



Jamaat question deepens rift within NCP

Tasnim Jara quits, 30 others object to 'seat-sharing' with the Islamist party

SHAMIMA RITA

Just a day before the deadline for submitting the nomination papers, the National Citizen Party faces turmoil as two key leaders have quit over the party's decision to pursue a seat-sharing deal with Jamaat-e-Islami.

Senior Joint Member Secretary Tasnim Jara announced her resignation yesterday, and Joint Secretary Arshadul Haque stepped down on Thursday, with sources suggesting others may follow.

At least 30 central leaders wrote to Convener Nahid Islam, warning that an alliance with Jamaat would betray grassroots leaders and undermine the party's ideology.

"The basis of our objection lies in our party's declared ideology, the historic accountability associated with the July uprising, and fundamental questions of democratic ethics," the letter said.

They argued that since the July uprising, Jamaat-e-Islami and its student wing, Islami Chhatra Shibir, have engaged in divisive politics, infiltration, sabotage, false accusations against the NCP, propaganda during student union elections, and online character attacks on female members.

The letter also cited Jamaat's anti-independence role in 1971, its collaboration in genocide, and its stance on wartime crimes as fundamentally incompatible with Bangladesh's democratic consciousness and the party's values.

"Our responsibility is to guide the state and society toward human rights, religious tolerance, equal dignity of women and men, protection of minorities, civic rights, and above all, democratic values. Any alliance with Jamaat-e-Islami would weaken this moral position and damage our credibility."

30 NCP leaders in their letter to party convener

Stressing the legacy of the July uprising, they said, "Our responsibility is to guide the state and society toward human rights, religious tolerance, equal dignity of women and men, protection of minorities, civic rights, and above all, democratic values. Any alliance with Jamaat-e-Islami would weaken this moral position and damage our credibility."

The letter reminded leaders that they had previously criticised Jamaat's duplicity on reform issues and declared their intention to contest all 300 seats independently, going on to form the "Gonotantik Songskar Jote".

Noting that nearly 1,500 nomination forms were sold and 125 candidates were selected, the letter warned that shifting to an alliance for a few seats would deceive the nation and disappoint supporters seeking principled, future-oriented politics.

"If moderate supporters withdraw, the party will lose its centrist base. This would harm the NCP's independent political agency," it said, urging a clear stance against any alliance with Jamaat.

"Strategy should be determined by principles; principles should not be sacrificed for tactical considerations."

According to NCP sources, the party had been preparing to contest the election alone for the past two months but changed its position after the killing of Sharif Osman Bin Hadi, spokesperson for Inqilab Moncho and an independent candidate for Dhaka-8.

Since then, security concerns among NCP leaders and activists have intensified, while party leaders have increasingly felt that alignment with a major political force is necessary to consolidate the NCP's place in national politics.

Tasnim Jara was not a signatory to the letter. She announced her decision to run as an independent candidate from Dhaka-9 in a Facebook post yesterday.

Addressing the residents of Dhaka-9, Jara wrote in her post, "I promised you and the people of this country that I would fight for you and for building a new political culture. No matter what the circumstances may be, I am firmly determined to keep that promise."

"Candidates backed by political parties have local party offices and

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Through the dense fog, a motorcyclist navigates a barely visible road in the Birulia area near the capital's Uttara yesterday morning. The photo was taken around 8:00am.

PHOTO: STAR



Khaleda Zia 'going through critical phase'

Says Dr Zahid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia is passing through a critical phase, and it cannot be said that her physical condition has improved, her personal physician Zahid Hossain said yesterday.

He added that Khaleda's elder son, BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman, has sought prayers from people across the country for his mother's quick recovery.

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Seat-sharing math grows complex for Jamaat

Leaders claim they're close to agreement despite NCP in the fray

RASHIDUL HASAN

The seat-sharing talks between Jamaat-e-Islami and its seven allies, including Islami Andolan Bangladesh, appear increasingly complicated with the NCP and other parties seeking a share as well.

Jamaat and IAB leaders, however, insist a deal is imminent, and a nomination list is expected to be finalised today, a day before the deadline for nomination submission.

"The top leaders of Jamaat and Islami Andolan Bangladesh are scheduled to hold a meeting tonight [yesterday] to finalise the nomination list," IAB Secretary General Yunus Ahmed said. "The list will be made public through a press conference tomorrow [today] or the day after."

The talks formally began on December 9, with Jamaat leaders initially hopeful that a final list of candidates from the eight like-minded parties could be announced within a week.

But things became so difficult that senior Jamaat leaders cancelled prearranged programmes to focus solely on negotiations, according to an aide to a top Jamaat leader.

Jamaat Secretary General Mia Golam Porwar, however, dismissed claims of discord. "Our discussions with different

political parties regarding seat sharing are almost at the final stage. It will be finalised very soon," he said.

Echoing that optimism, Jamaat Assistant Secretary General and head of the party's publicity wing, Ahsanul Mahboob Zubair, said they hoped to complete the process before the December 29 nomination deadline.

Jamaat is holding seat-sharing talks not only with its ideological allies but also with the NCP, the Liberal Democratic Party and the Bangladesh Labour Party.

"Additional time is required for redistribution of nominations as several new political parties, including the National Citizen Party, have joined discussions with us," he said. "The nomination list of the eight like-minded parties and others who joined us will be

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MOMENTUM FROM TARIQUE'S RETURN

BNP looks to take it to ballot box

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

The BNP is aiming to sustain the momentum generated by acting chairman Tarique Rahman's return and rally supporters ahead of the upcoming 13th national election.

The party believes that Tarique's homecoming has dispelled the uncertainty and confusion that had surrounded the polls.

Senior leaders said party workers are energised, with his arrival adding fresh pace to campaign activities nationwide.

"Tarique Rahman's return has put an end to all kinds of doubts surrounding the upcoming polls. Leaders and activists are now united and energised. His arrival has also strengthened the BNP and given the party new drive, which leaders and activists want to maintain," said BNP Joint Secretary General Syed Emran Saleh Prince.

Echoing the sentiment, BNP Standing Committee member Iqbal Hasan Mahmud Tuku said the interest and excitement among party members and the public in general over Tarique Rahman's homecoming was positive for BNP.

According to insiders, party leaders and activists want to avoid creating any situation that could negatively affect the election environment or harm the party's image, especially now that Tarique is present in the country.

BNP wants to prevent any disorder among its leaders and activists during the election period that could give rival parties an opportunity to undermine the party.

The leadership sees this present moment as a chance to turn public attention towards BNP as the election approaches.

Sources note that meetings, outreach programmes and internal coordination efforts are expected to increase in the coming days, particularly at the grassroots level.

Senior leaders plan to stay engaged in election-focused activities. As part of this, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir will

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Tarique, Zaima finish process to become voters

BNP acting chief offers fateha at Hadi's, Koko's graves

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman and his daughter Zaima Rahman yesterday completed the procedures required to be listed as voters ahead of the national election and referendum on the July charter slated for February 12.

On the third day of their return, the father-daughter duo visited the Election Commission office in the capital's Agargaon separately amid heavy security to register as voters in Ward no. 19 under the Dhaka-17 constituency.

The family's present address on Gulshan Avenue falls under that ward.

Tarique has not been listed as a voter yet because he has been away since the EC began preparing voter lists with photographs ahead of the December 2008 polls.

The Election Commission will hold a meeting today to decide on the inclusion of Tarique and Zaima in the voter list, said EC Secretary Akhtar Ahmed.

According to Section 15 of the Voter List Act, 2009, the EC may, at any time, include or remove the name of any person entitled

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BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman gets his photograph taken as part of his voter registration process yesterday afternoon at the Election Commission headquarters in the capital's Agargaon. He is expected to receive his national identity card within 24 hours. PHOTO: BNP MEDIA CELL

HADI KILLING Inqilab Moncho calls blockades in all divisional cities today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Inqilab Moncho yesterday announced all-out blockades in all divisional cities from today as its protests demanding justice for slain leader Sharif Osman Bin Hadi spread beyond the capital.

The blockades will begin at 11:00am, the organisation said in a Facebook post around 11:30pm. The announcement was also made from Shahbagh intersection, where Inqilab Moncho continued its sit-in for the second consecutive day, reports Prothom Alo.

During the programme at Shahbagh, Environment Adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan and Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sheikh Md Sazzat Ali visited the site and briefed protesters on the progress of the investigation around 11:00pm.

Pledging quick submission of the charge sheet and speedy trial, the adviser said, "The interim government is working to identify those who killed martyr Osman Hadi and those who worked behind the scenes, and to bring them to justice."

