parliamentary election and referendum scheduled for February 12 next year.

A delegation led by Jamaat's assistant secretary general Ehsanul Mahbub Jubayer collected the nomination paper from the returning officer's office in Dhaka's Agargaon in the morning.

Dhaka regional election officer Md Yunus Ali, also returning officer for Dhaka-13 and Dhaka-15 constituencies, said, "A nomination form was collected today [Thursday] on behalf of Jamaat Ameer Shafiqur Rahman for Dhaka-15 parliamentary seat."

Dhaka-15 comprises Kafrul area.

Other candidates who have collected nominations for Dhaka-15 are: Dr Ahammad Sajedul Huq Rubel (Communist Party of Bangladesh-CPB); Md Shafiqul Islam Khan (BNP); Alamgir Ferdous (NCP); SM Fazlul Haque (Islami Andolan Bangladesh); AKM Shafiqul Islam (Gonoform); Md Tanzil Islam, and Khan Shoaib Amanullah.

The deadline for submitting nomination papers is December 29.

## Mother, son

FROM PAGE 1

Doctors said last night that Khaleda's physical condition remains unchanged and that she is responding to treatment.

Her last meeting with Tarique was on May 6 this year, when she left London for Dhaka after receiving advanced treatment for nearly four months. She travelled to the UK on January 8.

The BNP chief has been undergoing treatment at Evercare Hospital since November 23, following the advice of her medical board after she was diagnosed with infections affecting her heart and lungs. She is also suffering from pneumonia.

Now 80, Khaleda has long battled multiple health complications, including liver cirrhosis, arthritis, diabetes, and ailments affecting her kidneys, lungs, heart and eyes. She has a permanent pacemaker and has previously undergone stent placement for her heart.

Lakhs of leaders and supporters from across the country participated in the programme organised to welcome Tarique.

To ensure wide coverage of Tarique's speech, the party installed around 1,000 microphones, enabling people gathered at various points in and around the venue to listen to his address.

In addition, around four dozen screens were set up across the area, allowing leaders and activists to follow the programme from different locations amid the massive crowd.

As Tarique's vehicle reached in from the stage, the entire venue echoed with slogans of "Tarique Zia" as leaders and activists chanted in unison, creating a charged and festive atmosphere.

headed towards Evercare Hospital to see his mother Khaleda Zia. Zubaida and Zaima were waiting for him there.

Thousands of BNP activists and supporters, lining both sides of the road leading to the hospital with party flags, banners and messages in hand, welcomed him with loud cheers and slogans.

Many were seen wearing T-shirts featuring Tarique's portrait and welcome messages.

Heavy security measures had been in place around the hospital and adjacent roads since morning, with members of the army, BGB, police and APBn deployed.

Tarique reached the hospital premises around 5:50pm. After visiting his ailing mother, Zubaida, Zaima and he left the hospital around 7:30pm to go home together.

They got off the red and green campaign bus in front of House-196 on Gulshan North Avenue around 8:40pm and disappeared through the white gates of their home in Bangladesh.

Today, Tarique is scheduled to visit Ziaur Rahman's grave in the afternoon and then move towards Savar to pay respects at the National Martyrs' Memorial.

## Tarique returns to a roaring reception

FROM PAGE 1

Shahjalal International Airport at 11:42am on a hazy December day, it marked Tarique's return to Bangladesh's political stage.

While the BNP had forbidden its followers from gathering near the airport, crowds eager to see Tarique thronged the streets all the way from Mohakhali.

The airport area was mostly devoid of public transport, and passengers commuting to and from the airport were seen walking with their luggage.

At the airport, Tarique, his wife Zubaida Rahman, and daughter Zaima Rahman, were received by senior BNP leaders, including Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam, Alamgir and Standing Committee member Salahuddin Ahmed.

Right after landing, he made a phone call to Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus, thanking him for the security arrangements.

"How is your health? Please keep us in your prayers. On my and my family's behalf, I would like to thank you. You have made various arrangements, especially for my security. Thank you so much," he said, according to an audio clip shared on his Facebook page.

The family was then greeted by Zubaida's mother Syeda Iqbalmand Banu at the airport's VIP lounge at 11:56am.

Zaima, who had left Bangladesh as a 13-year-old, embraced her grandmother in an emotional reunion. The family captured the precious moment in photographs, with Zaima sitting between Tarique and Banu.

While being ushered out of the VIP lounge and towards the bullet-proof bus waiting for him, he took a little detour to a patch of green.

He bent down and unlaced his Oxford boots to feel the wet, dewy winter grass with his bare feet. Surrounded by cameras capturing his every moment, he scooped up a piece of earth and gripped it in his palm - his first time touching the soil of his motherland in 17 years.

Zubaida and Zaima left for their Gulshan residence in a white microbus, while Tarique climbed onto a campaign bus.

The specially prepared vehicle, painted red and green, featured large portraits of Tarique flanked by his parents - former president and founder of the BNP Ziaur Rahman and party Chairperson Khaleda Zia. Slogans highlighting democracy and

political struggle were also displayed.

Tarique took the front passenger seat of the bus, which headed towards his reception on the July 36 Expressway, also known as the 300 Foot Road - packed with party leaders and activists.

Members of the security forces formed a cordon around the bus and escorted it towards the stage. The vehicle moved slowly, owing to the huge turnout of party leaders and activists.

Standing near his seat in the bus, Tarique repeatedly waved and offered salutations to the assembled supporters. As he came into their sight, the air was filled with chants and cheers.

Many of them, especially those who came from outside Dhaka, had spent the night under the open sky, hoping to get a front-row view of their star.

It took Tarique over three hours to reach the reception stage from the airport. Members of his party's standing committee and leaders of allied parties were already waiting on stage for him -- so was a mammoth rally.

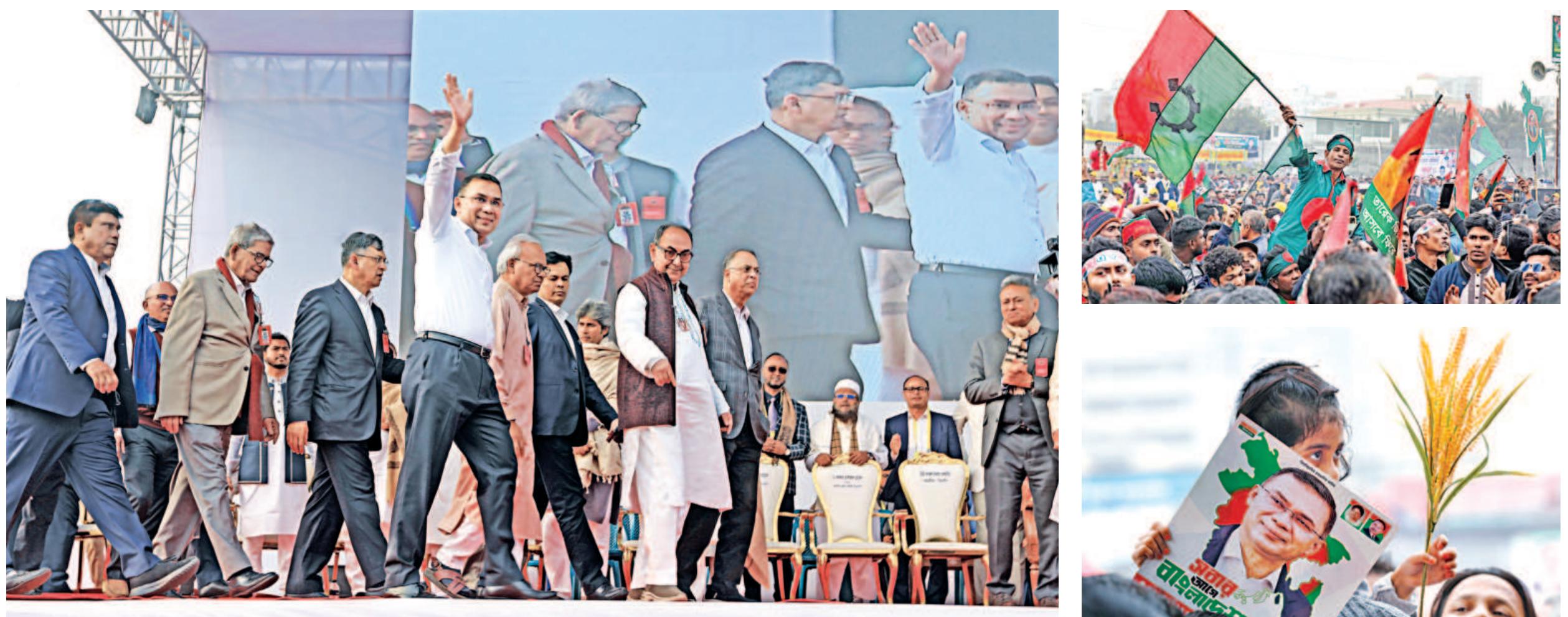
And Tarique came prepared.

As he got on the stage, he moved aside the ornate cushioned chair

prepared for him and pulled up a plastic chair -- a symbolic gesture showing that he did not take his role as a leader lightly.

For the past 17 years, Tarique had delivered public addresses virtually -- over a webcam, from his study, his voice quiet and composed.

Yesterday, he rolled up his sleeves, gripped the sides of the podium, his



## A HISTORIC HOMECOMING



Clockwise from top left, BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman waves to his supporters before delivering a speech at an event in Dhaka's 300 Feet area marking his homecoming; supporters wait along the route from the airport to the venue, holding party flags, electoral symbols, and banners; Tarique waves from a bus; the BNP leader removes his shoes to step barefoot on Bangladesh soil and scoops up a handful of earth in a symbolic gesture of homecoming; accompanied by his wife and daughter, Tarique greets senior party leaders at the airport. Bottom, Tarique's motorcade slowly moves through the massive crowd gathered to welcome him.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN, RASHED SHUMON, PALASH KHAN, PRABIR DAS, BNP MEDIA CELL



### MIGRANT CRISIS 12 die as boat sinks off Senegal

AFP, Dakar

At least 12 people died on Wednesday after a boat filled with migrants seeking to reach Europe sank off the coast of Senegal, security sources said.

The coastal west African country is one of the main departure points for the thousands of Africans who for years have been taking the perilous Atlantic route to reach Europe, primarily via the Spanish Canary Islands, aboard overcrowded and often dilapidated boats.

### Cold, dense fog

FROM PAGE 12  
came out in the morning. Working outdoors in this cold is very difficult," he said.

A similar situation has been prevailing in other northern districts.

"It's unbearably cold, so I opted to stay indoors. If I go out in this weather, I will fall ill. However, now I have to borrow money from others just to buy rice and lentils," said Kandri Bala, a female day labourer from Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila.

Farmer Makbul Hossain, 55, of Phulbari upazila in Kurigram, said it was difficult to work on farmland amid such severe cold.

and it may continue till noon (Friday) at places," said a bulletin of the Bangladesh Meteorological Department.

"Air navigation, inland river transport and road communication may disrupt temporarily due to thick fog," said the BMD forecast for the next 24 hours, issued at 6:00pm yesterday.

"Night temperature may fall slightly, and day temperature may remain nearly unchanged across the country. Due to foggy conditions, cold may be felt more intensely at many places across the country," it added.

[Our correspondents from Rajshahi and Lalmonirhat contributed to the report]

### X-mas celebrated amid festivity

FROM PAGE 12  
community dressed as Santa Claus to distribute gifts among children, maintaining a long-standing tradition, BSS reports.

In Tangail, the main celebration took place at the Jalchhata Christ Dharmapalli Church in Madhupur. Addressing the gathering, local religious leader Sammon Nakret urged the community to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ by living with mutual love, compassion, and peaceful coexistence. Traditional Pitha festivals were organised in several villages, including Mominpur, Jalchhata, Idlpur, Pirkachha, Sainamari, and Dharati.

In Sunamganj, the festival was held in at least 25 churches in the district

town and surrounding upazilas. Communities in border villages, including Uttar Narayanta, Puratan Gudigaon, Kathalbari, and Paschim Kona Para, celebrated the day with enthusiasm.

In Bandarban and Magura, special prayers were offered seeking happiness, peace, and prosperity for the nation. Families celebrated the festival by sharing traditional food and holding gatherings.

Similar celebrations were reported in Sherpur, Barguna, Natore, Rajshahi, Jhenaidah, and Rangamati.

Law enforcement agencies adopted additional security measures to ensure safety during the festival.

Marking the occasion, President Mohammed Shahabuddin extended

warm greetings to the Christian community at home and abroad on Christmas.

As in every year, the president exchanged greetings with distinguished members of the Christian community at the Bangabhaban.

According to a press release issued by Sabbir Ahmed Akunjee, senior assistant secretary of the Public Division at the President's Office, diplomats, high commissioners, and representatives of international organisations also attended the programme.

The president called for upholding communal harmony among the people of the country, irrespective of religion, race, and creed.

### NCP's Ctg-16 nominee

FROM PAGE 12  
"I am personally dissatisfied with NCP's alliance with Jamaat. We wanted NCP to pursue an independent political course," he said, adding that the party leadership had failed to uphold the vision of a new political settlement following the July uprising.

A former student of Dhaka University, Arshadul held several key positions within NCP, including joint member secretary at the central level. He hails from Banshkhali upazila in Chattogram.

He termed his resignation symbolic, saying he chose to announce it on the day BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman returned to Bangladesh after 17 years

in exile, describing it as a "special day".

Arshadul also said NCP had failed to materialise the aspirations of the July Uprising, despite the sacrifices of more than 1,400 martyrs and thousands of injured protesters.

He criticised what he described as a growing trend of using religion to polarise society and creating controversy around the Liberation War, warning that vested quarters were pushing the country towards uncertainty.

Expressing confidence in Tarique Rahman's leadership, Arshadul said there was no alternative to BNP and its allies forming the next government through victory in the upcoming polls.

## Significance of Tarique Rahman's return

His homecoming offers his party a psychological reset, and the country a moment of political recalibration

Political parties, like individuals, sometimes require a psychological reset. For BNP, that moment arrived on Thursday. For most of the past decade, the party has been steered from afar by its acting chairman, Tarique Rahman, while in exile in London. His return marks a long-awaited exhilaration—especially for grassroots supporters who, year after year, had held their breath—and a historic moment for the nation.

Rahman landed in Dhaka accompanied by his wife, Zubaida Rahman, their daughter, Zaima, and—to the delight of his social media followers—the family cat. The symbolism was heavy. Just outside the airport terminal, the 60-year-old leader paused to stand barefoot, a gesture of reverence for the soil from which he had been absent for 17 years, before boarding a bulletproof bus that carried him in a festive procession to a reception venue. There, he addressed a sea of supporters. It was a grounding moment in every sense, bringing to an end a period of suspended animation that began with his departure to the UK in 2008 and worsened under Sheikh Hasina's authoritarian rule.