The DMP commissioner said the

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BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman offers prayers at the grave of slain Inqilab Moncho leader Sharif Osman Bin Hadi near Dhaka University Central Mosque yesterday.

PHOTO: BNP MEDIA CELL

Tarique's security under review amid huge crowds

BAHARAM KHAN and MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Law enforcement agencies are reassessing Tarique Rahman's security citing unexpectedly large crowds at programmes attended by the BNP acting chairman, officials said.

The agencies, after reviewing the situation on Friday and Saturday, said turnout exceeded expectations even at smaller events, posing challenges.

A meeting was held at the Home Ministry yesterday with chiefs of law enforcement agencies to review security arrangements, according to multiple sources.

The head of an intelligence agency has been tasked with engaging the BNP to convey government concerns and discourage leaders and activists from crowding events other than public rallies, the sources said.

The assessments did not cite any specific threat from any group or individual, they added. Agencies noted that if Tarique begins attending rallies outside Dhaka, security challenge might increase.

Asked about the meeting's decisions, Special Branch chief and Additional Inspector General Golan Rasul told The Daily Star: "We are coordinating with all other agencies, providing and ensuring security for Tarique Rahman. As an intelligence agency, we are

conducting analysis of his possible threats to provide necessary security arrangements."

Tarique returned to Bangladesh on Thursday after 17 years in self-imposed exile, drawing tens of thousands to a rally in Purbachal. A law enforcement source said such crowds were expected on his return day, but the large turnouts on Friday and Saturday, particularly at Ziaur Rahman's mausoleum, prompted the reassessment.

The source said the BNP has not formally applied for Special Security Force (SSF) protection. While the government believes such protection may be necessary, it could raise questions about maintaining a level playing field ahead of the election. Any decision would require Election Commission approval, the source added.

"Overall, the government is in a dilemma over the issue."

The government began providing security to key political leaders after Osman Sharif Hadi, an independent candidate from Dhaka-8 and a prominent July uprising youth leader, was shot dead on December 12, a day after the election schedule was announced.

More than two dozen leaders have already been assigned gunmen, while Jamaat's ameer has sought round-the-clock security, including at his residence.

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Seat-sharing math grows complex

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finalised within a day or two."

Zubair added that in constituencies where consensus cannot be reached, multiple candidates may initially submit nomination papers, with withdrawals to follow later once agreements are finalised.

Jamaat sources said the party is holding seat-sharing talks not only with its ideological allies but also with the NCP, the Liberal Democratic Party and the Bangladesh Labour Party.

The NCP emerged in the post-mass uprising period, while the LDP, JSD and Labour Party had long been partners in the BNP-led simultaneous movement.

Following failed negotiations with the BNP, these parties are now recalibrating their political strategies.

As talks with like-minded parties stalled, Jamaat's parallel discussions with new partners further fuelled tensions within the eight-party bloc, sources said.

At the heart of the dispute lies a single question: how many seats each party will receive.

In the aftermath of the mass uprising, Jamaat initiated talks with Islami Andolan Bangladesh, Khelafat Majlis, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, Bangladesh Khelafat Andolon, Bangladesh Nezame-e-Islam Party and Jatiya Ganatantrik Party to field single candidates in all constituencies through seat-sharing. The Bangladesh Development Party later joined the alliance.

Together, the eight parties carried out joint street programmes around shared demands.

An initial understanding was reached, and talks progressed gradually. Each party conducted internal surveys to assess candidate strength.

Jamaat question deepens rift within NCP

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well-organised party workers. They also have opportunities to raise concerns or seek support from the government and administration regarding security or other issues. However, since I am not affiliated with any political party, I will not have access to any of those advantages. You are my only source of strength.

"As your daughter, if you extend affection and support in recognition of my honesty, dedication, and unwavering determination to pursue a new kind of politics, only then will I have the opportunity to serve you."

In her post, Jara also mentioned that she needs to collect signatures from 4,693 voters in Dhaka-9 as part of a requirement to validate her candidacy.

She said the signature collection will begin today and appealed for help from local residents and volunteers.

Before she decided to resign, Jara had raised Tk 47 lakh in less than 30 hours through crowdfunding for election expenses. Following her resignation from NCP, she also announced her decision to return the money.

She held the position of senior joint member secretary and general secretary of the Election Steering Committee.

While several others are planning to follow suit, Jara's exit was solely an individual decision, confirmed party insiders.

Senior Joint Secretary Ariful Islam Adeb told The Daily Star, "The committee was informed of Jara's decision when she messaged our WhatsApp group. Within a few minutes, she publicly posted about it on Facebook before the party could provide any response."

Earlier on Thursday, Mir Arshadul Haque resigned from his posts as joint secretary and executive council

member of the party. But disputes soon surfaced, particularly in constituencies where IAB, Khelafat Majlis and others argued their candidates were as viable as Jamaat's.

There were proposals to send neutral joint delegations to disputed constituencies to decide candidates based on surveys and local opinion, but those discussions made little headway.

Meanwhile, Jamaat's talks with the NCP moved to the forefront. After these discussions became public, unease grew within the eight-party alliance over whether the NCP's demands could be accommodated, IAB sources said.

Some parties also recalled past experiences with the NCP, noting that although the NCP had once attended a meeting at the residence of its Convener Nahid Islam to discuss a joint movement, it later declined to join the eight-party programmes.

Jamaat sources said talks are also ongoing, both formally and informally, with other parties including the LDP and the Labour Party.

According to NCP sources, its alliance talks with the BNP collapsed after the BNP reduced a promised allocation of 30 seats to four.

A Jamaat source said the JSD, led by ASM Abdur Rob, has also expressed interest in seat-sharing talks after failing to reach an agreement with the BNP.

On December 24, the LDP, led by Oli Ahmed, formally announced it was severing ties with the BNP over unresolved seat-sharing disputes. LDP Secretary General Redwan Ahmed later joined the BNP and received assurances of contesting with the sheaf of paddy symbol.

The Labour Party, meanwhile, ended its two-decade-long relationship with the BNP after failing

to secure a deal.

Labour Party chief Mustafizur Rahman Iran told The Daily Star that his party has agreed in principle to contest the election under a Jamaat-led alliance. "We have held unofficial discussions with Jamaat, but nothing has yet been finalised," he said.

There is also discussion that the LDP is seeking an understanding with Jamaat. Regarding the LDP, a Jamaat leader said an understanding may still be possible, partly to have a prominent freedom fighter aligned with the alliance.

IAB sources said the party remains firm in its demand for 100 seats to contest under an alliance with Jamaat, while Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, led by Mamunul Haque, is seeking at least 25. Several parties have warned they may withdraw from the alliance if their expectations are not met.

Jamaat leaders believe that if the eight like-minded parties, most of them Islamists, remain united, they can strengthen an Islamic ideological political narrative to counter the BNP's nationalist platform.

Jamaat Assistant Secretary General Hamidur Rahman Azad, who oversees coordination with like-minded parties, said disagreements would be resolved through pragmatism. "We will give nominations to those who have the best ability to win in the polls," he said.

Jamaat sources said the party plans to field candidates in more than 200 constituencies. Including allocations to the NCP, AB Party and other allies, Jamaat is expected to give up around 80 seats.

Last month, the NCP, AB Party and Rashtr Songskar Andolon formed the Democratic Reform Alliance, but Rashtr Songskar said they would quit the alliance after news about NCP's talks with Jamaat emerged.

activities over the past two months focused on reform-oriented politics, positioning the party as an independent force. As part of this, the party had announced plans to contest independently and formed the "Gonotantrik Shongskar Jote".

The rift has also affected recently formed members of this alliance. AB Party Chairman and former Shibir leader Mojibur Rahman Bhuiyan Monju is reportedly willing to ally with Jamaat, but the Rashtra Shangskar Andolon Chairman Hasnat Kaiyum opposes any alliance with Jamaat, BNP, or any other party.

On Friday, at a press conference at the headquarters on Topkhana Road in Dhaka, Hasnat Kaiyum said the alliance with NCP and AB Party was not officially communicated.

Pointing to the "Democratic" in the alliance's name, he said Jamaat represents an "undemocratic and religiously fascist force".

He emphasised that the Gonotantrik Shongskar Jote was established to stand independently of Jamaat and BNP.

Meanwhile, a senior Jamaat leader clarified, "This is not an alliance. We are discussing seat-by-seat arrangements with parties individually. There is no formal alliance discussion with NCP."

Meanwhile, NCP Member Secretary Akhter Hossen, in a press statement last night, outlined the party's stance on forming an electoral alliance.

He said that while BNP often differed with other parties on reform issues during talks with the consensus commission, NCP, Jamaat, and others found natural agreement on key points.