His return may help restore a measure of equilibrium to a fractured political landscape, but the road home was shaped by a new reality. Following Hasina's ouster last year, Rahman was relieved of politically motivated convictions in a litany of cases. Upon landing, he thanked Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus by phone from the airport lounge for the security provided to him and his family.

When he finally addressed the crowd, the most resonant passage of his speech came when he promised to build a "safe Bangladesh"—the basic concept of security that has felt elusive recently. He painted a picture of a nation free from violence that has stalked its streets. He envisioned a nation where "every woman, man, and child can leave home and return safely."

Rahman called for unity rather than vengeance. His tone was inclusive and forward-looking as he sketched a vision of the country's recovery. Playing on the famous words of Martin Luther King Jr., he declared, "I have a plan. I have a plan for the people of my country." It was a deliberate rhetorical pivot—from grievance to governance. He also recalled the martyrdom of Sharif Osman Hadi in his struggle to restore democratic rights.

His emphasis on pluralism was also striking. "Just as there are people of the hills in this country, similarly there are people of the plain lands," he said, explicitly embracing Bangladesh's religious and ethnic mosaic—Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians alike. "We all want to build such a Bangladesh, the dream of which a mother sees," he added. The metaphor is politically astute. Rahman underscored the daunting demographics of the nation he hopes to lead: millions of young people and children, and a female population that makes up half the country.

In a departure from the pomp of the past, Rahman sat on a simple, unadorned wooden chair at the reception venue. It was a calculated visual metaphor: a rejection of the "throne" mentality that has long plagued the country's leadership.

The exile is over. Rahman's physical presence now serves as a counterweight to the swelling influence of rival political actors. The challenges ahead are immense, but as his bulletproof bus wound its way through cheering crowds in Dhaka, the prevailing mood was one of palpable relief. He is rightly credited with preserving party unity through the lean years of opposition. His second act—now waiting to play out on home soil ahead of a February election—will depend on whether he can charm a new generation and convince a nation emerging from trauma that he represents a fresh start, rather than a return to business as usual.

## Enforcing tobacco law is the real challenge

New ordinance raises hope but glaring omissions remain

The government's move to approve a relatively comprehensive anti-tobacco ordinance deserves to be acknowledged at a time when tobacco consumption has visibly increased in the country. Against this backdrop, the ordinance appears to signal a renewed intent to prioritise public health and to respond to long-standing demands for tighter controls.

Several of its provisions are undoubtedly positive. Expanding the definition of tobacco products to include new forms such as nicotine pouches and banning e-cigarettes and vaping are necessary steps, although one must note the apparent double standard in not extending the same blanket ban to smoking in general. That said, the decision to prohibit all forms of tobacco advertising, including online promotions, deserves to be acknowledged, as does removing the provision for so-called "smoking zones," or banning the consumption of tobacco products in public places alongside smoking. These should strengthen the message that public spaces must be protected from tobacco exposure.

However, we must also acknowledge the omissions of the ordinance that can weaken its impact. The exclusion of several draft sections from the approved version—such as banning the sale of loose or unpackaged tobacco, hawking or unregistered sale of tobacco products, or flavouring them—has raised concerns among anti-tobacco campaigners. Loose cigarettes and flavoured products are among the most common entry points for young and low-income users, while hawking and unregistered sales allow tobacco to circulate with minimal oversight. The question is, why would the government allow this to happen?

Admittedly, revenue consideration is a big factor. According to our report, the omission proposals came from the National Board of Revenue and the finance ministry as the draft prohibitions could reduce revenue generation. Thus opposition from the health ministry was ignored. That revenue considerations can override public health concerns is deeply alarming. Tobacco-related illnesses already impose an enormous economic burden on us through healthcare costs, lost productivity, and premature deaths.

So while we agree with public health experts who welcomed the ordinance as being comprehensive, we must urge a reconsideration of the omission decisions and also stricter enforcement of anti-tobacco provisions, since new regulation will mean nothing without proper enforcement.

# EDITORIAL

## Short-term profit should not drive our shipping policy



Ahamedul Karim Chowdhury is adjunct faculty at Bangladesh Maritime University and former head of the Kamalapur Inland Container Depot (ICD) and the Pangaon Inland Container Terminal under Chittagong Port Authority.

AHAMEDUL KARIM CHOWDHURY

Recently, Bangladesh Shipping Corporation (BSC) has reported its highest net profit in 54 years, an achievement that has understandably generated optimism among policymakers and maritime stakeholders. After decades of operating largely at a loss, the corporation's return to profitability feels like a long-awaited vindication. Riding on this momentum, the government has signalled its intention to procure new vessels for BSC, with the stated goals of carrying more national cargo, saving foreign exchange, and creating seafaring jobs.

While these objectives are valid and important, the policy direction chosen to achieve them deserves careful scrutiny. Shipping is one of the most volatile and capital-intensive industries in the global economy. Decisions taken during a cyclical upswing can lock a country into long-term financial and operational risks long after favourable market conditions have faded.

BSC's recent profit, though welcome, must be seen in its proper context. Global freight rates surged unusually in the aftermath of the pandemic due to supply chain disruptions, port congestion, and vessel shortages. This exceptional market environment benefited shipowners worldwide, not just BSC. In Bangladesh's case, part of the reported profit also stemmed from one-off factors rather than recurring operational efficiency. A single profitable year, particularly after more than five decades of losses, does not automatically indicate a structural turnaround or long-term competitiveness.

Shipping history offers sobering lessons. Freight markets are cyclical by nature. Periods of high earnings are often followed by sharp downturns, during which revenues fall rapidly while fixed costs—loan repayments, crew wages, insurance, and maintenance—remain unchanged. Even globally renowned shipping companies, backed by modern fleets and professional management, have gone bankrupt when market cycles turned against them. Publicly funded shipping ventures are especially vulnerable because their losses ultimately fall on taxpayers.

Over the past three decades, most developed maritime nations have drawn clear conclusions from these realities. Governments gradually stepped away from owning and operating commercial shipping lines, not due to ideological preference, but

because state ownership proved ill-suited to an industry that demands speed, flexibility, and ruthless cost discipline. Former national flag carriers in Europe and Asia were privatised, merged, or allowed to be acquired by larger private operators once it became clear that emotional attachment to national ownership could not outweigh commercial logic.

Bangladesh's own maritime trajectory reinforces this global lesson. The country already has a growing private shipping sector operating dozens of ocean-going vessels without sovereign guarantees or exclusive cargo privileges. Several private groups today operate fleets far larger than BSC's, demonstrating that

because state ownership proved ill-suited to an industry that demands speed, flexibility, and ruthless cost discipline. Former national flag carriers in Europe and Asia were privatised, merged, or allowed to be acquired by larger private operators once it became clear that emotional attachment to national ownership could not outweigh commercial logic.

Countries such as the Philippines became global leaders in seafarer employment without owning a large national merchant fleet. They invested instead in internationally trusted training systems and global placement networks, enabling their mariners to serve across the world's commercial fleets. Bangladesh could follow a similar path, generating foreign exchange and employment at a fraction of the cost of buying ships.

Another overlooked risk is the long-term financial burden of fleet

is genuine, but purchasing ships is neither the most efficient nor the most scalable solution. Each vessel creates a limited number of onboard positions while requiring enormous capital outlay. Meanwhile, thousands of maritime graduates struggle to secure practical sea time not because global opportunities are absent, but because structured pathways to international employment remain weak. As I have argued in a previous article, the core challenge lies in training quality, international accreditation, and placement mechanisms—not in the number of state-owned ships.

Countries such as the Philippines became global leaders in seafarer employment without owning a large national merchant fleet. They invested instead in internationally trusted training systems and global placement networks, enabling their mariners to serve across the world's commercial fleets. Bangladesh could follow a similar path, generating foreign exchange and employment at a fraction of the cost of buying ships.

Another overlooked risk is the long-term financial burden of fleet

could deliver broader benefits than state ownership alone.

Many of the world's most successful maritime nations generate revenue, jobs, and influence by hosting ships under their flag rather than owning them outright. Such models allow governments to regulate standards, earn income, and promote national seafarer employment without bearing full commercial risk.

Bangladesh is also investing heavily in ports, logistics corridors, and energy infrastructure. These assets can anchor a strong maritime ecosystem if supported by the right policies. A competitive port system, efficient customs processes, access to ship finance, and skilled human capital will attract shipping activity far more reliably than a state-owned fleet operating in isolation.

None of this suggests that BSC has no role to play. The corporation can serve as a strategic participant, a benchmark for standards, or a partner in specific national interests. But expansion should be cautious, phased, and firmly grounded in commercial viability rather than short-term profitability.



Shipping ambition must be guided by prudence, not momentum-driven commitments.

FILE PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

local entrepreneurship, when given policy stability and market access, can compete internationally. Expanding state ownership risks crowding out this private capacity rather than complementing it.

There is also a structural concern about market distortion. When government cargo or regulatory advantages are reserved for a state-owned entity, private investment incentives weaken. Such policies also do not encourage competition and efficiency, undermining the very national capacity policymakers seek to build.

One of the most frequently cited justifications for expanding BSC's fleet is the need to create jobs for Bangladeshi seafarers. This concern

ownership. Ships depreciate, require periodic dry docking, and eventually must be replaced. These costs do not pause during market downturn. If freight rates decline or operational inefficiencies emerge, BSC may find itself unable to service debt without renewed government support. Bangladesh's experience with other state-owned enterprises should caution against assuming that shipping will be different.

A more sustainable vision for maritime strength lies in policy reform rather than asset accumulation. As I have argued in another article published in this daily, expanding Bangladesh's presence through an internationally competitive registry and public-private partnership model

Any further fleet growth should be accompanied by strict governance reforms, transparent performance benchmarks, and a clear exit strategy if market conditions turn unfavourable.

Shipping ambition must be guided by prudence. Profits earned during exceptional market conditions should prompt strategic reflection, not momentum-driven commitments. Public investment decisions in shipping are not easily reversible, and mistakes can linger for decades.

Bangladesh's maritime future will be strongest if it is built on competitiveness, private sector vitality, and globally employable human capital. One profitable year is worth celebrating, yes, but it should not decide the country's shipping destiny.

## TRIBUTE TO BIR UTTAM AK KHANDKER

### Adieu to a frontliner of our Liberation War



K. M. Iftesham Islam is in house contributor of Tech & Startup at The Daily Star.

K. M. IFTESHAM ISLAM

On December 20, 2025, Bangladesh lost Bir Uttam Abdul Karim Khandker, Liberation War deputy chief of staff and the first chief of the Bangladesh Air Force. His death is not only the passing of a decorated officer; it is the loss of a living bridge to the Liberation War. With him goes a voice that carried memory, discipline, and moral weight from 1971 into our uncertain present.

AK Khandker belonged to a generation that chose risk and duty over fear. When the country needed structure, he helped build it. When the war demanded courage with restraint, he offered both. His leadership was not loud, but it was firm. In a time when survival itself was unsure, he believed that victory had to be organised, ethical, and rooted in service to the people.

As the deputy commander, his role went beyond command during the war. He helped coordinate, plan, and sustain a resistance that was often outmatched in resources but not in resolve. On December 16, 1971, he was present during the Pakistani forces'

surrender at the Race Course Maidan as the representative of Bangladesh. The Liberation War was won not just by the courage of millions but also by leaders like him who could think clearly under pressure and turn scattered bravery into collective strength. AK Khandker was one of those leaders.

After independence, his responsibility did not end. As the first chief of the Bangladesh Air Force, he faced a mammoth task—building an institution from almost nothing. It demands patience, vision, and integrity. He helped shape the Bangladesh Air Force as a professional body grounded in discipline rather than politics, and service rather than spectacle—standards still relevant. He also served as a diplomat, and became the planning minister after being elected to parliament from Pabna-2 constituency in 2009.

What makes his passing especially heavy is the time we are living in. Our public life is often noisy, divided, and impatient. We speak of development, reform, and national pride, yet we

rarely pause to listen to those who built the foundations we stand on. AK Khandker represented an increasingly rare leadership. He believed that power should be accountable, that institutions should outlast individuals, and that patriotism is measured by service, not slogans.

His life also reminds us that the Liberation War was not a single



Bir Uttam AK Khandker. (January 1, 1930–December 20, 2025)

moment frozen in textbooks. It was a process, filled with hard choices and moral tests. Leaders like AK Khandker carried those lessons forward. They understood that independence was

not an ending. It was a beginning that required constant care. When such figures leave us, the risk is not only forgetting their names, but forgetting the values they lived by.

We often say that we honour our freedom fighters. But honour is more than ceremony. It is the willingness to protect institutions, reject violence as a political tool, and value competence over loyalty. It is the courage to defend truth even when it is inconvenient. These were principles that shaped AK Khandker's public life.

As the nation mourns him, we should ask ourselves what we are doing with the inheritance he and his peers left behind. Are we strengthening the republic they imagined, or are we slowly eroding it through neglect and short-term thinking? Are we building leaders who see power as responsibility or as entitlement?

AK Khandker's death marks the fading of a generation that knew the cost of freedom firsthand. With each such loss, the distance between us and 1971 grows wider. That distance makes memory fragile. It makes distortion easier. It makes duty feel optional. That is why remembering him matters.

We have lost a leader and a frontliner of the Liberation War. But we still have a choice. We can let his legacy become a line in history, or we can let it guide our conduct. If we choose the latter, then his life will continue to speak, quietly but firmly, to a nation that still needs its compass.

# Shrimp over rice and the quiet erosion of our food security



Dr Abdullah A Dewan is professor emeritus of economics at Eastern Michigan University in the US, and a former physicist and nuclear engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission. He can be reached at aadeone@gmail.com.

ABDULLAH A DEWAN

Recent reports on the southern coast describe an alarming breakdown in dry-season farming. In Chitalmari, Fakirhat, Rampal and Mollahat, land was ploughed and prepared for Boro paddy as it has been for decades, but irrigation pumps could not supply freshwater. Salinity had crept into canals that once sustained winter cultivation, leaving seedlings to dry on nursery beds. With no cyclone damage or embankment breach to blame, farmers faced a quiet failure: irrigation systems rendered useless by brackish water. Some abandoned planting altogether; others shifted to cultivating Bagda shrimp as the only viable way to salvage the season.

When salinity rises, the soil creates a condition agronomists call physiological drought: salt increases osmotic pressure around plant roots, preventing crops from absorbing moisture even when fields appear wet. Seedlings stand surrounded by water they cannot drink. The failure is invisible to the eye, but fatal to the crop.