As a result, the party is prioritising commitment to reform and politics aimed at rebuilding the nation and restructuring the state in evaluating any alliance.

Tarique, Zaima finish process

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to be on the voter roll, he said.

According to Article 12(1) of the Representation of the People Order, 1972, however, a person is disqualified from election if their name is not on the voter list.

Alongside completing his voter enrolment process, Tarique spent a busy day yesterday with events of both personal resonance and political significance. Wherever he went, crowds followed him.

Tarique left his Gulshan Avenue residence at around 10:40am in a white bulletproof SUV and reached the Dhaka University campus at around 11:15am under tight security to visit the grave of Sharif Osman Hadi, spokesman of Inqilab Moncho.

Inqilab Moncho, which has been staging a sit-in at Shahbagh

intersection since Friday afternoon demanding the arrest of Hadi's killers, temporarily moved to Aziz Super Market to allow Tarique's motorcade to go to the DU campus.

At around 11:30am, Tarique along with senior BNP leaders placed a wreath at Hadi's grave, which is located next to the mausoleum of National Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam near the Dhaka University Central Mosque. He later offered prayers seeking the salvation of Hadi's departed soul. Leaders of the Dhaka University Central Students' Union and DU Vice-Chancellor Niaz Ahmed Khan joined in.

Tarique also placed a wreath at Kazi Nazrul Islam's grave.

From there, he headed to the EC office to complete his voter registration process.

He then visited at the grave of his

new momentum. Leaders and activists across the country are confident and are campaigning strongly," he said.

Grassroots activists told The Daily Star that they feel more motivated. Many described the current mood within the party as hopeful.

"We are excited, but we also know the work ahead is hard. We need guidance, not just slogans," one grassroots worker said.

Several leaders said BNP's ability to manage crowds, maintain internal discipline, communicate with voters and respond to criticism will shape public perception ahead of polling day.

Noting that party leaders remain confident ahead of the polls, Standing Committee members say the party is entering the election period with renewed energy and a clearer sense of purpose than it has had in years.

However, they also acknowledge that excitement alone will not be enough.

Whether this energy turns into electoral success will depend on how effectively the party can convert enthusiasm into organisation and votes, said two standing committee members.

For years, Tarique led party activities from abroad through virtual meetings and instructions. Grassroots leaders said his comeback has helped reduce the gap between the central leadership and local organisers.

Over the past year, BNP has faced criticism over internal disputes, clashes among factions and allegations of misconduct by some activists. Senior leaders believe Tarique's presence will help re-establish a proper chain of command.

"Workers now know that the top leadership is watching closely. This creates pressure to stay disciplined," said a BNP organiser from the north.

BNP leaders also say Tarique's return has eased doubts about the party's readiness for the election, with earlier questions over leadership gaps and decision-making authority now largely settled.

The party plans to strengthen its communication strategy, focusing on direct engagement with voters, local meetings and clearer messaging on policy issues.

Party leaders said Tarique's role will be crucial in shaping this approach.

"People want to hear from him directly," said a BNP standing committee member, adding, "They want to know what kind of leadership he offers and how the party plans to address their problems."

Sources further mentioned that Tarique has so far limited his public statements, focusing on gestures and internal meetings, while clearer political messages are expected in the coming days.

Today we are in Shahbagh; tomorrow we may occupy Jamuna [the chief adviser's residence], the parliament or even the cantonment," he said.

Criticising what he described as government inaction, Jaber said no adviser had visited the protest site despite the sit-in continuing since Friday. "People were shivering on the streets while the advisers were sleeping at home," he said, adding that public confidence in the government was eroding.

"If you think you can control the country from inside the secretariat or the cantonment, you are wrong," he said. Claiming the platform's strength, he added, "On December 12, the day of Hadi's namaz-e-ajanaza, if we wanted, we could have toppled the government. Your Jamuna or cantonment couldn't have saved you."

Women and children joined the protest yesterday morning, along with people from various cultural and professional backgrounds. Poems were recited, verses from the Holy Quran were read, and slogans demanding justice were raised.

PROTESTS OUTSIDE DHAKA
In Chattogram, activists staged a sit-in at the New Market intersection around 5:00pm, causing severe traffic

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PROTESTS OUTSIDE DHAKA
In Chattogram, activists staged a sit-in at the New Market intersection around 5:00pm, causing severe traffic

congestion on surrounding roads. The blockade was continuing at the time of filing this report at 10:00pm, though traffic had partially resumed.

In Sylhet, protesters gathered in front of the Shaheed Minar in the Chouhatta area around 3:30pm. The sit-in continued until 8:00pm, halting traffic on one side of the Chouhatta-Zindabazar road.

In Kushtia, protesters under the banner of "Kushtia Janasadhara" brought out a procession from Shaheed Abarar Fahad Stadium around 2:30pm and later blocked Majhampur Gate — the town's main junction — for about an hour, stopping traffic on the Kushtia-Jhenaidah and Kushtia-Ishwardi highways.

DEMANDS
Inqilab Moncho placed three demands — formation of a speedy trial tribunal to complete the murder trial within a maximum of 30 working days; an impartial investigation involving internationally recognised professional agencies; and identification and arrest of what they described as "Awami terrorists" allegedly hiding within civil and military intelligence agencies.

They also demanded the resignation of the home adviser, his special assistant and the law adviser.

Two sent to jail over attack on Prothom Alo

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday sent two people to jail in a case filed over vandalism, arson and looting at the head office of Prothom Alo in Dhaka.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Didarul Alam passed the order after police produced the accused before the court, seeking their confinement, said a court staffer.

The two arrestees are Rubel Hossain, 38, and Nazmul Hasan, 21. They were arrested on Friday in the city's Pallabi area.

On December 22, Maj (retd) Sazzadul Kabir, head of security at the Prothom Alo office, filed a case with Tejgaon Police Station against 400-500 unidentified people under the Penal Code, the Anti-Terrorism Act, the Special Powers Act and the Cyber Security Ordinance over the attack on the newspaper's office in Dhaka's Karwan Bazar area.

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PATURIA-DAULATDIA

Ferry services resume after 15hrs amid fog

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

Ferry services on the Paturia-Daulatdia waterway resumed yesterday morning after remaining suspended for about 15 hours due to dense fog, officials said.

Operations restarted around 10:00am after visibility improved, said Abdus Salam, deputy general manager of the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) at the Aricha office.

He said the authorities had suspended all types of ferry movement on the route from 7:15pm on Friday as thick fog reduced visibility to unsafe levels.

During the suspension, three ferries — Shah Makhdum, Enayetpuri and Bhasha Shaheed Barkat — were stranded midstream, he added.

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Top, Crime Reporters Association of Bangladesh, bottom, Bangladesh Photo Journalists Association form human chains in front of the Dhaka Reporters Unity and the Jatiya Press Club respectively protesting the attacks on Prothom Alo and The Daily Star and the harassment of New Age Editor Nurul Kabir.

PHOTO: STAR

'A serious threat to press freedom, democracy'

Journalist leaders condemn attacks on Star, Prothom Alo; demand justice, safety for journo

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Journalists yesterday continued strong condemnation of the recent attacks, vandalism, and arson targeting The Daily Star and Prothom Alo, saying such acts

pose a serious threat to press freedom and democracy.

They demanded an immediate and impartial investigation, identification of those responsible and their patrons, and exemplary punishment. They also called

for stronger measures to ensure journalists' safety and protect media freedom.

The demands were raised at separate protest programmes held in Dhaka and Brahmanbaria.

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Section of govt allowed attacks Cold wave, dense fog disrupt Bomb-like objects, chemicals

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"Since the proactiveness that was supposed to be there was missing, just as the media has suffered damage, our damage has not been little either. We, as the government, realise this damage," Rizwana said.

She termed the arsonists "common adversaries". "If you do not like someone's opinion, open a newspaper of dissenting opinion. You cannot set fire to a newspaper and think your problem is solved," she said.

Calling for a united fight against those instilling fear, the adviser said she herself had faced security threats.

She also said she aims to issue the Broadcast Commission Ordinance and the Press Commission Ordinance, and to finalise the leadership of the Information Commission, during her tenure as an adviser.

Speaking at the conference, Kamal Ahmed, head of the Media Reform Commission and consulting editor of The Daily Star, expressed deep frustration that not a single recommendation of the commission has been implemented in the nine months since the report was submitted.

"I cannot say that even a single one of the proposals has been implemented so far. For this, I am sorry," Kamal said.

Addressing the information adviser, Kamal said perhaps blame could not be placed on her shoulders, but that blame could certainly be placed on the shoulders of the interim government.