In recent years, coastal districts have lost nearly 50,000 hectares of cultivable land to salinity. Salt does not announce itself through catastrophe. It enters quietly—an inch of tide here, a dry monsoon there, a river slightly less generous than before—until the soil forgets how to hold rice. Farmers rarely meet this with protest; they adapt by turning to shrimp.

Shrimp aquaculture generates income where paddy fades. In one season alone, shrimp exports from a single district exceeded Tk 700 crore—attractive in economic terms. Yet profitability cannot disguise a deeper exchange: shrimp contributes to export earnings, while rice secures nourishment. When one replaces the other, income may continue, but food security shifts. Soil that converts to shrimp ponds rarely returns to rice; salinity lingers.

This quiet transformation is not local or isolated. Salinity is already redrawing coastlines and harvest patterns worldwide.



Saltwater has overtaken vast stretches of farmland in Satkhira, where once-thriving rice fields and freshwater ponds have been replaced by shrimp enclosures.

FILE PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

The Mekong Delta has begun losing rice for the same reason, with tides pushing upriver millimetres by millimetres. The Nile Delta is gradually surrendering to the Mediterranean, and in the Indus Basin, salinity has challenged yields for decades. The UN estimates that over 1.4 billion hectares of farmland globally are now salt-affected—nearly 10 percent of the world's cultivated base. Hunger arrives slowly, not through famine but erosion.

Even the world's most engineered agricultural economies face similar

groundwater depletion has triggered a salinity shift, forcing farmers from almonds towards pistachios and other drought-tolerant grains. Across the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), governments have responded to signs of salinity stress with research funding, soil restoration, crop insurance, and irrigation reform.

These comparisons matter because they shift the discussion from misfortune to management. If high-capacity nations treat

soil salinity as a strategic threat, coastal agriculture in Bangladesh cannot afford to treat it as a slow inconvenience.

There are still paths forward for Bangladesh. Along the western coast of India, farmers have cultivated Pokkali rice—a salt-tolerant indigenous variety—for over three thousand years. During lower-salinity months, they grow rice; when the tide turns brackish, they shift to prawn cultivation by opening and

The danger ahead is not only environmental; it is generational. If rice cultivation no longer sustains dignity or income, the children of farmers will not remain farmers. Land may stay fertile on paper, yet unused in practice. Soil security depends not only on water and seeds, but on the faith that farming still has a future.

Meanwhile, urban progress speaks loudly through structures that reach into the sky—flyovers, expressways, power plants, megaprojects—and each ribbon-cutting is celebrated as an achievement. But concrete does not feed families. A functioning irrigation channel receives no ceremony, though without it every new expressway ultimately leads to a place where nothing grows. Economic growth may continue for a time even as agriculture declines, but eventually the imbalance reveals itself at the dinner table rather than in budget documents.

The steps we need to overcome and manage the problem are neither mysterious nor unreachable. Irrigation infrastructure must be funded, maintained, and governed with the same seriousness applied to the power or transport sector. Shrimp expansion needs zoning rather than market momentum. Salinity-tolerant rice seeds should be distributed widely, supported by services that help farmers manage new methods, not left isolated in trial plots. River dredging must be ongoing rather than intermittent, recognising that rivers are agricultural arteries. Crop insurance, procurement pricing, and credit support must sustain the farmers who hold the food system in their hands.

A half-century ago, the threat was famine, and agriculture recovered through research, extension, cooperation, and resilience. Flood, cyclone, and the pressure of population did not break food security then. But, salinity may, if allowed to proceed unchallenged. It does not uproot houses or break embankments; it waits, season after season, until fields go quiet.

A nation may grow economically while allowing cultivable land to slip into export ponds, but it becomes dependent. Food security is not achieved through ports, highways, or megaprojects; it is achieved when water reaches the fields and seed meets soil. No country retains full strength if it cannot feed itself, and whether that foundation is protected or allowed to erode will determine not just the next harvest but the country's long-term resilience.

## Dipu Chandra Das and a tragedy of outrage without truth



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H. M. NAZMUL ALAM

Dipu Chandra Das did not die because he insulted a religion. He died because accusation has become a more powerful weapon than truth, and because crowds in Bangladesh increasingly believe that outrage is evidence enough. He died because someone decided that verification was optional, that due process of law can be ignored. He was beaten, dragged, hung, burned and filmed. Not in the dark. Not in secrecy. But in public, under streetlights, beside a highway, before cameras and spectators.

This follows a familiar script we have seen play out frequently in recent times. What makes this death particularly unbearable is not only its brutality but its emptiness. Even the agencies tasked with enforcing law and order have admitted that there is no direct evidence that Dipu Chandra Das insulted religion at all, not that doing so justifies extrajudicial actions. No post. No recording. No witness who actually heard the alleged words. Everyone heard that someone heard something somewhere. That was enough.

German American philosopher Hannah Arendt warned that when facts lose their authority, the space they leave behind is quickly occupied by violence. A mob does not require proof. It requires permission. Sometimes that permission comes from silence, sometimes from delay, and sometimes from the quiet decision to push a man outside a factory gate to save property while surrendering a life. Institutions may not strike the blow, but they often step aside to make room for it.

The most terrifying line in the official narrative, therefore, is not about the fire or fists. It is the sentence that says he was handed over to protect the factory. It reveals a hierarchy more disturbing than any slogan shouted that night. Order was maintained. Production survived. A worker did not.

This was not an eruption of uncontrollable madness. It unfolded over hours. Accusations circulated. Groups formed. Calls were made late. By the time law enforcement arrived, the ritual had concluded. And yet, even as Dipu's body burned, the next tragedy for the nation was already in the making. A young political leader and organiser, Sharil Osman Hadi, shot

in broad daylight of December 12, was declared dead on that same day—December 18—by the doctors in Singapore. The aftermath? Vested groups exploiting it to attack the offices of *Prothom Alo* and *The Daily Star* at night and vandalise cultural institutions.

What's worth noting is each such incident of mob violence often arrives with a press statement from the government promising justice, and departs with an investigation that soon fades into abstraction. The pattern is so consistent

**There is a peculiar irony in how quickly the word "conspiracy" is deployed in public discourse. Everything is planned, we are told. Everything is destabilisation. Everything is someone else's design. But what if the most effective "conspiracy" requires no mastermind at all? What if it is sustained by predictable delays, familiar denials, and the collective comfort of never holding the system itself accountable?**

that it now feels almost administrative. Besides, there is a peculiar irony in how quickly the word "conspiracy" is deployed in public discourse. Everything is planned, we are told. Everything is destabilisation. Everything is someone else's design. But what if the most effective "conspiracy" requires no mastermind at all? What if it is sustained by predictable delays, familiar denials, and the collective comfort of never holding the system itself accountable? When people do not trust institutions to deliver the justice they want, they outsource judgment

to the street, even if the verdict is flawed. When law becomes slow, spectacle becomes swift. The mob promises instant resolution, even if that resolution arrives soaked in blood.

There is something grotesquely modern about this violence. It is not only physical but performative. Phones are raised as fists fall. The burning body becomes content. The horror is shared, commented on, argued over, monetised by attention. American writer Susan Sontag warned that repeated exposure to images of suffering risks turning pain into consumption. We are now consuming our own collapse.

The state responds with numbers. Arrests counted. Law enforcement operations named. Weapon licenses facilitated. Police training programmes announced. The language is managerial, as if violence were a logistical glitch rather than a moral failure. We are told that thousands have been arrested. We are told that security is being strengthened. Yet, crime statistics rise, as does people's sense of fear and uncertainty.

Perhaps the problem is not absence of force but absence of foresight. Preventive intelligence is discussed after each catastrophe like an afterthought we keep forgetting to remember. Former police officials now speak openly about preventive detention, a tool that sounds alarming in theory but strangely comforting in a society where prevention has become an endangered concept. But even prevention cannot succeed if it is applied selectively or theatrically. Law enforcement cannot appear only when cameras are present and vanish when crowds gather.

A society is judged not by how loudly it condemns such violence but by how rarely it allows it to happen. Bangladesh today condemns well. It investigates verbosely. It mourns briefly. Then it moves on, leaving behind families who must learn to live with the knowledge that truth arrived too late to save a life.

Dipu Chandra Das had a daughter who will grow up knowing her father through news reports and viral videos. That is the inheritance we are offering the next generation. Not safety. Not surety of justice. We must reverse this course. We must understand that if the upcoming elections are a national priority, so is preserving the sanctity of life. If religion is sacred, so is restraint in a democratic society. And if the state claims authority, it must reclaim its credibility through sufficient presence, speed, and moral clarity.

Otherwise, we should stop pretending that these are isolated failures. Rather we should accept the truth that a society that continuously allows outrage to replace evidence will keep producing graves long before it produces justice.

## CROSSWORD

BY THOMAS JOSEPH

### ACROSS

1 Concede	28 Bee follower	e.g.
6 Set one's sights	29 Slugger Williams	9 Approve
11 Smoker's pipe	30 Nut	10 Tyrants
12 Play part	34 Hot blood	14 Mechanical
13 Some sharks	35 Curved path	learning
15 Unclose, to poets	36 Hoopla	19 Brewing need
16 Bartender on "The Simpsons"	37 Manicuring tool	22 Pooch pest
17 Spinning toy	40 Be in accord	23 Eye parts
18 Cinnamon candies	41 Racket	24 Ordinary
20 Debate side	42 Plane choices	25 Amber wine
21 Valuable rock	43 Polite chaps	26 Sport with blades
22 Boxing weapon	DOWN	28 Area under a wave
23 Skate park sights	1 Despise	30 Oxford parts
26 Runs away	2 Hang loosely	31 Short putt
27 Green and Longoria	3 Acted wordlessly	32 That is: Latin
	4 " _____ a Rock"	33 Centers
	5 Quakes	38 Permit
	6 Grill waste	39 "Lenore" writer
	7 Water cooler	
	8 Cornish pastry,	



### WEDNESDAY'S ANSWERS

L	I	B	R	A	L	I	N	E	
O	N	A	I	R		I	R	O	N
S	A	L	M	A		T	A	S	T
E	W	E	P	S	U	T	I	N	
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E	S	A	U	F		D	A	L	E
C	E	R	E	A	L	A	I	S	L
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dsopinion@gmail.com.

10-3

# star BUSINESS



## Soybean imports from US surge 310% in Sept-Dec

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Bangladesh has massively increased soybean imports from the United States over the past four months, thanks to attractive prices and private sector efforts to narrow the trade gap with Washington.

Between September and the first week of December, the country imported 754,681 tonnes of American soybeans, a rise of 310 percent compared with the same period last year, according to the US Soybean Export Council (USSEC).

The increase occurred during the first 11 weeks of the new marketing year, which runs from September to August.

The price advantage followed a temporary halt in American soybean purchases by China earlier this year, in protest against higher reciprocal tariffs on Chinese goods.

The pause left US farmers with surplus stock and depressed prices. By the time Beijing resumed buying in October under a new trade agreement, Bangladeshi importers had already seized the opportunity.

Bangladesh's private sector has also stepped up imports of US cotton, wheat and liquefied natural gas under commitments to reduce the bilateral trade gap.

Following intense negotiations, the Trump administration in August cut reciprocal tariffs on Bangladeshi goods to 20 percent from 37 percent imposed in April 2025.

The US-Bangladesh trade relationship has grown considerably over recent decades, although the balance remains heavily in Dhaka's favour. In 2024, US exports to Bangladesh totalled \$2.3 billion, while imports from Bangladesh reached \$8.4 billion.

### KEY POINTS

- Private sector boosted imports to help narrow trade gap
- Local firms pledged over \$1.25b in US soybean and soybean meal purchases for next year
- Brazilian soybean imports fell sharply over the past 6-7 months

Jim Sutter, chief executive of USSEC, said in November that US soybeans and soybean meal are the largest American agricultural exports to Bangladesh.

He added that Bangladesh's leading soy-processing firms and meal importers recently signed a Letter of Intent worth \$1.25 billion to purchase US soybeans and soybean meal over the coming year.

Sutter described the agreement as "a landmark" that highlights sustainability and supply chain resilience.

Participants are collaborating with USSEC to advance sourcing standards, technical engagement, and growth of the protein-feed ecosystem in Bangladesh," he said.

Bangladesh produces only about 7 percent of its annual soybean demand, relying on imports for the remainder.

Sutter said the country now has a large and modern crushing industry that supplies most of its soybean meal and oil needs. Bangladesh maintains a zero percent import tariff on soybeans and soybean meal, providing a stable trade environment.

In the 2023-24 marketing year, the US accounted for 32 percent of Bangladesh's soybean imports and 3 percent of its soybean meal imports. Industry leaders expect these shares to rise sharply under recent agreements.

Md Taslim Shahriar, deputy general manager of Meghna Group of Industries, said Bangladesh has reduced soybean imports from Brazil over the past six to seven months in favour of US supplies.



## Auditor doubts Central Pharma's survival amid cash strain

AHSAN HABIB

Stock investors of Central Pharmaceuticals have been unsettled after the auditor of the listed drug maker issued an adverse opinion, warning of significant uncertainty over the company's ability to continue operating as a business amid persistent financial distress and regulatory lapses.

In its audit report for the year ended June 2025, the auditor said the company's future was uncertain due to years of losses, growing unpaid liabilities and weak cash generation, raising doubts about its ability to meet obligations.

Mohammad Shabbir Hossain, a partner of Ashraf Uddin & Co, said Central Pharmaceuticals' retained earnings -- the accumulated profits or losses over the years -- have fallen close to its paid-up capital, indicating that past losses have eroded most of the funds invested by shareholders.

Although the company has stated that it has adequate resources to continue operations for the foreseeable future, the auditor said management has failed to raise fresh funds or generate sufficient cash from its core business to pay its current liabilities.

The audit report also noted that the company has not repaid outstanding bank loans and that the National Board of Revenue (NBR) has raised substantial tax claims against it.

In addition, production costs exceeded sales revenue, mainly due to high fixed expenses and limited utilisation of

production capacity.

The auditor further flagged regulatory risks, noting that Central Pharmaceuticals has not renewed its drug manufacturing licence.

The company has also failed to pay key statutory and regulatory fees, including Dhaka Stock Exchange listing fees and Central Depository Bangladesh Limited fees, exposing it to penalties, suspension of trading or possible delisting.

### RISKS

- Years of losses
- Growing unpaid liabilities
- Weak cash generation

These situations indicate that a material uncertainty exists that may cast significant doubt on the company's ability to continue as a going concern," the auditor said.

In audit terms, a going concern refers to a company's ability to continue operating and meet its obligations in the normal course of business.

The company's financial statements did not adequately disclose these risks, prompting the issuance of an adverse opinion -- the most severe form of audit opinion, which indicates that the accounts do not present a true and fair view of a

company's financial position.