"The truth is, the interim government has done nothing," he said.

Kamal said the commission submitted its report to Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus on March 22.

"The chief adviser told us, 'Make a separate list of the immediately implementable ones. We will take steps to implement those very soon.' We provided that list within just 24 hours. I heard he gave instructions a few times, but nothing happened," Kamal said.

He criticised officials of the information ministry for showing business by sending the report to various departments for opinions, only to later say that the recommendations could not be implemented.

Kamal also highlighted the government's failure to act on the recommendation to merge BTW, Bangladesh Betar and BSS into an autonomous institution. He said two committees formed under advisers CR Abrar and Wahiduddin Mahmud produced no results.

"There is no time left now. At least a score of recommendations could have been implemented just by issuing a directive," Kamal added.

Moderated by journalist Shahnaz Sharmin, the event was also addressed by Supreme Court lawyer Sara Hossain, senior journalist and BJC adviser

Khairul Anwar, BJC Trust Chairman and Maasranga TV Chief News Editor Rezanul Haq, Jamuna Television CEO and BJC trustee Fahim Ahmed, BBC Media Action Country Representative Md Al Mamun, and others.

On the night of December 18, Prothom Alo and The Daily Star were subjected to arson and looting. Nurul Kabir was also harassed while visiting The Daily Star office to express solidarity.

Speakers at the conference termed the incident a "black day for the media".

21-year-old tied

FROM PAGE 12

e-Islami for the attack, she said, "After they left him unconscious near the Omarpur Bazar bridge area, my husband rescued him and rushed him to a local hospital, from where he was later referred to Rajshahi."

While undergoing treatment before coming to Dhaka, Siju told local journalists that two youths — Nur and Anwar from Saratnagar — tied him to a pole and hacked him, according to a video of Siju's statement.

In the video, shared by his family, Siju also alleged that a local Jamaat leader, Abdur Razzak, had called Nur and Anwar to carry out the attack.

"Even if my son had any fault, can Jamaat take the law into their own hands? They hacked him in a way meant to ensure his death," Sufia told this newspaper, alleging that her son was targeted for being a BNP activist.

Humayun Kabir, Shibganj Police Station officer-in-charge, said Siju's father Robiul Islam filed a case on the night of December 24 on charges of attempted murder.

Sub-Inspector Gopal Chandra Mondal, the investigating officer, said the case names three accused and includes 10-12 unidentified individuals.

Two brothers from Omarpur village — Abdur Razzak, 32, and Shah Alam, 30 — were arrested on December 26 and sent to jail following a court order, he added.

Police are working to arrest Nur and Anwar, Mondal said.

Contacted, Durul Huda, media secretary of Jamaat's Shibganj upazila unit, denied the allegations, calling them part of a political conspiracy.

"Siju is a person of bad character with many allegations against him. Locals were very angry with him. However, we condemn the way he was attacked and demand justice," he said.

Asked whether arrestee Razzak was involved with Jamaat, Huda said, "Razzak holds no official position; he is a Jamaat supporter. This is an attempt to tarnish Jamaat's image before the elections. Razzak could not have committed such an act."

FROM PAGE 12 Srinagar Fire Service and Civil Defence rushed to the spot and carried out rescue operations.

Dewan Azad Hossain, station officer of Srinagar Fire Service, said the injured were taken to Srinagar Health Complex. As the condition of several victims deteriorated, they were later referred to Dhaka for advanced treatment.

Vehicular movement on the expressway remained suspended for some time following the accident.

The damaged bus, Tungipara Express, was seized by Hasara Highway Police, while the truck fled the scene immediately after the incident.

FLIGHTS DIVERTED, FERRY SERVICE DISRUPTION

At least eight flights were diverted to alternate airports yesterday due to dense fog at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA), authorities said.

Three flights were diverted to Chattogram, four to Kolkata, and one to Bangkok as a safety measure, according to SM Ragib Samad, executive director of the airport.

Ferry services on the Paturia-Daulatdia and Aricha-Kazirhat river routes resumed yesterday morning

Minorities worry

FROM PAGE 12

ethnic minority communities have been subjected to communal violence in different parts of the country.

"From August 4 to December 31 last year, and from January 1 to November 30, 2025, there were 2,184 and 489 incidents of violence against religious and ethnic minorities and indigenous communities, respectively, as reported in newspapers and other media. In December alone, there were five murders."

He added, "The barbaric killing of Dipu Chandra Das in Mymensingh's Bhaluka on December 18 on allegations of blasphemy, followed by his body being hung from a tree and set on fire, has shocked the global community."

"The government's denial of organised post-August 5 violence by labelling it as 'political' has deeply frustrated minority communities. Law enforcers later acknowledged the truth, though only partially."

The discussion was chaired by Nirmal Rosaria, one of the presidents of the parishad. Bangladesh Mahila Parishad President Fawzia Moslem and Advocate Subrata Chowdhury, chief adviser of the Bangladesh Puja Ujjapan Parishad, among others, also spoke.

after remaining suspended for nearly 15 hours due to dense fog.

In its bulletin, the Met Office said yesterday that moderate to dense fog is likely in some areas across the country from midnight to morning, and in some areas it may persist until noon.

The drop in temperature has caused severe hardship, especially in the northern regions. Cold winds and dense fog have disrupted daily life, hitting low-income workers, day labourers and floating people the hardest.

Temperatures in Dinajpur, Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, and Gaibandha hovered between 10°C and 11°C.

The country's lowest temperature was recorded in Jashore at 8.8°C.

In Dhaka and other parts of the country, the feeling of cold has increased over the past five days due to a sharp fall in temperatures.

Dhaka recorded a minimum of 13°C on Friday, down from 14°C the day before.

Minimum temperatures in most parts of the country ranged between 10°C and 13°C.

The weather office warned that temperatures may drop further in the coming days, with the intensity of cold and fog likely to increase.

FROM PAGE 12

Two of Al Amin's children were injured and treated at Ad Din Hospital before being transferred to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Al Amin fled the scene.

Speaking to reporters at Keraniganj Police Station yesterday, Dhaka District Superintendent of Police Mizanur Rahman said the 400 litres of chemicals were likely hydrogen peroxide and other flammable liquids.

"We suspect these chemicals were being used for a specific purpose. The family members are being questioned to determine the source and intended use."

He said police conducted a thorough search and found a laptop, two monitors, explosive-like materials, chemicals stored in drums, and four crude bomb-like objects in the presence of locals. "We alerted the Bomb Disposal Unit, the Anti-Terrorism Unit, and the CID's crime scene unit ... A seizure list is being prepared by the CID."

About the cause of Friday's explosion, he said, "Since chemicals and crude bomb-like objects were found, it is primarily assumed that there was some kind of chemical reaction with an explosive substance. Further investigation will determine the cause... We are also investigating whether there was any plan of sabotage ahead of the national election."

The SP added that primary interrogation revealed that Al Amin faces multiple cases in and around Dhaka, with seven filed across the capital. "He was arrested twice in 2017 and 2020 and was also in jail. He was released on bail in 2023 and drove an auto-rickshaw for some time. Currently, he has been working as an Uber driver."

In 2017, Rab arrested three suspects, including Al Amin, linked to Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh, he added.

Several cases have also been filed against Asmani Khatun, alias Asma, nationwide, Mizanur said, adding that Asiya's brother Mufti Harun, who is another director of the madrasa, is currently abroad.

Visiting the explosion site, this correspondent saw over a dozen containers labelled "hydrogen peroxide."

According to police, Al Amin, a resident of Bagerhat's Mollahat upazila, ran the madrasa, with about 25-30 students, in two rooms of a flat on the ground floor of a building. Of the remaining two rooms, one was used as a living room, while he lived in the other with his family.

Parveen Begum, the owner of the building, said that on April 1, 2022, a

JNU STUDENT POLLS Campaigning ends amid hope for a fair election

RAKIB MADBER

Campaigning for the Jagannath University Central Students' Union (JnUCSU) and hall union elections officially ended yesterday, having begun on December 15.

This will be the first JnUCSU election since the establishment of the university. Voting is scheduled for December 30, while vote counting and result announcements are set for December 30 or 31.

Throughout the campaign period, the campus came alive with political discussions and a festive atmosphere.

Candidates reached out to students through direct interactions, manifesto announcements, and various programmes, outlining their visions and promises for the university.

With campaigning now over, both candidates and voters share expectations of an inclusive, transparent, and secure voting process that ensures genuine student representation.

M e h e r u n

Khanam, a student of Mass Communication and Journalism, said, "Students have only one demand for the first JnUCSU election — the election must be conducted fairly."

Suyail Ahmed, another student, said, "We have heard allegations of irregularities in previous Ducsu elections. We hope nothing like that happens in our election."

Ivan Tahseeb, general secretary (GS) candidate of the Socialist Student Front-backed Maulana Bhashani Brigade panel, expressed concern over the election process.

"We are worried about a fair election, as several actions by the university election commission have raised questions about its competence. Violations of the electoral code of conduct have occurred regularly, but the commission has failed to take action," he said.

AKM Rakib, vice president (VP) candidate of the Chhatra Dal-backed Oikoboddho Nirbheek JnUian panel, said they had made their best efforts to reach students.

"We received a very positive response. Now we expect a fair, peaceful, and secure election. We do not want unrest like that seen on other campuses," he said.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



Mazar vandalised in Thakurgaon

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

The Shah Sattaypir Mazar was vandalised, and several graves were damaged in the shrine compound in Sadar upazila of Thakurgaon early yesterday.

Local followers of Shah Sattaypir gathered at the site in the morning, expressed anger over the incident and demanded stern action against those responsible.

Enamul Haque, president of the shrine committee, said devotees regularly conduct religious activities at the shrine and that no "immoral activities" have ever taken place there.

"Yet unidentified miscreants vandalised the shrine and damaged several graves in the dead of night," he said, adding, "Those responsible must not be spared."

He also said preparations were underway to file a case in connection with the incident.

Thakurgaon Sadar Police Station Officer-in-Charge Md Monir Hossain said police are investigating the incident.

Visiting the site, Upazila Nirbahi Officer Khairul Islam said the offenders will be identified soon.



PHOTO: COURTESY

The 8th convocation of United International University was held on its campus on Madani Avenue in Dhaka yesterday. Buet Vice-Chancellor Prof Abu Borhan Mohammad Badruzzaman presided over the ceremony. University Grants Commission member Prof Mohammad Anwar Hossen attended as the special guest, while Prof M Taher A Saif of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Illinois, USA, delivered the convocation speech. The ceremony was also addressed by UIU Chairman Hasan Mahmood Raja and Vice-Chancellor Prof Md Abul Kashem Mia.

Illegal topsoil trade threatens farming

MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

Indiscriminate extraction of fertile topsoil from agricultural land during the dry season continues unabated in Habiganj, posing a serious threat to food security and environmental sustainability, warn environmentalists and locals.

Every winter, profit driven soil traders allegedly remove topsoil from farmlands in Shayestaganj, Bahubal, Nabiganj and Chunarughat upazilas, taking advantage of weak monitoring by the authorities.

Locals allege that organised middlemen buy topsoil from farmers at nominal prices and sell it at much higher rates to industrial and private establishments, rendering vast tracts of cropland less productive.

On December 25, residents of the Manman Haor area in Lakhai

upazila seized four soil-laden tractors allegedly linked to Chhota Mia, a Ward-3 member of Bamoi Union Parishad. The tractors were later handed over to Lakhai Police Station in the presence of Union Parishad Chairman Arif Ahmed Rupon.



Earlier, mobile courts fined several individuals for illegal soil extraction across the district. In Bahubal upazila, a man identified as Nanu Mia was fined Tk 50,000 for cutting fertile soil from agricultural land in the Joynabad area.

Residents of Brahmandora Union

in Shayestaganj alleged that soil is being extracted daily from the Sherpur, Keshabpur and Rishipara areas.

"Eight to ten tractors loaded with soil pass through our village every day. People remain silent because influential groups are involved," said Raju Mia of Zainabad village in Bahubal.

Lakhai Police Station Sub-inspector Masud Rana said preliminary findings indicate that the seized tractors belong to a local UP member, adding that authorities are considering filing a regular case or proceeding through a mobile court.

Bahubal Assistant Commissioner (Land) Mahbulul Islam said mobile court drives are conducted whenever information is received.

Over 75,000 apply for SUST entry test

UNB, Sylhet

More than 75,000 students have applied online to sit for the first-year, first-semester undergraduate admission tests of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST) for the 2025-26 academic session.

Member Secretary of the Admission Committee Prof Mohammad Selim confirmed that a total of 75,023 applicants submitted their applications before the deadline. The applications were received for A, B and A2 (sub-unit for Architecture) units.

According to the admission committee, the entrance examination for Unit A will be held on January 13, while the test for Unit B is scheduled for January 14. The examinations will take place at designated centres in Sylhet and the capital, Dhaka.

As per the admission guidelines, merit lists will be prepared out of a total of 100 marks. The score will be calculated based on the marks obtained in the admission test (out of 80). For HSC 2025 candidates, the combined GPA of SSC and HSC examinations will be multiplied by two, while for HSC 2024 candidates, the combined GPA will be multiplied by 1.6.

One dead as anchored vessel catches fire

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

One person was killed yesterday in a fire that broke out on a ship anchored in Cox's Bazar before its scheduled voyage to St Martin's Island.

The blaze erupted around 6:30am on the vessel The Atlantic Cruise while it was anchored in the Bakkhali river near the Nunachhara BIWTA jetty, said Wakil Uddin, port officer of the BIWTA.

The deceased, Nur Kamal, 25, a resident of Teknaf and a staff member of the ship, was reportedly asleep on board at the time of the incident.

Syed Muhammad Morshed Hossain, deputy assistant director of Cox's Bazar Fire Service and Civil Defence, said, "We received information around 7:00am and rushed to the spot. Three fire service units brought the fire under control."

"Initially, the ship authorities said the fire originated from an electrical short circuit," he added.



PHOTO: STAR

Cox's Bazar Sadar UNO Tanzila Tasnim said the fire broke out while the vessel was anchored and preparing for its journey to St Martin's Island.

She confirmed there were no tourists on board at the time.

Hosain Islam Bahadur, general secretary of the Sea Cruise Operator Owners' Association of Bangladesh, said around 180 passengers had been scheduled to travel on the vessel, but the fire started before boarding began.

He added that the passengers were safely transferred to other vessels.

Following the incident, Cox's Bazar Deputy Commissioner Md A Mannan announced the formation of a five-member investigation committee to determine the cause of the fire.

Campaigning ends amid hope

FROM PAGE 3

Abdul Alim Arif, GS candidate of the Chhatra Shibir-backed Odomo JnUian Oikko panel, said their campaign had been strong from the beginning.

"We spoke regularly with

students, listened to their problems, and received positive feedback. However, we still have concerns about the fairness of the polls," he said, adding that they hope for a transparent election.

Shahin Mia, assistant general secretary (AGS) candidate of the Jatiya Chhatra Shakti-backed Oikoboddho JnUian panel, said they received encouraging responses from students.

"Students have voiced

their support wherever we went, so we are optimistic. We want a fair election, but the election commission has disappointed us repeatedly. We hope those mistakes are not repeated on election day," he said.

According to the schedule announced on November 5, the election was initially set for December 22. However, following a campus closure due to earthquake-related panic, a revised schedule was announced on December 4.

A serious threat to press freedom, democracy Thailand

FROM PAGE 12

FROM PAGE 3
Members of the Crime Reporters Association of Bangladesh (CRAB) formed a human chain in front of its office, while the Bangladesh Photojournalists Association (BJPA) held another in front of Jatiya Press Club.

In Brahmanbaria, the Brahmanbaria Democratic Unity organised a protest in front of the district press club.

Speaking at the CRAB programme, Dhaka Reporters Unity (DRU) President Abu Saleh Akond said the attacks on Prothom Alo and The Daily Star were assaults on press freedom and democracy.

He said journalists had struggled for 16 years for media freedom and democratic restoration, during which more than 1,500 people were killed and thousands were injured. "The government in power today is the result of that struggle," he added.

Abu Saleh alleged that sections of the police and administration failed to act despite having prior information about the attacks, adding that timely intervention could have prevented the incidents.

He also said many officials still carried the mindset of the previous fascist regime.

Referring to the killing of 65 to 70 journalists over the years, including journalist couple Sagor Sarwar and Meherun Rumi, he said justice had not been served in most cases.

"We hoped for justice under the new government, but instead we saw media houses being set on fire," he said, urging journalists to remain united.

"Today it is Prothom Alo and The Daily Star. Tomorrow it could be any of us."

CRAB President Mirza Mehedi Tamal said attacks on media outlets were not new but described the recent incidents as unprecedented.

"Media cannot be silenced by attacks. It has always stood back up, and this time these two media houses did so," he said.

Lazzat Enab Mohsi, deputy editor of Prothom Alo, said not only the attackers but also those who instigated and encouraged the violence must be brought to justice.