Shares of Central Pharmaceuticals sold at Tk 8.50 on the Dhaka Stock Exchange on Wednesday. Central Pharmaceuticals raised funds from the stock market in 2013 on expectations of strong growth. The audit warning has heightened concerns among small investors.

Jakir Hossain, a retail investor, said he bought the stock in 2018 after reports suggested the company might be taken over by a large business group. The acquisition never materialised, and the share price later fell sharply, leaving him with a large unrealised loss.

"I was already disappointed as the company has paid only 1 percent dividend so far. Now this audit opinion has made the disappointment even worse," he said.

Responding to the auditor's observations, Md Tajul Islam, company secretary of Central Pharmaceuticals, said, "Our production is going on, and we have full confidence that the company will remain active."

He said retained earnings were still Tk 7 lakh to Tk 8 lakh below the paid-up capital of Tk 119 crore. "The company reported losses last year, resulting in negative earnings per share, but production and operations would continue," he added.

Regarding the licence issue, Islam said renewal was an ongoing process, and the company was working to complete it.

He acknowledged that some dues to the NBR remained outstanding, but said management hoped the company would not be shut down.

## Banking crisis laid bare in 2025, lasting fixes hinge on next govt

### BANKING REPAIRS UNDERWAY

#### STARTING POINT

Severely weakened banking system after years of irregularities  
High inflation, weak credit growth, rock-bottom confidence

#### LIFTING THE LID

NPLs at Tk 6.44 lakh crore, nearly 36% of total loans  
Over a dozen banks with default ratios above 50%  
Large corporates drove much of the new defaults

#### PATCHWORK REPAIR

##### Mergers and liquidation

- Five troubled shariah-based banks moved into merger
- Nine non-banks lined up for liquidation

##### Governance clean-up

- Tighter scrutiny of bank loan books
- Updated loan classification rules introduced

##### Legal groundwork

- Bank Resolution Ordinance: Framework to resolve failing banks, protect depositors
- Deposit Protection Ordinance: Insurance ceiling doubled to Tk 2 lakh, covering 93% of depositors
- Change to Bangladesh Bank Order: Amendments to strengthen central bank autonomy

#### YEAR-END MACRO REALITY

- Inflation near 8%, above target
- Policy rate at 10%, lending rates 16-17%
- Record \$30.04b remittances stabilised reserves, taka

MD MEHEDI HASAN

When bankers entered the new year and opened their books for 2025, many quickly realised that the scale of long-burden damage was too large to hide any longer.

Years of political interference, widespread lending irregularities, loan scams and an overall lax regulation had hollowed out the balance sheets.

What followed was not a recovery year, but somewhat of a reckoning. The interim government took bold steps to confront the financial sector crisis, pushing through a bank merger, non-bank liquidations, new laws and tighter supervision.

Yet by the end of the year, the financial sector readings tell a sobering story. Bad loans are at a record high, depositor confidence is shaken, and reforms are still constrained by old power structures.

These constraints became painfully clear as the year progressed, culminating in alarming data by the third quarter.

As of September, non-performing loans (NPLs) in the banking sector surged to Tk 6.44 lakh crore, nearly 36 percent of total outstanding credit. This was more than double the ratio a year earlier, and the highest level since 2000.

Besides, more than a dozen commercial lenders reported default ratios above 50 percent, showing that distress was no longer confined to a handful of weak institutions.

Large corporate groups accounted for a massive share of new defaults, especially after the fall of the Awami League government in August 2024.

The rise in bad loans came amid a broader macroeconomic squeeze.

Inflation remained high at around 8 percent, well above the central bank's target, while private sector credit growth slowed to record lows as lenders pulled back.

Throughout the year, new investment remained stalled, as borrowing costs climbed with the central bank holding the policy rate at 10 percent -- the highest among neighbouring economies.

Lending rates reached 16 percent to 17 percent, further dampening business activity. Confidence, already fragile, eroded further as depositors started to question the safety of their savings.

Faced with mounting stress, the interim government opted for emergency repair rather than incremental change.

The most discussed move was the merger of five troubled shariah-based lenders into the state-run Sammilito Islami Bank PLC.

Licensed on 30 October, the new bank became the largest Islamic lender in the country overnight, with paid-up capital of Tk 35,000 crore, including

Tk 20,000 crore from the government.

The merger dominated public attention throughout the second half of the year. Depositors rushed to branches, overwhelming staff and triggering chaos in several locations. Although the Bangladesh Bank provided liquidity support multiple times, withdrawals continued, while many customers were unable to access their funds.

Four of the banks -- First Security Islami Bank, Social Islami Bank, Union Bank and Global Islami S Alam Group, while EXIM Bank was controlled by Nazrul Islam Mazumder of Nassra Group.

This ownership concentration highlighted how political patronage had shaped the crisis.

Authorities assured depositors that their money would eventually be recovered, but the central bank governor made clear that general shareholders would receive nothing, declaring their scrips worthless.

Alongside the merger, the banking regulator moved to shut down nine troubled non-bank financial institutions. Together, these actions marked a break from the long-standing practice of keeping weak institutions alive through regulatory indulgence.

To support the reform initiatives, the government also strengthened the legal framework for crisis management.

The Bank Resolution Ordinance 2025 gave authorities the power to intervene in failing banks, protect depositors and impose losses on shareholders. The central bank set up a dedicated Bank Resolution Department to implement the law.

In November, the Deposit Protection Ordinance 2025 doubled the insured deposit ceiling from Tk 1 lakh to Tk 2 lakh, covering about 93 percent of depositors nationwide.

Governance reform, however, proved more contentious.

Bangladesh Bank Governor Ahsan H Mansur initiated steps to amend the Bangladesh Bank Order 1972 to strengthen central bank autonomy and align it with global standards.

The draft proposal included removing bureaucrats from the board and reducing political influence. Resistance from within the bureaucracy and the finance ministry quickly followed, slowing progress.

Economists argued that genuine independence of the central bank would require abolishing the

Banking and Financial Institutions Division under the finance ministry, but officials opposed the idea.

By year-end, the push for BB's autonomy had slowed, leaving the future of reform uncertain without strong political backing.

Meanwhile, other regulatory measures advanced more quietly.

The central bank updated loan classification rules, conducted asset quality reviews to assess the actual health of bank balance sheets and prepared to shift toward risk-based supervision.

Moving away from checklist inspections toward continuous risk monitoring, a key condition of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for its ongoing loan programme, is scheduled for full implementation in January 2026.

Draft amendments to the Bank Company Act, which are intended to tighten eligibility for bank owners and directors, were prepared but left for the next elected government as the country entered the election cycle.

While banking reforms dominated headlines, the exterior sector offered some relief.

A crackdown on illegal money transfer channels like hundi and hawala helped stabilise the foreign exchange market, while lower import costs eased pressure on reserves.

Expatriate Bangladeshis sent a record \$30.04 billion in remittances in the fiscal year 2024-25, the highest ever in a single fiscal year.

Gross foreign exchange reserves rose to \$32.57 billion by mid-December, up from \$24.94 billion a year earlier, reversing the sharp decline seen under the previous regime.

In 2025, new technologies also began to appear in the banking conversation, though more as a promise than a right-now solution.

Some banks rolled out early AI-powered services, and the Bangladesh Bank reopened applications for digital bank licences, attracting interest from telecom operators, financial institutions and conglomerates.

These initiatives signalled a longer-term shift but did little to address the immediate crisis of governance and asset quality.

Now, as the country ends 2025 and prepares to enter another new year, one conclusion stood out. The outgoing year did not fix the banking sector, but it stripped away illusions.

The true scale of bad loans was revealed, political protection weakened, and the first tools for orderly resolution were put in place. Whether these patchwork repairs evolve into lasting reform will depend on political will after the election and the willingness to confront entrenched interests. For now, the system remains fragile, repaired but far from healed.

### THE REWIND

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## Beximco Pharma trading suspended on London bourse

### STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Beximco Pharmaceuticals has announced that trading of its global depositary receipts (GDRs) on London's Alternative Investment Market (AIM) will be suspended from January 2, 2026, due to delays in publishing its annual financial results for the year ended June 30, 2025.

A GDR is a financial instrument issued by a depositary bank that represents shares in a foreign company.

**The drug maker said it would not be able to publish its final results and annual report by December 31, 2025, the deadline stipulated under AIM Rule 19**

enable international companies to access investors worldwide by listing on local stock exchanges outside their home markets.

In a disclosure on December 19, the Bangladesh-based drug maker said it would be unable to publish its final results and annual report by December 31, 2025, the deadline stipulated under AIM Rule 19.

The company attributed the delay to its inability to hold a board meeting required to approve the accounts, owing to an ongoing legal dispute in the High

Court over the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission's move to appoint nine additional independent non-executive

# 5G handset production hits 1 lakh again amid rollout

MAHMUDUL HASAN

Local manufacturing of 5G handsets crossed the one lakh mark in October for the second time since June 2024, as manufacturers grew optimistic following the commercial launch of 5G services by mobile operators.

In October, local assemblers produced 1.08 lakh 5G handsets, up from 63,000 units in September, according to the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC).

Earlier, in June 2024, production had also exceeded one lakh units, reaching 1.55 lakh.

Despite the increase, 5G devices accounted for only 4.74 percent of the total 22.81 lakh handsets manufactured in Bangladesh in October. Feature phones dominated production with a 61.21 percent share, while 4G handsets accounted for 34.29 percent.

The rise in local 5G handset production followed the limited commercial rollout of 5G services by Robi Axiata and Grameenphone from September 1, 2025.

Grameenphone introduced 5G across all eight divisional headquarters, though coverage remains limited to selected areas. Robi launched 5G services in parts of Dhaka, Chattogram, and Sylhet.

5G penetration has started in the country as customers are increasingly looking for 5G handsets. That's why we have stepped up and started manufacturing," said Rezwani Hoque, CEO of ISMARTU Technology BD Limited, the local maker of Tecno handsets.

He added that Tecno has already launched four 5G smartphone models locally.

Hoque also said that the global supply chain is now dominated by 5G devices, prompting

## MANUFACTURING

**22.81** lakh handsets manufactured in October

Feature phones account for over **61%** of October production

## 5G DEVICE PENETRATION

5G devices account for less than **5%** of total handsets

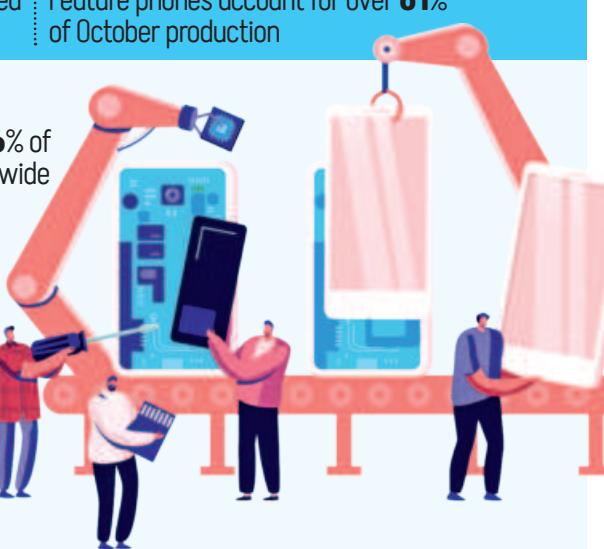
Only about **6.6%** of devices nationwide are currently 5G-capable

## DEVELOPMENTS

Commercial launch of 5G by GP and Robi boosted confidence

## 5G OUTLOOK

5G adoption may take 5-7 years to match current 4G usage levels



many local manufacturers to shift their production. "After the launch of 5G, customers prefer the handset to come with 5G support if the price goes beyond Tk 30,000," he added.

According to BTRC, around 62 percent of devices currently in use nationwide are smartphones, most of which are 4G-enabled. Industry estimates suggest only 6.6 percent of devices can connect to 5G networks.

Imported and expatriate gifted handsets make up roughly 50 to 60 percent of the smartphone market. Many of these are high-end 5G-ready devices, though a significant portion is refurbished models, industry insiders said.

Robi Axiata said 5G adoption will be gradual. "In 200 areas, 5G penetration among devices is already 12-15 percent, with 120 areas reaching nearly 20 percent penetration. Our initial focus will be rolling out 5G to these areas," said Shahed Alam, chief corporate and regulatory affairs officer of Robi Axiata.

He added that most imported and gifted handsets registered on Robi's network are compatible with 5G.

According to Robi estimates, it may take five to seven years for 5G adoption to reach current 4G levels, as affordability and economic factors remain key challenges.

# ADB gives \$688m for Ctg-Dohazari rail line upgrade

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the government of Bangladesh signed loan agreements worth \$688 million on December 22 to upgrade the 35-kilometre railway line from Chattogram to Dohazari, aiming to strengthen rail connectivity along the country's key southern corridor.

The funding will support the South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation Chattogram-Dohazari Railway Project, which also includes building a 2.5-kilometre railway bypass.

Once completed, the bypass will allow direct train services from Dhaka to Cox's Bazar without stopping at Chattogram station, reducing travel time and improving efficiency.

According to a press release, the project aims to create seamless connectivity along the Dhaka-Chattogram-Cox's Bazar corridor, a vital route for both passengers and freight, boosting regional transport efficiency and economic growth.

The agreements were signed at a ceremony held at the Economic Relations Division (ERD) office in Dhaka by ERD Secretary Md Shahriar Kader Siddiqi and ADB Country Director for Bangladesh Hye Yun Jeong.

ADB officials said the project would make rail services between Dhaka and Cox's Bazar more resilient, reliable, and efficient, encouraging a shift from road to rail transport. Improved connectivity is expected to stimulate economic activity along the corridor, particularly benefiting tourism and fisheries in the Cox's Bazar region.

The Dhaka-Chattogram-Cox's Bazar corridor, part of the Trans-Asia Railway network, currently carries about 32 percent of passenger traffic and 55 percent of freight traffic, showing its strategic importance for national and regional economic integration.

Key project components include elevating tracks, improving drainage, modern signalling, dual gauging of tracks, and procuring 30 energy-efficient locomotives to cut fuel use and emissions.

The project will also enhance Bangladesh Railway's operational capacity through staff training and upgrade three stations with accessible, user-friendly facilities and spaces for private-sector commercial activities.

NBR allows holiday e-filing for poll aspirants

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) has introduced special arrangements to allow individuals planning to contest the upcoming national parliamentary election to file their income tax e-returns on holidays.

Under this initiative, aspiring candidates can submit their income tax returns online even on weekly holidays. This will reduce pressure ahead of nomination deadlines, according to a press release.

To make the process easier, the NBR, through its e-Tax Management Unit, has opened a dedicated help desk at the e-Tax Management Unit office at the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh (IEB) in Dhaka.

The help desk will assist with online income tax return filing and provide both technical and procedural support.