The programme was moderated by CRAB Secretary MM Badsha. Former DRU president Shakhawat Hossain Badsha; Prothom Alo Executive Editor Sazzad Sharif; Tipu Sultan, head of politics and crime at Prothom Alo; and The Daily Star's senior reporter, Tuhin Shubhra Adhikary also spoke.

Former CRAB presidents Kamruzzaman Khan, Modhusudhan Mandal and Khairuzzaman Kamal, along with current and former leaders of DRU and CRAB, were also present.

At the BJPA programme in front of the Jatiya Press Club, leaders of various journalist organisations

joined the protest.

Speaking there, Kader Gani Chowdhury, secretary general of a faction of the Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists, recalled scenes of flames engulfing The Daily Star and Prothom Alo, saying journalists were left helpless and desperate to save their lives.

"One sister had taken shelter on the rooftop of The Daily Star. Her pleas that day shook the conscience of the world," he said.

"What kind of civilisation is this? What kind of humanity? How can burning people alive be considered a part of civilisation or humanity?" he asked, describing the attacks as assaults on democracy.

He urged the government to take action against those responsible. "If justice is not ensured, such crimes will increase, and the government will bear a permanent stain."

Shawkat Hossain Masum,

deputy head (online) of Prothom Alo, said attackers this time came with their faces uncovered, believing they would face no consequences.

"There is not only a plan to silence us, but a plan to cut our throats," he said.

The rally, moderated by BJPA President AKM Mohsin, was also addressed by Dhaka Journalists Union President Shahidul Islam, The Daily Star Chief Photographer Anisur Rahman, and BJPA General Secretary Babul Talukder, among others.

In Brahmanbaria, a protest organised by the Brahmanbaria Democratic Unity demanded the immediate arrest of those involved in the attacks.

Leaders and activists of various social, cultural and professional organisations, along with students and journalists, joined the demonstration.

a million on both sides and included fighter jet sorties, exchanges of rocket fire and artillery barrages.

The clashes were reignited early this month after a breakdown in a ceasefire that halted a previous round of fighting.

"Both sides agree to maintain current troop deployments without further movement," the ministers said in a joint statement on the ceasefire.

"Any reinforcement would heighten tensions and negatively affect long-term efforts to resolve the situation," according to the statement released on social media by Cambodia.

For more than a century, Thailand and Cambodia have contested sovereignty at various undemarcated points along their 817-km (508-mile) land border - a dispute that has occasionally exploded into skirmishes and fighting.

Factory for Rent
A 7-storied building with a total area of 91,840 sq. ft. is available for office or factory rent at KB Bazar, Signboard, Gazipur. Each floor area: 13,120 sq. ft. Contact: 01743-243076, 01713-243065. Email: saifulislamgazipur2025@gmail.com

40th Death Anniversary

The 40th Death Anniversary of Late Rahimullah Choudhury, a renowned industrialist of the country and former Member, National Assembly (M.N.A.), is being observed on the 28th December, 2025 both at his village home in Matubhuiya, Feni and in Dhaka by The Insaniyat Society, an N.G.O. founded by him for the education and welfare of the destitute in the society.

We request all his relatives, friends and well wishers to pray for his departed soul.

Family Members of Late Rahimullah Choudhury

Strengthening of BGD e-GOV CIRT (2nd Revised) Project
Bangladesh Computer Council (BCC)
Information and Communication Technology Division
Ministry of Posts, Telecommunications and Information Technology
ICT Tower, Plot # E-14/X, Agargaon, Dhaka-1207, Bangladesh
www.cirt.gov.bd

Memo No. 56.01.0000.037.07.058.25-712 Date: 28 December 2025

e-Tender Notice

This is to notify all concern that the following e-tender have published through e-GP portal.

Sl. No.	Tender ID, Package No. & Date of Publishing	Name of Package	Online Tender Last selling & Closing Date and Time
01	Tender ID: 1189690, Tender Package # eTender-G-49, Publishing Date: 28 December 2025	Supply, Installation & Commissioning of Cyber Security Software/Tools.	Last selling: 11-January-2026 at 02:00 PM Closing Date and Time: 11-January-2026, 05:00 PM

The interested Person/firms may visit the website www.eprocure.gov.bd to get the details of the tender.

This is an online Tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/ hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender registration in the National e-GP system portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required.

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP system portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd, Dial 16575 to reach e-GP helpdesk).

SD/-
Project Director

Two sent to jail over

FROM PAGE 3

According to the case documents, the attack was carried out with the intent to intimidate, cause damage, disrupt office operations and prevent the publication of the newspaper.

The value of Prothom Alo's looted property is estimated at Tk 2.50 crore,

while the total damage caused by vandalism and arson amounts to approximately Tk 32 crore, the case statement also said. Earlier, a total of 32 people were sent to jail in connection with two cases filed over the attacks on the offices of The Daily Star and Prothom Alo in Dhaka city.

Ferry services resume

FROM PAGE 3

The vessels later resumed movement once conditions normalised.

The prolonged halt in ferry services led to long queues of trucks, buses and private vehicles at Paturia in Manikganj

and Daulatdia Ghat in Rajbari, causing severe suffering to passengers and drivers. BIWTC officials said ferry operations have now returned to normal and efforts are underway to clear the backlog of vehicles.

Bangladesh Red Crescent Society
National Head Quarter (NHQ)
684-686, Red Crescent Sarak, Bara Moghbazar, Dhaka 1217.
PABX: +88-02-48310188-9, Ext: 222, 258, Direct: +88-02-8333430, web: www.bdracs.org

INVITATION FOR RE-TENDER

1. Invitation Reference, Tender ID No, and Date	Pro. (Log.) 486/2025, Tender ID: 78/2025 Date: 24/12/2025.
2. Procuring Entity Name	Secretary General, NHQ, BDRCS
3. Name of Requisition Department	Holy Family Red Crescent Medical College, 1, Eskaton Garden Road, Dhaka-1000.
4. Implemented by	Holy Family Red Crescent Medical College, NHQ, BDRCS.
5. Invitation for	Supply, Installation & Construction of Different work at Holy Family Red Crescent Medical College.
6. Procurement Method	Open Tendering Method (OTM), One stage two envelopes.
7. Budget and Source of Funds	Holy Family Own Fund
8. Work Details	LOT-D: Supply, Installation & Commissioning of 13 Persons 1000 Kgs Passenger Lift at Female Hostel.
9. Purchase of Tender document	Tender documents and schedules with detailed information are available at the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) website: www.bdracs.org and www.hifrcmc.edu.bd Tender Schedule Download Link: https://bdracs.org/tender/
Important Details:	
Interested bidders are requested to collect the tender documents within the stipulated timeframe from the mentioned link/BDRCS website.	
A Tender Schedule purchase fee for LOT-D for BDT 3,000.00 is applicable. This fee is non-refundable.	
The purchase fee should be paid through bKash number 01894-806393 (BDRCS Merchant Account).	
Please mention the bKash transaction reference number on top of the tender schedule.	
Please mention the tender reference number Pro. (Log.) 486/2025, Tender ID: 78/2025 Date: 24/12/2025 in the bKash transaction.	
Failure to include the bKash transaction reference number may result in the disqualification of your bid.	
10. Tender Schedule available from website/link	28-12-2025
11. Tender Closing Date and Time	12-01-2026 at 3:00 PM
12. Tender Opening Date and Time	12-01-2026 at 3:15 PM
13. Address of Tender Submission & Opening	Logistics Department, National Headquarters, BDRCS, 684-686 Red Crescent Road, Bara Moghbazar, Dhaka-1217.
14. Place/Date/Time of Pre-Tender Meeting	06-01-2026 at 11.00 am in the Logistics Meeting Room, National Headquarters, BDRCS, 684-686 Red Crescent Road, Bara Moghbazar, Dhaka-1217.
15. Eligibility of Tenderer	As per Tender Documents.
16. Submission Criteria	Tender will be evaluated as per LOT.
17. Tender Security Amount	2.5 % of the Total quoted value as per LOT.
18. Completion Time in months	As per Tender Documents.
The Bangladesh Red Crescent Society reserves the right to accept or reject any or all tender or split the order without assigning any reason and will not be bound to accept the lowest bid.	
Size: 3 col x 6"	

Dr. Kabir M. Ashraf Alam ndc
Secretary General

INTERNATIONAL



People feed pigeons on a street in Yangon yesterday, a day before the start of Myanmar's general election. The election will be held in phases and expected to last a month. Myanmar has been hammered by a civil war triggered by a 2021 coup in which the military ousted an elected civilian government led by Aung San Suu Kyi. Suu Kyi remains jailed, her hugely popular party dissolved and the poll is being widely criticised by democracy watchdogs as an exercise to rebrand military rule. PHOTO: REUTERS

ARMS TO TAIWAN China slaps sanctions on 20 US firms

AFP, Beijing

China has announced fresh sanctions on 20 US defence firms, including a Boeing branch, over Washington's latest arms sales to Taiwan, the island Beijing claims.