The NBR said the help desk will operate today from 2:00pm to 5:00pm and tomorrow from 9:00am to 5:00pm.

The service will also be available during regular office hours on Sunday and Monday, the revenue authority added.

# WB offers \$151m to boost job support

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The World Bank (WB) has approved an additional \$150.75 million in financing to help Bangladesh scale up employment opportunities and improve incomes for low-income youth and microentrepreneurs, with a special focus on women and communities vulnerable to climate change.

The funding will support the Recovery and Advancement of Informal Sector Employment (RAISE) Project, extending benefits to around 1.76 lakh additional young people nationwide, on top of the 2.33 lakh beneficiaries already covered, according to a WB press release issued on December 18.

The expanded programme will provide a range of services, including skills training, apprenticeships, entrepreneurship

development, and access to microfinance. Besides, new initiatives will promote women's empowerment through access to quality childcare and climate-resilient livelihood options, helping communities adapt to environmental shocks, stated the press release.

The additional financing will also allow the project to reach rural areas, pilot home-based childcare services with training and start-up grants for women, and strengthen job intermediation through fairs, employer linkages, and support in contract negotiations, it added.

With this latest support, total World Bank financing for the RAISE project has reached \$350.75 million, aiming to create wider employment opportunities and strengthen small business growth across Bangladesh.

# Prime Bank signs payroll agreement with Fame Group

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Prime Bank PLC has recently entered into a payroll agreement with Fame Group to provide dedicated banking services and digital payroll solutions to the group's employees.

The agreement was signed at the bank's corporate office in Dhaka, according to a press release.

Under the arrangement, employees of Fame Group will receive a range of banking benefits from Prime Bank, including preferential services as well as access to credit card and loan facilities.

They will also be able to use PrimePay, the bank's digital payroll platform, which offers automated salary disbursement and round-the-clock corporate payment solutions.

M Nazeem A Choudhury, deputy managing director of Prime Bank PLC, and Masud Alam, managing director of Fame Group, signed the agreement on behalf of their respective organisations.



M Nazeem A Choudhury, deputy managing director of Prime Bank PLC, and Masud Alam, managing director of Fame Group, pose for photographs in the presence of officials of both organisations at the bank's corporate office in Dhaka recently.

# ACI, Deli launch strategic partnership for stationery products



Officials of ACI and Deli pose for photographs at an event at Sheraton Dhaka on December 24 under the theme "Beyond Boundaries, Beyond the Ordinary".

PHOTO: ACI

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Deli, a global stationery brand, and local conglomerate ACI have launched a strategic partnership to expand the range of premium stationery products in Bangladesh, with a focus on creativity, productivity and innovation.

The programme was attended by Mars Ma, stationery general manager of Deli

International, and Arif Dowla, managing director of ACI Group, alongside senior officials of both organisations, business partners and guests from various sectors.

Under the partnership, Deli will bring its international expertise in high-quality stationery products, while ACI will leverage its extensive local distribution network and market presence to make the products widely available across the country.

The companies said the collaboration aims to introduce a broad range of world-class stationery solutions designed for students, professionals and creative users. The products are expected to combine functionality, durability and modern design, while aligning global standards with local requirements.

Speaking at the event, representatives of both organisations said they were confident the partnership would set new benchmarks in the country's stationery market and encourage users to think beyond conventional boundaries in learning and work.

# Shimanto Bank inks deal with Dhaka Central Int'l Medical College & Hospital

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Shimanto Bank PLC has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Dhaka Central International Medical College & Hospital at the bank's head office recently.

Under the agreement, all debit and credit cardholders of Shimanto Bank, along with its employees, will be able to avail exclusive benefits and special facilities while receiving healthcare services from Dhaka Central International Medical College & Hospital, according to a press release.

The MoU was signed by Md Sahidul Islam, head of business of Shimanto Bank, and Md Hadiul Karim Khan, head of marketing of Dhaka Central International Medical College & Hospital, on behalf of their respective organisations.

Shafir Zahirul Islam, head of cards and ADC of Shimanto Bank, and Md Musa Ali, senior assistant manager and zonal in charge of corporate marketing of Dhaka Central International Medical College & Hospital, along with senior officials from both organisations, were present at the signing ceremony.



Md Sahidul Islam, head of business of Shimanto Bank, and Md Hadiul Karim Khan, head of marketing of Dhaka Central International Medical College & Hospital, pose with the signed documents at Shimanto Bank's head office recently.

PHOTO: SHIMANTO BANK PLC



Ahsan Khan Chowdhury, chairman of Rangpur Foundry Limited, is seen attending the company's 45th annual general meeting held virtually on December 24, along with other officials of the company.

PHOTO: RANGPUR FOUNDRY LIMITED

# RFL approves 23% dividend

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Rangpur Foundry Limited (RFL) has approved a 23 percent dividend for its shareholders for the financial year 2024-25 at the company's 45th annual general meeting (AGM), held on December 24 through a digital platform.

The AGM was attended by Ahsan Khan Chowdhury, chairman, Rathendra Nath Paul, managing director, Shaiful Alam, acting chief financial officer, Muhammad Aminur Rahman, company secretary, and shareholders of the company.

Directors Sabiba Amjad, Chowdhury Kamruzzaman, Abu Taher Chowdhury, and Zakia Sultana, and Uzma Chowdhury (finance), Choudhury Atiur Rasul, director (accounts), also attended the meeting.

During the meeting, shareholders expressed their appreciation for the company's performance over the years and provided suggestions aimed at further strengthening business operations, according to a press release.

The managing director briefed investors on RFL's overall business performance and outlined the company's plans. Concluding the meeting, the chairman thanked participants for their continued support and cooperation.

## PFUJ condemns attacks on media in Bangladesh

## STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) has strongly condemned the recent violence, vandalism and arson targeting media houses in Bangladesh.

In a joint statement issued yesterday, PFUJ President Afzal Butt and Secretary General Arshad Ansari denounced the targeted attacks on the offices of The Daily Star and Prothom Alo, as well as the assault on Nurul Kabir, editor of New Age and president of the Editors' Council.

"Silencing the press through physical intimidation is a direct violation of the constitutional right to freedom of expression and the rule of law," the PFUJ leaders said.

They also expressed deep concern over reports that more than 100 journalists in Bangladesh remain detained without trial, demanding their immediate and unconditional release.

The PFUJ further highlighted what it described as a disturbing regional trend, pointing to similar incidents of violence in Nepal. Just months ago, mob attacks targeted the Kantipur Group, Annapurna Post and Image TV.

The leadership also paid tribute to photojournalist Suresh Rajak of Avenews TV, who died in an arson attack in Kathmandu on March 28, 2025, noting that the perpetrators of these crimes remain unaccountable.

The PFUJ called upon the governments concerned to conduct fair, impartial and speedy investigations into all incidents of arson and violence, identify and bring the perpetrators to justice, end the culture of impunity and ensure the safety of journalists as they perform their professional duties.

"Violence and harassment aimed at silencing the media are unacceptable in any democratic society," the statement concluded.

## Contraceptive

FROM PAGE 1  
dropped to 58.2 percent from 62.7 percent in 2019. Access to modern contraception also declined, meeting the needs of 73.5 percent of women compared to 77.4 percent in 2019, shows the survey carried out by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics in collaboration with UNICEF.

DGFP officials said the unmet demand for contraceptives rose sharply during the Covid pandemic that hit the country in 2020. However, the then government deprioritised family planning rather than boosting contraceptive supply.

In 2023, the health ministry halted the purchase of contraceptives for about a year, resulting in a significant supply gap. It opted to channel funds meant for buying contraceptives towards the procurement of other items. Family planning took a back seat at that time, said a DGFP official, seeking anonymity.

When contacted, DGFP Director General Ashrafi Ahmad said the crisis deepened after the expiry of the Fourth Health, Population and Nutrition Sector Programme (HPNSP) in June last year. In the past, most contraceptives were bought under the scheme.

A lack of field level workers worsened the situation, she said, adding that recruitment for some posts was halted due to legal complications.

## CONTRACEPTIVE SUPPLY DROPS

DGFP provides people with five types of contraceptives -- condoms, oral pills, intrauterine devices (IUDs), injectables, and implants -- to people free of cost through its field level workers across the country.

According to its national contraceptive summary report, condom supply dropped by 57 percent over the last six years.

Condom supply stood at 97.48 lakh in September 2019, months before the Covid outbreak -- a period when the unmet demand for contraceptives rose sharply.

The number continued to decline to 41.52 lakh in September this year, down from 87.31 lakh in September, 2022.

The other four contraceptive items have also seen a steady decline

since 2019: oral pills by 63 percent, IUDs by 64 percent, injectables by 41 percent, and implants by 37 percent.

As of December 11 this year, the agency had stocks of condoms for 39 days; implants for 33 days; IUDs for 45 days; oral pills for five months and 18 days; and injectables for six months and 15 days.

Asked, Abdur Razzaque, director of the DGFP's logistics and supply unit, said they already initiated the purchase of implants.

"These contraceptive items could be restocked soon, provided that an ongoing legal issue over the purchase is resolved."

However, condoms are likely to run out of stock, depriving people of supplies for at least a month, he said.

Razzaque said the government approved a project last month to buy all five types of contraceptives, but the procurement process will take at least three months to complete.

For the time being, DGFP is using available funds to buy condoms in limited quantities, but their supply may still be disrupted for a month next year, he said.

Asked about the manpower shortage, Ershad Ahmed Nomani, deputy director (personnel) of DGFP, said that of the 50,648 field-level posts, at least 12,720 (25 percent) remain vacant.

Those include posts of family planning assistants and inspectors; family welfare volunteers; and sub assistant community medical officers, he said.

These field-level workers not only distribute contraceptives but also provide advocacy and counselling to service seekers.

All these activities, which are crucial for birth control, have been seriously disrupted due to shortages of contraceptives and manpower, ultimately contributing to the rise in TFR, said Aminul Islam, a professor of Population Sciences at Dhaka University.

He also noted that in recent years, many couples have shown reluctance towards family planning, with some preferring to have more than two children.

"A combination of all these factors explains the recent rise in the total fertility rate," he added.

RAOZAN IN CHATTOGRAM  
New market unused as vendors clog highway

SIFAYET ULLAH, Ctg

A newly constructed kitchen market in the Gohira area of Raozan municipality in Chattogram has remained unused for nearly a year despite shops being handed over to the vendors.

Meanwhile, vendors continue to occupy the Chattogram-Rangamati regional highway daily, causing traffic congestion and hardship for commuters.

The market was built under a Livestock and Dairy Development Project between December 2023 and June 2024 to remove the roadside bazaar that regularly blocks the



regularly commutes along the route.

The multipurpose market building was constructed at a cost of Tk 1.20 crore and includes more than 16 separate sheds for poultry, meat and an open shed, said Jayita Basu, upazila livestock officer of Raozan.

The Raozan municipality has already leased out the market to private vendors.

During a recent visit, this correspondent observed vendors selling vegetables by occupying most of the highway's Rangamati-bound lane, while customers shopped amid moving traffic.

Mahbubul Alam, a vegetable vendor, said, "We have heard that the

new market does not have electricity connections and other basic facilities yet. That's why we are still sitting here."

Nurul Islam, another trader, said they were being told to move to the new market but had not received clear instructions about whom to pay rent to or how the market would be managed.

Locals and vehicle drivers said the roadside market poses serious safety risks.

Nasir Uddin, an autorickshaw driver, said navigating the area requires constant caution as accidents occur almost daily.

Contacted, Aungching Marma, municipal administrator and assistant

commissioner (Land) in Raozan, said, "Most vendors sitting on the road are low-income people. Even if we want to, it is not easy to take strict action against them."

He said delayed installation of several utility facilities in the new building had rendered it non-functional. "Last week, we sent municipal engineers to ensure all utilities were installed, and the structure is now ready," he said.

The leaseholders have been repeatedly instructed to start operating from the new building, he added, warning that legal steps would be taken if vendors continue to occupy the highway in disregard of the instructions.

Rangamati-bound lane of the highway.

However, despite completion of the construction and allocation of shops in December last year, traders have yet to relocate to the new facility.

"Vendors still sit along the highway's Rangamati-bound side every day, forcing vehicles to slow down or squeeze into a single lane, often leading to traffic congestion during peak hours," said Ali Ahsan Sumon, a college teacher who



A US Marine Corps AV-8B Harrier II taxis on the tarmac at the former Roosevelt Roads naval base in Ceiba, Puerto Rico, on Wednesday, amid tensions between US President Donald Trump's administration and the government of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

## Key reforms rolled out but case backlog persists

FROM PAGE 1

Despite these measures, delays in case disposal persist across all tiers of the judiciary, with 2.56 lakh cases added to the backlog between July 1, 2024, and September 30 this year.

"The separation of civil and criminal courts at the district level, along with court digitisation initiatives, will improve public access to justice. These reforms reflect significant progress in implementing the Judiciary Reform Commission's recommendations to enhance the judiciary's autonomy and efficiency," said Imran Siddiq, an SC lawyer.

A significant number of the commission's reform goals have been achieved. The establishment of the Secretariat, which was long overdue, marks a milestone in achieving the separation of the judiciary, noted Imran, also a member of the commission's legal team.

"Implementation of reforms has been particularly evident at administrative and institutional levels. But long-term structural reforms, especially those requiring constitutional amendments or extensive

legislative action (such as decentralisation of High Court benches and financial autonomy) may be implemented once an elected government assumes power," he told The Daily Star.

When contacted, SC Spokesperson Md Muajjem Hussain said, "In the past, responsibilities were scattered across various authorities. There was a long-standing demand for an autonomous institution under the Supreme Court, which can take coordinated measures, ensure proper management, and adopt necessary judicial processes or policies," he told The Daily Star.

The new ordinance has paved the way for formulating a coherent policy and streamlining these functions, he noted.

In reply to a query, Muajjem said that once the Secretariat becomes fully operational, it will be able to take measures to reduce the case backlog. "But the results will not be visible in a day or two. Its impact will be seen in the coming years."

This correspondent tried to

contact Law Adviser Asif Nazrul five times via mobile phone, sent text messages, and emailed him over the past couple of weeks, but received no response.

## OTHER REFORMS

Following the Awami League government's ouster, the law ministry made a major reshuffle in the judiciary. It promoted and transferred 1,334 lower court judges, and withdrew around 20,000 politically motivated cases and 410 cases filed by the state under the Cyber Security Law.

It also set up information centres at Chief Judicial Magistrate Courts in all divisional cities to ensure easy public access to case-related data.

The Enforced Disappearance Prevention and Redress Ordinance 2025 was formulated with the provision of death penalty as the maximum punishment in enforced disappearance cases.

Besides, the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) was amended to ensure safeguards against arbitrary arrest and mandatory preliminary investigation within 48 hours of filing a complaint.

The International Crimes

Tribunal Act was amended, barring the accused in cases under this law from holding or running for public office once formal charges are pressed against them.

In January, the Supreme Court Judge Appointment Ordinance, 2025, was issued, empowering the Supreme Judicial Appointment Council to select suitable candidates for appointment as SC judges.

Between March and August this year, two Appellate Division judges and 25 HC judges were appointed through the council, led by the chief justice.

## CASE BACKLOG

The number of pending cases in courts across the country stood at around 47 lakh as of September 30 this year, up from 44.44 lakh on July 1 last year, according to case disposal statements from the SC.

The Appellate Division of the SC saw a rise in pending cases to 39,417 from 28,901 on July 1 last year. They include appeals in connection with the 2009 BDR carnage; Narayanganj seven murders; the killings of AL leader Ahsan Ullah Master, and BUET student Abrar Fahad; and the

Holey Artisan attack, said SC sources.

The Appellate Division, however, disposed of several significant political and constitutional cases, including the appeals related to the August 21 grenade attack, the caretaker government system, and the Supreme Judicial Council.

There were 637,882 pending cases with the HC as of September 30, with 60,000 cases added to the backlog since July 1 last year.

Lower courts saw an addition of 185,168 cases to the backlog during the period, with the number of pending cases rising to 40,53,908 as of September 30 this year.

SC sources said the shortage of judges has contributed to the rise in the case backlog. The country currently has 2,302 judges -- seven in the Appellate Division; 108 in the HC; and 2,187 in lower courts. Of the judges, three have been barred from carrying out judicial functions since October 16 last year as the Supreme Judicial Council is probing allegations against them. Another three are on leave.

## 2 more sent to jail over attacks on Star, Prothom Alo

## COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday sent two men to jail in connection with the vandalism, arson, and looting at the offices of The Daily Star and Prothom Alo in Dhaka.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Md Jamshed Alam passed two orders after police produced the accused, Swapan Mondal, 27, and Aminul Islam, 21, before the court seeking their confinement, said a court staffer.

Swapan was arrested on Wednesday in a case filed over the attack on The Daily Star office, while Aminul was arrested in the case filed over the attack on Prothom Alo office. Earlier, 29 people were sent to jail in connection with the two cases.

On December 22, Mizanur Rahman, head of operations at The Daily Star, filed a case with Tejgaon Police Station against 350-400 unidentified people under multiple laws, including the Penal Code, Anti-Terrorism Act, Special Powers Act, and Cyber Security Ordinance.

On the same day, Major (retd) Sazzadul Kabir, head of security at Prothom Alo, filed a similar case against 400-500 unidentified people over the attack at their Karwan Bazar office.

## 7.4 lakh registered for postal voting

UNB, Dhaka

Some 7,40,000 voters, including more than 5,34,000 expatriates from different countries around the world, have been registered to vote through postal ballots in the national election scheduled for February 12, 2026.

The Election Commission opened the "Postal Vote Bd" app for Out-of-Country Voting (OCV) on November 19 and for In-Country Postal Voting (ICPV) on December 17.

"The Postal Vote Bd app will remain open for the registration of all entitled voters till December 31," said Ruhul Amin Mollik, director (public relations) at the Election Commission Secretariat, yesterday.

Although the postal balloting system has long been included in the law, it was never practised in previous elections.

## Three killed as train runs over pedestrians

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Three people were killed after being run over by a train while walking along the railway tracks near Arikhola railway station in Kaliganj, Gazipur yesterday.

Local sources said the Noakhali-bound Upokul Express was passing Arikhola station around 4:30pm when the victims, walking home between Arikhola railway bridge and Deyaltek road, failed to hear the train approaching from behind. They were struck and died on the spot, they added.

Arikhola station master Manik Mia said the identities of the deceased could not be known immediately.

Locals informed police, who later recovered the bodies. Kaliganj Police Station Officer-in-Charge Md Zakir Hossain confirmed the deaths, adding that efforts are underway to identify the victims and complete legal procedures.

Judge Appointment Ordinance, 2025, was issued, empowering the Supreme Judicial Appointment Council to select suitable candidates for appointment as SC judges.

Between March and August this year, two Appellate Division judges and 25 HC judges were appointed through the council, led by the chief justice.

## CASE BACKLOG

The number of pending cases in courts across the country stood at around 47 lakh as of September 30 this year, up from 44.44 lakh on July 1 last year, according to case disposal statements from the SC.

SC sources said the shortage of judges has contributed to the rise in the case backlog. The country currently has 2,302 judges -- seven in the Appellate Division; 108 in the HC; and 2,187 in lower courts.

Of the judges, three have been barred from carrying out judicial functions since October 16 last year as the Supreme Judicial Council is probing allegations against them. Another three are on leave.

# NEWS

## Turkey detains 115 alleged IS members

AFP, Istanbul

Some 115 alleged members of the Islamic State group suspected of planning attacks during the end of year holidays have been arrested in Turkey, Istanbul's prosecutor general said yesterday.

"Following intelligence indicating that the IS terrorist organisation was planning attacks during Christmas and New Year celebrations," the prosecutor's office ordered the detention of 137 people, 115 of whom have been arrested, the Istanbul prosecutor general's office said in a statement.

Turkey shares a 900-kilometre (559-mile) border with Syria, where jihadist groups are still active and where the IS was accused of an attack in mid December that killed two US soldiers and one civilian.

Washington recently blamed a lone IS gunman for an attack in Palmyra, Syria, on December 13 in which two US soldiers and an American civilian died.

This week, Turkey's intelligence agency also conducted an operation on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border area, capturing a Turkish national who it said held a senior role in the IS group.



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un visits the construction site of an 8,700-tonne nuclear-powered submarine said to be capable of launching surface-to-air missiles, in this photo released yesterday by the country's official Korean Central News Agency. PHOTO: AFP

## 'NCP leaning towards seat-sharing deal with Jamaat'

FROM PAGE 1

Repeated attempts to reach NCP Convener Nahid Islam and Chief Coordinator Nasiruddin Patwary by phone and message were unsuccessful.

NCP Joint Convener Sarwar Tushar told The Daily Star that no final decision had been made. "Nothing has been finalised for an official announcement. Details will be shared once discussions are over," he said.

Jamaat Secretary General Mia Golam Porwar

confirmed to BBC Bangla

that discussions on seat-

sharing between Jamaat

and the NCP were under

way.

When The Daily Star

tried to contact Porwar by

phone, his aide Foyez Uddin

received the call and said the

Jamaat leader was busy.

Two senior NCP leaders, requesting anonymity, said the proposed arrangement with Jamaat would not be a formal alliance but a seat-

sharing deal, allowing the

party to contest the election

under its own symbol.

Jamaat has also agreed to a seat compromise while keeping the Gonotantrik Songskar Jote intact. "Overall, the talks are moving in a positive direction," one NCP leader said.

The issue entered the public domain yesterday morning after Abdul Kader, former coordinator of the anti-discrimination student movement and convener of the defunct Dhaka University Democratic Student Union, raised concerns in a Facebook post.

He wrote that the NCP was finally forming an alliance with Jamaat, calling it a "suicidal decision" driven by the interests of a few leaders.

Kader claimed the NCP had initially demanded 50 seats from Jamaat but eventually settled for 30, under conditions that would prevent the party from fielding candidates in the remaining 270 constituencies.

He also claimed NCP's Patwary and Jamaat leader Abdullah Mohammad Taher would oversee the

finalisation of candidates for those seats. Taher did not receive phone calls for comments.

Sources said talks between the BNP and NCP had been ongoing since the start of election preparations, with both sides initially exploring an alliance rooted in the legacy of the July mass uprising.

The NCP had sought 20 seats, and most of its leaders supported the move.

However, disagreements over seat distribution, the July charter and reform issues gradually widened, becoming public with the signing of the charter.

In early November,

Nahid had announced his decision to contest separately. On December 7, the Gonotantrik Songskar Jote was launched, followed by the NCP's announcement of candidates for 125 seats on December 10.

As negotiations with the BNP stalled, NCP leaders said the party shifted its focus toward Jamaat-e-Islami to preserve its political relevance and

organisational footing.

A senior NCP leader, speaking anonymously, said the BNP's stance had changed as its position strengthened. "During difficult times, the BNP needed us. Now they have taken a dismissive, almost despotic attitude," he said.

"They are offering only three seats, with the condition that we dissolve the party and our alliances to merge with them. Under these terms, the prospects of an alliance or seat-sharing with the BNP are extremely low," he added, noting that a final decision would follow talks with Tarique.

A BNP leader with knowledge of seat-sharing talks with other parties said it had held discussions with the NCP a long time ago. "There was no talk with the NCP recently," the leader added, requesting anonymity.

### MIXED REACTIONS AMONG ALLIES

The developments have drawn mixed reactions within the Gonotantrik

Songskar Jote. The Amar Bangladesh Party (AB Party) has responded pragmatically, while the Rastro Songskar Andolon has voiced sharp criticism.

"We will speak with our alliance partners soon. We want to move forward together," said a senior NCP leader.

An AB Party leader, requesting anonymity, said, "Without an agreement with a major party, our post-election existence would be uncertain. Since the BNP is unwilling to compromise, Jamaat has become our last option."

In contrast, Rastro Songskar Andolon Chairman Hasnat Kajiyam said the NCP's engagement with Jamaat undermined the alliance's principles.

"Jamaat is an undemocratic party. By negotiating simultaneously with the BNP and Jamaat, the NCP has violated the core democratic conditions of the alliance. As a result, this alliance has effectively collapsed and no longer exists," he said.

## Russia makes 'proposal' to France over jailed researcher

AFP, Moscow

Moscow has made an offer to Paris regarding jailed French researcher Laurent Vinatier, who is facing espionage charges that could see him sentenced to 20 years in a Russian prison, the Kremlin said yesterday.

"We will speak with our alliance partners soon. We want to move forward together," said a senior NCP leader.

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DHAKA FRIDAY DECEMBER 26, 2025  
POUSH 11, 1432 BS

The Daily Star

9

## KSA urges Yemen separatists to cede seized territory

AFP, RIYADH

Saudi Arabia, the main backer of Yemen's internationally recognised government, said yesterday that Yemeni separatists should return territory seized recently, adding that it seeks to de-escalate tensions within the government camp.

The separatist Southern Transitional Council is part of Yemen's internationally recognised government, a patchwork of groups held together by their opposition to the Iran-backed Houthis, which rule much of the country's north.

This month, the UAE-backed STC, which seeks to revive the formerly independent state of South Yemen, swept through swathes of the country, expelling other government forces and their allies in a move that sparked fears of secession and further instability.

"The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia points out that the military movements in the governorates of (Hadramawt and Al-Mahra), recently conducted by the Southern Transitional Council, were carried out unilaterally, and without the approval of the Presidential Leadership Council (PLC) nor in coordination with the Coalition's leadership," the Saudi foreign ministry said in a statement.

"These movements resulted in an unjustified escalation that harmed the interests of the Yemeni people with all of its segments," it added.

## Law and order

FROM PAGE 12

particularly the police.

They said those expectations were not met.

"He needed to resign due to his failure to perform at the expected level and shortcomings in crisis management," said another senior government official. "He was a former IGP, and there were expectations that he would play a strong and decisive role."

Khuda Baksh, a former inspector general of police who was overseeing the Ministry of Home Affairs, and Uddihi.

amid mounting concerns over public safety following a series of incidents in recent months.

These incidents include the killing of Sharif Osman Hadi, spokesperson of Inqilab Moncho and an aspirant from the Dhaka 8 constituency. Following his death, attacks were also carried out on the offices of national dailies The Daily Star and Prothom Alo, as well as on two prominent cultural organisations - Chhayanan and Uddihi.

Officials told this

newspaper that unease was growing within the administration over his performance, particularly after the shooting of Hadi, one of the organisers of the July uprising, and the subsequent fallout.

"Realising this unease, he himself submitted the resignation. The government did not ask him to resign," said a top government official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Attempts to reach Khuda Baksh for comment were unsuccessful.

## Focus on 'quarantine'

FROM PAGE 12

in the Caribbean Sea, where long-forgotten theft of other people's property, namely piracy, and banditry, are being revived," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said of the situation.

Putin said last week he would look into Vinatier's case after a French journalist asked him about it during an end-of-year televised press conference.

"I don't know anything about this case. This is the first I've heard of it," Putin said.

"But I promise you I'll definitely find out what it is. And if there's even the slightest chance of resolving this matter favourably, if Russian law allows it, we'll make every effort," Putin said.

Asked by AFP about the Kremlin statement, the French foreign ministry declined to comment.

The Kremlin said at weekend that Putin was "ready" to engage in dialogue with Macron.

international legal norms."

"We confirm our support for the efforts of the government of Nicolas Maduro aimed at protecting sovereignty and national interests, and maintaining the stable and secure development of his country," she said.

## Grieving father returns home

FROM PAGE 12

off the site, and silence hung heavy - a stark echo of the blast.

Witnesses recounted the terror of the moment. Jakir Siddiqi, who identified himself as a media director, said he frequents the area with colleagues for tea.

"The explosion was so deafening that it left me

numb for several minutes," he said.

Kalam Mia, whose tea stall is just 10 feet from the spot, said the aftermath. "I looked and saw a young man lying there, his head shattered. I've worked here for years, but I've never seen such cruelty," he said.

Akbar has filed a murder

## One killed

FROM PAGE 12

According to locals, Samrat had formed a criminal gang and had long been involved in extortion and other criminal activities. After remaining in hiding in India for a long time, he recently returned home and allegedly demanded extortion money from a resident of the village.

On Wednesday night, Samrat and members of his group went to the villager's house to collect the money. When the occupants raised an alarm shouting "robbers", locals rushed to the spot and beat Samrat.

His other associates managed to flee, while Selim was caught with weapons, said police.

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"Realising this unease, he himself submitted the resignation. The government did not ask him to resign," said a top government official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Attempts to reach Khuda Baksh for comment were unsuccessful.

## Barbados' first COVID-19 death

FROM PAGE 12

Barbados' first COVID-19 death

has been reported.

The 75-year-old man, who had been

admitted to hospital with COVID-19 symptoms, died on Wednesday morning, the health ministry said.

He was the first person to die from the disease in the Caribbean island nation.

Health Minister Dr. Franklyn

has said the country is still in the early stages of the pandemic.

He said the country has been

working to contain the spread of the virus.

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MIGRANT CRISIS  
Coastguard rescues 52 off Greece

AFP, Athens

Greek coastguard were searching yesterday for a missing child off the island of Farmakonisi after rescuing 52 migrants in two separate incidents in the Aegean Sea, local media reported.