The United States has long been Taiwan's biggest arms supplier despite China viewing the democratic island as part of its territory and refusing to rule out using force to bring it under control.

Taipei said this month that Washington had approved \$11 billion in defence sales in what would be one of the largest weapons packages for the island.

China criticised the deal and announced new sanctions on Friday against Boeing's defence manufacturing outpost in St. Louis, aerospace giant Northrop Grumman and others.

The companies appear to have little or no business in China and some have been previously sanctioned by Beijing. Chinese entities will be banned from working with the firms, and their assets in the country will be frozen.

The arms sales "violate the one-China principle... seriously damaging China's sovereignty and territorial integrity", Beijing's foreign ministry said.

Russia pummels Kyiv as Zelensky heads to US

Nearly 500 drones, 40 missiles used in overnight assault; hundreds of thousands left without power

AFP, Kyiv

Russia pummelled Ukraine's capital Kyiv with drones and missiles yesterday, killing one woman and knocking out power to hundreds of thousands, ahead of President Volodymyr Zelensky's latest talks with US leader Donald Trump.

Zelensky said the attack showed Russia did not want to end its invasion launched in February 2022 that has left tens of thousands dead.

Ahead of the Ukraine president's talks in Florida with Trump today, Russia said Kyiv and its EU backers were trying to "torpedo" a US-brokered plan to stop the fighting.

On top of the fatality, the barrage of drones and missiles wounded dozens and cut power and heating to hundreds of thousands of Kyiv region residents in freezing temperatures, Ukraine authorities said.

Zelensky said some 500 drones and 40 missiles pounded the capital and its surrounding region. He questioned Russia's intentions to end the war.

"Russian representatives

engage in lengthy talks, but in reality, Kinzhals and 'shaheds' speak for them," he said, referring to the Kinzhal ballistic missiles and the Shahed drones used in Russia's daily strikes.

"They do not want to end the war and seek to use every opportunity to cause Ukraine even greater suffering and increase their pressure on others around the world," he added.

AFP reporters heard loud explosions, some accompanied by bright flashes that turned the sky orange, in the attack that lasted for 10 hours.

The Russian army said it had targeted infrastructure and energy facilities "used in the interests of the Armed Forces of Ukraine", as well as military sites, with hypersonic missiles and drones.

Ukraine's Prime Minister Yulia Svyrydenko said the attack left about 600,000 "consumers" without power while authorities said apartment blocks, a university dormitory and a petrol station had been among buildings hit.

Today's meeting to discuss new proposals comes as Trump

intensifies efforts to end Europe's worst conflict since World War Two.

The new 20-point plan would freeze the war on its current front line but possibly require Ukraine to pull back troops from the east, where demilitarised buffer zones could be created, according to details revealed by Zelensky this week.

The new plan formulated with Ukraine's input is Kyiv's most explicit acknowledgement yet of possible territorial concessions. It is very different from an initial 28-point proposal tabled by Washington last month that adhered to many of Russia's core demands.

Trump, speaking to news outlet Politico on Friday, said of Zelensky's plan that "he doesn't have anything until I approve it". He added: "So we'll see what he's got."

Part of the plan includes separate US-Ukraine bilateral agreements on security guarantees, reconstruction and the economy.

"We will discuss these documents, security guarantees," Zelensky said of the meeting.

"As for sensitive issues, we will discuss (the eastern region of) Donbas and the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, and we will certainly discuss other issues," he added.

KSA demands Yemen rebels withdraw forces

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia yesterday warned it would back Yemen's government in any military confrontation with separatist forces and urged them to withdraw "peacefully" from recently-seized provinces.

The statements came a day after reported Saudi air strikes on separatist positions in Yemen's Hadramawt province - and after Washington called for restraint in the rapidly escalating conflict.

Saudi Defence Minister Khalid bin Salman posted on X that troops from the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC) should "peacefully hand over" two regional governorates to the government.

The STC had warned on Friday that they were undeterred after strikes blamed on Saudi Arabia hit their positions. No casualties were reported.

In recent weeks, separatists backed by the United Arab Emirates and seeking to revive the formerly independent state of South Yemen have made territorial gains.

Experts say their successes have embarrassed regional heavyweight Saudi Arabia, the main backer of the internationally-recognised Yemeni government.

'Embarrass them'

Trump urges release of any Epstein files naming Democrats

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump urged the Justice Department Friday to "embarrass" any Democrats who worked with Jeffrey Epstein after it began poring over millions of documents linked to the late sex offender.

The DOJ began releasing records last week from the investigation into Epstein, a wealthy financier who died in a New York jail in 2019 while awaiting trial for trafficking underage girls for sex.

The latest disclosures on Tuesday contain numerous references to Trump including documents detailing flights he took on Epstein's private jet.

Trump was once a friend of Epstein but distanced himself after his crimes came to light.

"Now 1,000,000 more pages on Epstein are found. DOJ is being forced to spend all of its time on this Democrat inspired Hoax," Trump said on his Truth Social platform.

"The Dems are the ones who worked with Epstein, not the Republicans. Release all of their names, embarrass them, and get back to helping our Country!" Trump said.

"The Radical Left doesn't want people talking about TRUMP & REPUBLICAN SUCCESS, only a long ago dead Jeffrey Epstein - Just another Witch Hunt!!!"

The DOJ missed a December 19 deadline to release the files in full despite a law compelling it to do so.

Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche previously blamed the delayed release on a need to painstakingly redact the identities of Epstein's victims.

The DOJ has defended Trump, saying the files contain "untrue and sensationalist claims" against him that were submitted to the FBI before the 2020 election which landed him a second term in office. The department has not specified which allegations are false.

Netanyahu set to meet Trump

Gaza truce, Iran, regional issues on agenda

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will depart for the United States today and meet with President Donald Trump in Florida a day later, an Israeli official told AFP.

It will be Netanyahu's fifth visit to see Trump in the United States this year.

His trip comes as the Trump administration and regional mediators push to proceed to the second stage of the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

Israeli Yedioth Ahronoth newspaper on Wednesday reported that a wide range of regional issues was expected to be discussed, including Iran, talks on an Israel Syria security deal, the ceasefire with Hezbollah in Lebanon and the next stages of the Gaza deal.

Progress in moving to the second phase of October's Gaza ceasefire agreement has so far been slow. The ceasefire also remains fragile.

Under the second stage, Israel is supposed to withdraw from its positions in Gaza, an interim authority is to govern the Palestinian territory instead of Hamas, and an international stabilisation force (ISF) is to be deployed.

It also includes a provision for Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas to lay down its weapons -- a major sticking point.

Axios reported that the meeting between Trump and Netanyahu was key to advancing to the next steps of the deal. Citing White House officials, Axios said that the Trump administration wanted to announce the Palestinian technocratic government for Gaza and the ISF as soon as possible.

It reported that senior Trump officials have grown "increasingly frustrated as Netanyahu has taken steps to undermine the fragile ceasefire and stall the peace process".

Khaleda Zia

FROM PAGE 1

Khaleda was admitted to Evercare Hospital in the capital on November 23. As her condition deteriorated, she was first shifted from a cabin to the coronary care unit and later to the intensive care unit.

"So naturally, it cannot be said that her physical condition has improved. She is going through a complex and critical moment. By the grace of Allah, if she can overcome this crisis, then Alhamdulillah, something good will happen," Zahid told journalists outside the hospital at 12:16am.

When Zahid was briefing the media, Tarique and his wife Zubaida Rahman were present at the hospital, marking their second visit since Tarique returned home from London on

December 25 after ending a 17-year exile.

Zahid, also a BNP standing committee member, said, "Tarique Rahman stayed by her bedside for some time. This reflects a son's affection and care for his mother."

He said Tarique also expressed gratitude to members of the medical board formed for Khaleda's treatment.

"The doctors are ensuring that treatment is being provided properly in line with the recommendations of the medical board," Zahid said.

He added that Tarique urged party leaders and activists not to gather unnecessarily outside the hospital out of overenthusiasm, so as not to disrupt the treatment of patients admitted there or those seeking medical care.

Tarique's security under review

FROM PAGE 2

Meanwhile, the government has decided not to use force against Inqilab Moncho, which has vowed to continue its blockade at Shahbagh intersection until justice for Hadi is ensured, sources said.