They found 13 migrants who had arrived on the small, uninhabited island, but one boy was reported missing from the group.

Another 39 migrants were found on board an inflatable boat off Crete, according to the same source. They were taken to the village of Kaloi Limenes in Crete. No details about their nationality were provided.

Two coastguard vessels and an airforce helicopter were deployed for the operation off Farmakonisi.

Many migrants try to reach the Greek islands from Turkey or Libya as a way of entering the European Union.

Five killed in Nigeria mosque blast  
35 hurt; cops probe suicide bomber

AFP, Maiduguri

Nigeria police said yesterday that they suspected a suicide bomber was behind the blast that killed several worshippers in a mosque on Christmas eve in the country's northeastern Borno state.

A police spokesman put the death toll at five, with 35 wounded. A witness on Wednesday told AFP that eight people were killed.

The bomb went off inside the crowded Al-Adum Juma'at Mosque at Gamboru market in the capital city of Maiduguri, as Muslim faithful gathered for evening prayers around 6:00 pm, according to witnesses and the police.

"An unknown individual, whom we suspect to be a member of a terrorist group, entered inside the mosque, and while prayer was ongoing, we recorded an explosion," police spokesman Nahum Daso told journalists.

Daso said in a statement late on Wednesday that the "incident may have been a suicide bombing, based on the recovery of fragments of a suspected suicide vest and witness statements."

Police officials have been deployed to markets, worship centres and other public places in the wake of the blast.



This handout photograph, taken and released by the Ukrainian Emergency Service yesterday, shows rescuers working to extinguish a fire following a reported Russian drone strike in Ukraine's Chernihiv region.

PHOTO: AFP

## Israeli strike hits vehicle near Syria border

Says Lebanon; two killed; deadline nears to disarm Hezbollah in the country's south

AFP, Beirut

Lebanon said an Israeli strike near the border with Syria killed two people yesterday, as a deadline nears for Lebanon's army to disarm Hezbollah in the country's south.

Despite a November 2024 ceasefire that was supposed to end more than a year of hostilities between Israel and the Iran-backed Hezbollah, Israel has kept up strikes on Lebanon and has also maintained troops in five southern areas it deems strategic.

"An Israeli enemy strike today on a vehicle in the town of Hawsh al-Sayyed Ali in the Hermel district killed two people," the health ministry said, with the state-run National News Agency saying the raid targeted a van.

The NNA also reported that a man wounded in an Israeli strike last week near Beirut had died of his injuries.

It identified him as a member of Lebanon's General Security agency and said "he happened to be passing at the time of the strike as he returned from service" in Beirut.

The health ministry had said that strike targeted a vehicle on the Shouf district's Jadra-Siblin road, around 30 kilometres (19 miles) south of the capital, killing one person and wounding five others, while an AFP photographer had seen a



damaged goods truck.

On Tuesday, Lebanon's army said a soldier was among those killed in an Israeli strike a day earlier and denied the Israeli military's accusation that he was a Hezbollah operative.

Under heavy US pressure and fears of expanded Israeli strikes, Lebanon has committed to disarming Hezbollah, starting with the south.

The army plans to complete the group's disarmament south of the Litani River -- about 30 kilometres (19 miles) from the border with Israel -- by year's end.

Lebanese army chief Rodolphe Haykal told a military meeting on Tuesday "the army is in the process of finishing the first phase of its plan".

More than 340 people have been killed by Israeli fire in Lebanon since the ceasefire, according to an AFP tally of Lebanese health ministry reports.

Meanwhile, Syrian authorities yesterday said they killed a senior leader in the Islamic State group in coordination with the US-led coalition, hours after the arrest near Damascus of another leader.

Syrian security and intelligence forces, working in coordination with the international coalition, conducted what the interior ministry described as a "precise security operation".

A December 13 attack killed two US soldiers and an American civilian. Washington blamed the attack on a lone IS gunman in Syria's Palmyra.

Iran Guards seize foreign-crewed tanker in Gulf

AFP, Tehran

Iran's Revolutionary Guards on Wednesday seized an oil tanker in the Gulf carrying more than a dozen foreign crew members, state media reported.

The vessel "was carrying 4 million litres of smuggled fuel with 16 non-Iranian crew members on board," state television quoted navy commander General Abbas Gholamshahi as saying.

Forces from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) "boarded the ship ... as it was leaving Iranian territorial waters," he added.

It was not immediately clear which flag the ship was flying.

Iranian forces regularly announce the interception of ships it says are illegally transporting fuel in the Gulf.

They regularly target tankers that Tehran accuses of being part of the illicit trade in the Strait of Hormuz, a key chokepoint for global oil and liquefied natural gas shipments.

Wednesday's seizure is the latest in a series of similar incidents in recent weeks.

Earlier in December authorities seized a tanker in the Gulf of Oman with 18 crew members from India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh on board.

## CHRISTMAS HOMILY

## Pope condemns 'open wounds' of war

AFP, Vatican City

Pope Leo XIV condemned the "senselessness" of war and the "open wounds" it leaves behind, as he delivered his first Christmas message yesterday after a year marked by conflict but also hopes for peace in Gaza and Ukraine.

Pope Leo, who was elected in May after the death of his predecessor Pope Francis, spoke of Gaza during a mass in St Peter's Basilica, saying: "How... can we not think of the tents in Gaza, exposed for weeks to rain, wind and cold".

"Fragile is the flesh of defenceless populations, tried by so many wars, ongoing or concluded, leaving behind rubble and 'open wounds,'" the Pope said at the mass.

"Fragile are the minds and lives of young people forced to take up arms, who on the front lines feel the senselessness of what is asked of them and the falsehoods that fill the pompous speeches of those who send them to their deaths," he said.

"Let us pray in a particular way for the tormented people of Ukraine," Pope said.

"May the parties involved, with the support and commitment of the international community, find the courage to engage in sincere, direct and respectful dialogue," he added. Later yesterday, Pope was set to deliver a twice-yearly "Urbi et Orbi" (to the city and the world) message and blessing, which usually addresses global conflicts.

## DISPUTED ELECTION

### Trump-backed Asfura wins Honduras presidency

REUTERS, Tegucigalpa

Nasry Asfura, the conservative candidate for Honduran president backed by US President Donald Trump, was declared the winner on Wednesday more than three weeks after the November 30 election, which was beset by delays, technical problems and allegations of fraud.

The Honduras electoral authority, known as the CNE, said Asfura won 40.3 percent of the vote, edging out center-right Liberal Party candidate Salvador Nasralla who garnered 39.5 percent. The candidate of the ruling LIBRE party, Rixi Moncada, came in a distant third.



Asfura ran on a broad pro-business platform saying private investment was necessary to move the country forward, while his political agenda focused on jobs, education and security.

He has also signaled he may swap Honduras allegiance to Taiwan, and away from Beijing.

The results were so close and the ballot processing system so chaotic that around 15 percent of the tally sheets, comprising hundreds of thousands of ballots, had to be counted by hand to determine the winner.

In the weeks following the vote, LIBRE repeatedly called for protests against what they denounced as an "electoral coup."

The protests interrupted the manual count, blocking officials from accessing the building where tally sheets were being stored.

## China accuses US of hindering China-India ties

REUTERS, Beijing

China yesterday accused the US of distorting its defence policy in an effort to thwart an improvement in China-India ties.

Foreign ministry spokesperson Lin Jian was responding to a question at a press briefing on whether China might exploit a recent easing of tensions with India over disputed border areas to keep ties between the United States and India from deepening.

China views its ties with India from a strategic and long term perspective, Lin said, adding that the border issue was a matter between China and India and "we object to any country passing judgment about this issue".

The Pentagon said in a report on Tuesday that China "probably seeks to capitalize on decreased tension ... to stabilize bilateral relations and prevent the deepening of US-India ties".

China on Tuesday urged the United States to fulfil its nuclear disarmament responsibilities after the draft Pentagon report said China was likely to have loaded more than 100 intercontinental ballistic missiles in sites near the Mongolian border and showed no desire for arms control talks.

"As a super nuclear power with the largest nuclear arsenal, the most urgent task for the US is to earnestly fulfil the special and priority responsibility for nuclear disarmament," Lin Jian, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson, said at a regular press conference in Beijing.

The US should "substantially reduce its nuclear arsenal to create conditions for other nuclear weapon states to join the nuclear disarmament process," Lin added.



An armed man watches as Syrian scouts perform music in the streets during Christmas celebrations in the old city of Damascus. Syrian authorities said they killed a senior leader in the Islamic State group in coordination with the US-led coalition, hours after the arrest near Damascus of another leader.

## Indian forces kill Maoist rebel leader

AFP, Bhubaneswar

Indian security forces killed a senior Maoist rebel commander and three other fighters including two women in a raid yesterday, police said, as authorities push a major offensive against the guerrillas.

New Delhi has launched an all-out campaign against the insurgents and vowed to end the Maoist rebellion by March 2026.

Police in the eastern state of Odisha said they had killed Maoist commander Ganesh Uike in a gunfight in Kandhamal district, after security forces received a tip-off about his location.

Uike, 69, the leader of the Maoist rebels in the coastal state, had a bounty of more than \$120,000 on his head.

"Four dead bodies of Maoists" were recovered following the gunfight, top state police officer Yogesh Bahadur Khurania said, identifying one of them as Uike.

## BPL 12 begins today with chaos in tow

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

The Bangladesh Premier League T20 (BPL) returns for its 12th edition today, promising cricketing excitement but once again shadowed by controversy. From organisational hiccups to franchise turmoil, chaos seems inseparable from the league's narrative, setting the tone even before the first ball is bowled.

As the tournament gets underway at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium, with Sylhet Titans facing Rajshahi Warriors in the opener, controversies continue to surface despite repeated assurances of a smoothly run event.

The newly elected Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), led by Aminul Islam Bulbul, took charge just two and a half months ago and faced a range of organisational challenges, such as broadcasting, security and logistical issues among others. While much groundwork was done, several gaps remained.

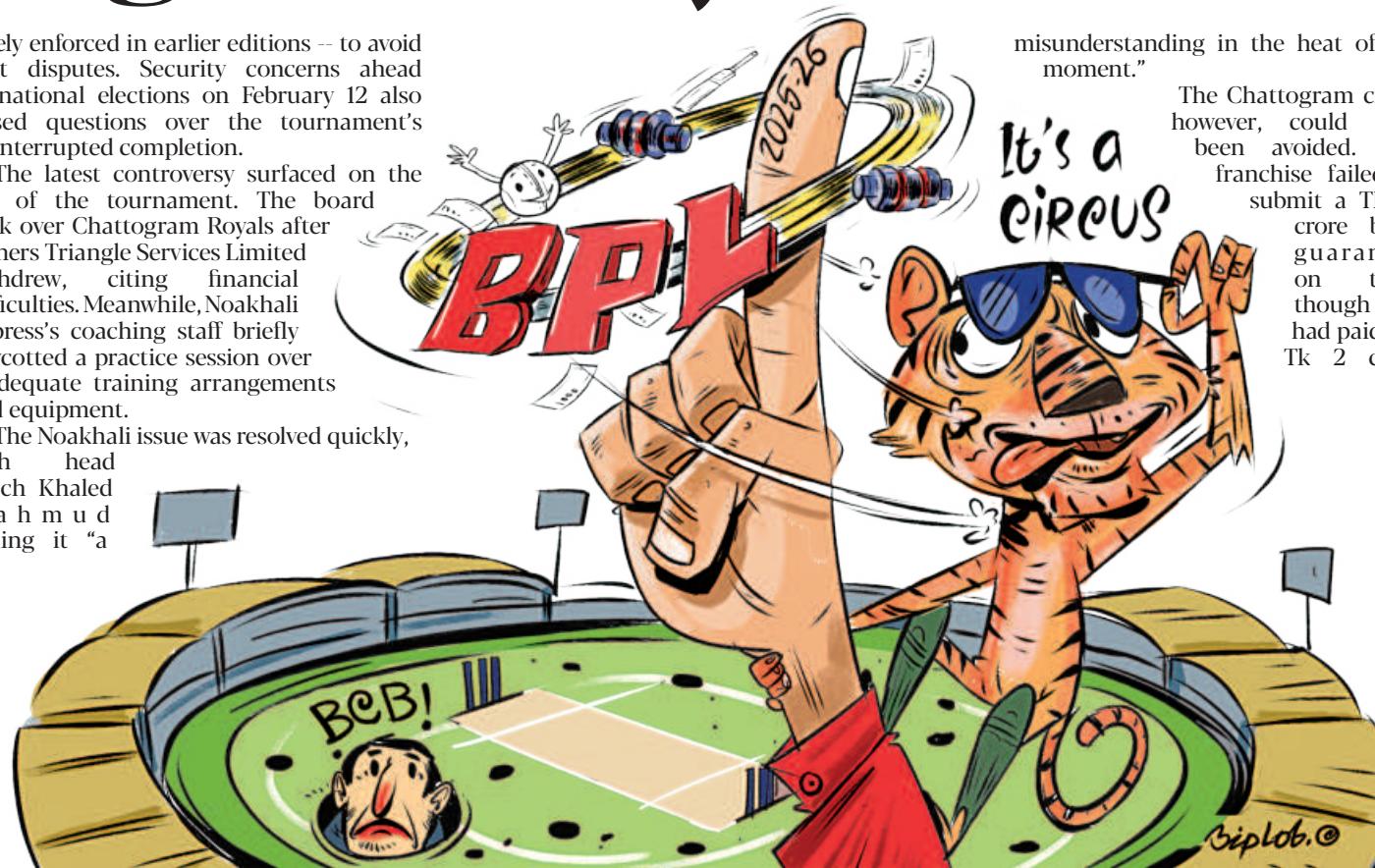
Six franchises were awarded for the next five seasons, and the players' auction returned for the first time in 12 years. Controversy struck even before the auction, with several players dropped over alleged involvement in fixing during the previous edition.

This season, the board adopted a tougher stance on franchise payments, insisting on participation fees and bank guarantees --

rarely enforced in earlier editions -- to avoid past disputes. Security concerns ahead of national elections on February 12 also raised questions over the tournament's uninterrupted completion.

The latest controversy surfaced on the eve of the tournament. The board took over Chattogram Royals after owners Triangle Services Limited withdrew, citing financial difficulties. Meanwhile, Noakhali Express's coaching staff briefly boycotted a practice session over inadequate training arrangements and equipment.

The Noakhali issue was resolved quickly, with head coach Khaled M a h m u d calling it "a



## Christmas moments

Despite a packed holiday schedule, footballers still found heart-warming moments on and off the pitch. Liverpool shared a cheerful Christmas Eve photo on Wednesday, showing the squad in buoyant spirits during training, dressed in red practice kits and Santa hats while linking arms on the pitch. Manchester City striker Erling Haaland joined the celebrations by dressing up as Santa Claus and posing with a sack full of presents. Barcelona forward Robert Lewandowski struck a cosy note, posing with his family in matching red checkered pyjamas, while City goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma smiled alongside his partner and child in front of a Christmas tree. Spain and Chelsea defender Marc Cucurella also shared a festive family photo in matching blue pyjamas, and Brazil winger Raphinha beamed with his family in a Christmas-themed snap. Bayern goalkeeper Manuel Neuer did it differently as he was seen in shorts on a beach next to a Christmas tree. While such moments offered festive warmth, football's relentless calendar rolls on, with the Premier League and Serie A set to stage Boxing Day fixtures even as much of the rest of Europe pauses for a winter break. Photos: Instagram



## A LOOK BACK AT 2025

## Hope flickers despite hurdles

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Hope and despair -- Bangladesh women's cricket team saw both sides of the coin in 2025, as the possibilities shown this year and the turbulence faced both on and off the field left them standing on the precipice of either progress or regression going into the new year.

As the year is revisited, a few performances continue to light beacons of hope.

The narrative was shaped by the biggest event in Bangladesh women's cricket in 2025, the ODI World Cup held in September-November. The lead-up to the event, however, carried heartbreak and frustration -- heartbreak in failing to secure direct qualification, and frustration in how, even after eventually booking a place in the mega event, the team were let down by the Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) lack of foresight in arranging a proper preparation phase.

The Tigresses toured the West Indies in January with direct qualification in line, but a 2-1 series loss forced them into the six-team World Cup Qualifiers in Pakistan in April.

Qualification itself came by the narrowest of margins and a near miracle, as Bangladesh grabbed the second spot at the expense of West Indies, who finished just 0.013 behind in net run rate after both teams secured three wins.

There was respite amid the struggle. A ton against Thailand saw skipper Nigar Sultana Joty become the first woman centurion from Bangladesh in an ICC ODI

event. Joty and Sharmin Akter Supta finished as the second and third highest run-getters of the qualifiers. The Women's Dhaka Premier League in March also offered encouraging signs, with several batters showing greater tenacity and attacking intent.

However, following the league, World Cup preparation plans hit

the neck, something that might have been different with proper international exposure before the World Cup. They ended with just one win, the same return as in the 2022 edition.

This time, however, performances suggested the players were able to rise above their lack of preparation.



a snag. The Tigresses went into the showpiece without playing a single international bilateral series since the West Indies tour.

Instead of competitive international fixtures, camps and tournaments with the national U-15 boys' team were all that BCB could arrange. The lack of competitive preparation showed during the World Cup, particularly in crunch moments.

Bangladesh collectively failed to grab close matches by the scruff

The explosiveness of the new generation -- Marufa Akter, Rabeya Khan, Rubya Haider and Sobhana Mostary -- stood out as the main takeaways.

It was a dream start for Marufa, who, with her inswingers, immediately became one of the stars of the World Cup.

Batting concerns had followed the Tigresses, yet the tournament also saw Mostary, the top scorer for Bangladesh in the previous T20 World Cup, and Supta staking

claims in the top order.

The 23-year-old Mostary led with composure, and while Supta remained the standout in terms of aggregate runs, Mostary created impact. Among the youngsters, Shorna Akter's explosive knock against South Africa and Rabeya's ability to change games with her leg-spin gave Bangladesh's campaign vitality, even as they fell just short in the final hurdles against England, South Africa, and Sri Lanka.

As the year edged towards its close, off-field controversies also came to light. Former skipper Jahanara Alam made allegations of sexual abuse against coaches and team management officials near the end of the year, developments that threatened to derail stability.

Looking ahead, preparations for the 2026 Women's T20 World Cup in England in June-July began late this year. But it remains in danger of becoming another patched-up effort, with the BCB yet to confirm any international matches before the tournament and questions continuing to be raised about the standard of domestic cricket.

Still, as 2025 draws to a close, the year will be remembered not only for missed opportunities and administrative failures but also for the emergence of a promising core. If nurtured with proper planning, competitive exposure, and stability, the performances of this year may yet become the foundation on which Bangladesh women's cricket builds a brighter future.

## A LOOK BACK AT 2025

## 'Sincaraz' rivalry defines the season

Women share the spotlight



AGENCIES

Carlos Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner turned 2025 into a season-long duel, a tug-of-war that defined men's tennis and gave the sport a compelling new centre of gravity.

For the second straight year, the Grand Slams were carved up between them, each chapter sharpening a rivalry that now feels era-defining.

Sinner struck first. His commanding Australian Open victory over Alexander Zverev not only secured a title defence but also made him the first Italian man to win three majors, eclipsing Nicola Pietrangeli's long-standing mark. Then came an interruption -- a three-month ban in February stemming from a 2024 anti-doping violation -- followed by an unforgettable return.

Paris delivered the rivalry's masterpiece. In the longest Roland Garros final on record, Alcaraz saved three match points to outlast Sinner in five hours and 29 minutes, sealing one of the great comebacks and confirming his status as the "Prince of Clay" in the post-Nadal era. Wimbledon flipped the script again, Sinner exacting revenge on Centre Court

and drama. Madison Keys stunned Melbourne by claiming her first major at 29, Coco Gauff conquered Paris, and Iga Swiatek handed Amanda Anisimova a brutal Wimbledon final lesson. Aryna Sabalenka salvaged the season with a dominant U.S. Open title before Elena Rybakina closed the year in style at the WTA Finals.

Off court, rising prize money and governance disputes simmered, even as Novak Djokovic provided poignant milestones late in his career with 100th title in Geneva and 101st in Athens.





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Law and order failure led to Khuda Baksh's resignation

Say officials

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Khuda Baksh Chowdhury resigned from his post as special assistant to the chief adviser amid growing concerns within the government over his handling of law and order ahead of the February 12 national election, officials said.

Several senior government officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Khuda Baksh was appointed special assistant on November 10, 2024, following the July mass uprising, with the expectation that he would play a pivotal role in restoring discipline and boosting morale within law enforcement agencies,

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## MOGHBAZAR BLAST Grieving father returns home with son's coffin

TOUSIF KAIUM and SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Ali Akbar Majumder brought his family to Dhaka from Khulna four years ago, carrying the modest hope that hard work might bend fate in their favour.

That hope was extinguished in a single, violent moment on Wednesday, when his 21-year-old son Siam Majumder, was killed in a crude bomb attack in Moghbazar.

"Now I am returning home with my son's coffin," Akbar said yesterday outside the Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue, his voice breaking.

The bomb, hurled from a flyover in front of the Muktijoddha Sangsad Central Command Council, struck motor parts shop worker Siam as he was having tea at a roadside stall. He died on the spot, the cup unfinished.

"The state failed to protect my boy. I don't want anything else -- I just want justice," the grieving father said.

An auto-rickshaw driver, Akbar spoke of the long road his family had travelled to escape poverty. Burdened by a loan of Tk 5 lakh, he moved to Dhaka with his wife and two sons four years ago. Years of relentless labour had nearly cleared the debt.

"We were saving every penny to send Siam abroad for a better life. But he wanted to stay, start a small business, and change our fortune here," Akbar said, his words trailing off as a vehicle arrived to take the body to Eskaton for the first funeral prayer.

From there, the final journey would begin, back to Khulna, where Siam will be laid to rest.

When this correspondent visited the scene yesterday, the usually bustling area near the Muktijoddha Sangsad stood eerily still. Tea stalls were shuttered, ropes cordoned

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## X-mas celebrated amid festivity

STAR REPORT

Christmas, the biggest religious festival of the Christian community, was celebrated yesterday across the country with religious fervour and festivity. Churches were illuminated and special prayers were offered at mission centres and homes to mark the birth of Jesus Christ.

On the occasion, Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus exchanged greetings with representatives of the Christian community at the State Guest House Jamuna.

Wishing everyone on the occasion of Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, Prof Yunus said, "You are a reflection of society. By looking at you, we can understand whether everything is in order."

"We want to build a healthy society. For that reason, the July charter has been prepared to uphold the spirit of the mass uprising," the chief adviser said, adding that through a referendum on this charter, the country would move one step forward.

He called upon religious leaders to play a role in raising public awareness about the upcoming election and referendum.

In their welcome address, Christian leaders highlighted the chief adviser's global reputation and his role in improving the country's economy and overall condition.

Religious Affairs Adviser AFM Khalid Hossain, Archbishop Bejoy N D'Cruze, Bishop Philip P Adhikary, Benedict Alo D'Rozario, Christopher Adhikari, and other community leaders were present at the meeting, according to the chief adviser's press wing.

CELEBRATIONS

In the capital and elsewhere, senior members of the

SEE PAGE 3 COL 4



A man collects date tree sap in the chilly morning in Daulatpur of Khulna yesterday. Many like him have no other option but to work during this cold spell that has affected several parts of the country.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

NCP's Ctg-16 nominee Arshadul quits party

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

National Citizen Party's nominee for the Chattogram-16 (Banskhali) constituency, Mir Arshadul Haque, has resigned from the party ahead of the upcoming election.

Arshadul, also the chief coordinator of NCP's Chattogram city unit, announced in a Facebook post yesterday

that he had withdrawn from all positions within the party and would not contest the election from Chattogram-16 on its behalf.

NCP's Chattogram city unit joint coordinator Arif Moinuddin confirmed Arshadul's resignation.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Arshadul said the expectations that had led him to join NCP were not fulfilled due to what he described as the party's deviation from its promised political path.

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Children offer Christmas prayers building a small platform with figurines of the baby Jesus, Mary, and the three wise men at Darusha Christian Para in Rajshahi's Paba upazila yesterday.

PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

## Cold, dense fog disrupt daily life

Rajshahi records lowest 10.2 degrees Celsius

STAR REPORT

A shivering cold coupled with dense fog yesterday disrupted daily life across the country, particularly for people from low-income groups.

In Dhaka, residents experienced severe cold, with low-income and homeless people bearing the brunt.

"We are homeless and have been living on the streets, but it is difficult to sleep at night due to the severe cold," said Rahman Miah, who lives in the Palashi area.

In Rajshahi, the intensity of the cold increased sharply, with the district recording the country's lowest temperature of the current season at 10.2 degrees Celsius yesterday morning, said Rajshahi Meteorological Office assistant Tarek Aziz.

He warned that the temperature may drop further over the next few days, intensifying the cold spell.

Due to dense fog, vehicles were seen moving cautiously on roads with fog lights turned on.

Low- and middle-income people, particularly daily wage earners, faced severe hardship as they were forced to go to work early in the morning amid the fog and cold to sustain their livelihoods.

"Driving in this weather is very hard, but we still have to go out every day to earn a living," said Mohammad Yusul, an auto-rickshaw driver in Rajshahi city.

Rafiqul Islam, a tea-stall owner at the city's Talaimari intersection, said the weather had turned noticeably harsher compared to previous days. "Very few people

SEE PAGE 3 COL 2

## Focus on 'quarantine' of Venezuela oil

White House orders military; Russia compares US blockade to piracy

REUTERS, Washington

The White House has ordered US military forces to focus almost exclusively on enforcing a "quarantine" of Venezuelan oil for at least the next two months, a US official told Reuters, indicating Washington is currently more interested in using economic rather than military means to pressure Caracas.

"While military options still exist, the focus is to first use economic pressure by enforcing sanctions to reach the outcome the White House is looking for," the official said on Wednesday, speaking on condition of anonymity.

While President Donald Trump has been publicly coy about his precise aims regarding Venezuela, he has privately pressured Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro to flee the nation, Reuters has reported. Trump said on Monday it would be smart for Maduro to leave power.

The efforts so far have put tremendous pressure on Maduro, and the belief is that by late January, Venezuela will be facing an economic calamity unless it agrees to make significant concessions to the US," the official said.

Trump has accused the South American country of flooding the US with drugs, and his administration has for months been bombing boats originating in South America that it alleges were carrying drugs. Many nations have condemned the attacks as extrajudicial killings.

Trump has also frequently threatened to start bombing drug infrastructure on land, and has authorised covert CIA activity directed at

Caracas.

So far this month, the US Coast Guard has intercepted two tankers in the Caribbean Sea, both fully loaded with Venezuelan crude. The comments by the White House official on Wednesday come after Reuters reported that the Coast Guard was waiting for additional forces to carry out a third seizure, first attempted on Sunday, against an empty sanctioned vessel

Trump has accused Venezuela of flooding the US with drugs

He privately pressured Maduro to flee the nation

US Coast Guard intercepted two tankers in the Caribbean

known as the Bella-1.

Venezuela's UN Ambassador Samuel Moncada said on Tuesday: "The threat is not Venezuela. The threat is the US government."

Meanwhile, Russia's foreign ministry said yesterday that the United States was reviving piracy and banditry in the Caribbean Sea by blockading Venezuela and said it hoped that US President Donald Trump's pragmatism would help avoid a disaster.

"Today we are witnessing complete lawlessness

SEE PAGE 9 COL 6

## One killed in mob beating over extortion allegation

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

A man was beaten to death by a mob in Rajbari's Pangsha upazila on Wednesday night over an extortion allegation, police said.

The incident took place around 11:00pm at Hosendanga village of Kalimohor union, Assistant Superintendent of Police (Pangsha Circle) Debrata Sarkar told reporters yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Amit Mondal, also known as Samrat, a resident of the village.

During the incident, police arrested one of his associates, Mohammad Selim, and recovered two firearms from his possession.

The ASP said police rushed to the spot upon receiving information and rescued Samrat in a critical condition. He was taken to Pangsha Upazila Health Complex, where doctors declared him dead around 2:00am.

Police later recovered a pistol and one shooter gun from Selim and took him into custody. Samrat's body was sent to Rajbari Sadar Hospital morgue for an autopsy, the ASP added.

He also said Samrat had at least two cases filed against him with Pangsha Police Station, including a murder case.

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## 6 more held over Dipu killing

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Police arrested six more persons early yesterday in connection with the killing of Dipu Chandra Das in Mymensingh's Bhaluka upazila on December 18.

The arrestees are Taqbir, 22, Ruhul Amin, 42, Noor Alam, 33, Shamim Mia, 28, Selim Mia, 22, and Masum Khalasi, 22.

"The arrested individuals allegedly incited the employees present at the factory with slogans and spread the incident outside the factory. They also pressured Dipu to resign," said Md Abdulhalim Mamun, additional superintendent of police in Mymensingh.

After primary interrogation, they were produced before a Mymensingh court with a five-day remand prayer, said the ASP.

With the arrests, 18 people have so far been arrested for their alleged involvement in the incident.

On Monday, a Mymensingh court placed 12 people, arrested over the killing, on a three-day remand each, said police.

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