It will, however, maintain informal coordination with platform representatives. Sources said an informal proposal was made for talks with two government advisers at the Secretariat, but the representatives were unwilling to meet them and did not clarify whom they wished to engage with.

The government will remain positive towards Inqilab Moncho but keep a cautious watch to prevent political misuse of the platform, they added.

The platform's member secretary, Abdullah Al Jaber, declined to comment when contacted by The Daily Star.

A law and order core committee meeting is scheduled at the Home Ministry at 2:30pm today.

The agenda includes the Hadi murder, with the government planning to formally inform the public that one of the accused is suspected to have fled to India, sources said.

Earlier, in response to journalists' questions, the government did not specify whether the accused was in the country or abroad.

"The government is also set to outline what steps will be taken to bring the accused back to the country," said a law enforcement source.

So far, 11 people have been arrested in connection with the Hadi murder. Of them, five have given confessional statements, while three are on remand with the Detective Branch for interrogation.



A woman jumps in the air in Times Square as snow falls during a winter storm in New York City. A winter storm packing a frosty mix of snow and ice bore down on the US Northeast Saturday, disrupting post-holiday weekend airline traffic and prompting officials in New York and New Jersey to issue weather emergency declarations. PHOTO: REUTERS

Star BUSINESS



Ctg port sets new records in container, vessel handling

DWAIPAYAN BARUA, Ctg

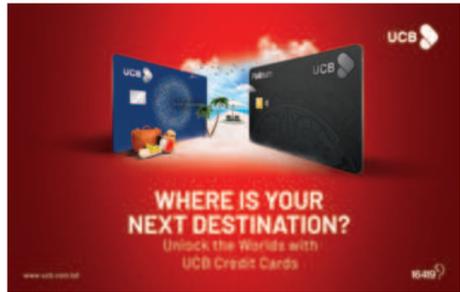
Despite several operational disruptions this year, the country's premier Chattogram port is on track to hit record highs in container, cargo, and vessel handling, reflecting growth in foreign trade as well as improved port efficiency and capacity.

Operational disruptions, including yard congestion, led to vessel queues and long waiting periods at different times. However, several reforms – including digital transformation and expanded yard capacity – have significantly reduced vessel waiting times, bringing them down to almost zero in the last quarter, thereby supporting continued growth.

As of December 26, the port had handled a record 33.64 lakh TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units) of containers, the highest ever, up 2.68 percent from 32.27 lakh TEUs last year, according to Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) data.

Of this total, about 18.32 lakh TEUs were imports and 15.31 lakh TEUs were exports. Port officials expect roughly 45,000 more TEUs to be handled in the remaining days of the year.

The CPA compiled the data by counting import, export, and empty containers loaded and unloaded at the port's main jetties, the Pangoan Inland Container Terminal in Keraniganj, and the Kamalapur Inland Container Depot in Dhaka.



The port also handled a total of 13.63 crore tonnes of cargo, including containerised goods, surpassing last year's record of 12.40 crore tonnes. The total number of vessels handled reached 4,396, compared to 3,867 in 2024, also marking a record high.

CHALLENGES AND MEASURES

Operational activities, such as cargo handling and delivery, were severely disrupted for several days in May and June due to a nationwide pen-down strike by National Board of Revenue officials.

Other setbacks – including the 10-day Eid-ul-Azha holidays in June, a weeklong customs server disruption in July, and repeated work abstentions by transport workers – led to container build-up and a severe vessel queue that lasted until August, with waiting times exceeding 12 days at one point.

To ease congestion, the port authority gradually took measures and in August expanded the port's container storage capacity by nearly 10 percent to 59,000 TEUs by freeing up space in existing yards and using two old sheds outside the main port area.

The launch of a digital payment system for gate passes in February also began yielding results by mid-year, speeding up cargo transport.

With Chittagong Dry Dock Limited of the Bangladesh Navy taking operational charge of the New Mooring Container Terminal (NCT) in early July, container handling at NCT increased noticeably in the following months.

As a result, vessel waiting times dropped sharply from September, with zero waiting days recorded for nine days in September, 18 days in October, 19 days in November, and 20 days so far in December. Ships now often berth immediately.

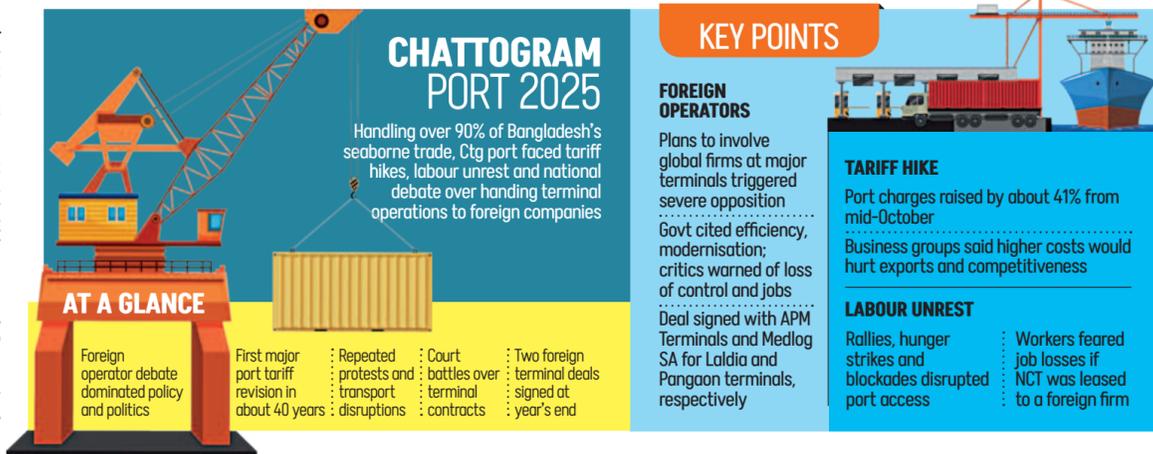
Khairul Alam Suzan, former director of the Bangladesh Shipping Agents Association, said, "The Chittagong Dry Dock authority has remarkably streamlined queues of container and cargo-carrying vehicles at both the jetties and delivery points at the NCT, which has greatly improved the pace of container handling and delivery activities."

He also stressed the need to make customs operations round the clock, like port operations, for further improvement.

Commodore Ahamed Amin Abdullah, member (Harbour and Marine) of the Chittagong Port Authority, said, "This year, the port authority delivered exceptional performance, handling a historic volume of containers and cargo, driven by increased trade and expanded port capacity. Vessel waiting times were reduced to zero on many occasions, enabling berthing upon arrival and faster turnaround."

A turbulent year for the premier seaport

Strikes, tariff resets and disputes over foreign operator appointments tested governance at Ctg port



DWAIPAYAN BARUA, Ctg

From the start to the end, Chattogram port remained in the national spotlight this year – for protests, controversy, tariff hikes and other significant policy decisions like handing over operations of major terminals to foreign companies.

Throughout the year, political uncertainty, labour unrest and sensitive reform decisions all collided at the facility that handles more than 90 percent of the country's international trade. It barely got any breathing space for trade to bloom.

Even so, as of December 26, the port handled 33.64 lakh TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units) containers, a 2.68 percent growth from 32.27 lakh TEUs handled last year, according to Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) data.

Meanwhile, the port handled a total of 13.63 crore tonnes of overall cargo, including the containerised ones, this year till December 27 morning, topping last year's total volume of

customs services at the port.

Protests continued on and off for weeks. Cargo clearance slowed, vessels waited longer at anchor, and yard capacity approached critical levels. Even after the strike was formally

THE REWIND

withdrawn in late May, congestion lingered, with the port struggling to return to normalcy.

THE FOREIGN OPERATOR DEBATE

The NBR protest was surely a key flashpoint for the port in the outgoing year. As this protest went on, the Chattogram port unit of Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal, the workers' wing of BNP, launched a series of weeklong protest programmes, protesting the government's move to lease out the New Mooring Container Terminal (NCT) to a foreign operator.

Asia, warning that without rapid reform, Chattogram risked losing cargo to regional rivals.

Political unease over the matter continued through July, August and September, with BNP and Jamaat leaders publicly questioning whether an interim government had the mandate to sign long-term concession agreements for strategic infrastructure.

HIGH TARIFFS, TERMINAL DEALS, PROTESTS

October proved to be the most disruptive month of the year.

In mid-October, the CPA announced a sweeping revision of port tariffs – the first such adjustment in about four decades – with an average increase of around 41 percent across several charges related to container handling and storage.

Trade bodies reacted sharply, warning that the higher costs would erode export competitiveness, particularly for garment exporters already facing global demand pressures.

As part of the hike, the CPA raised gate pass fees for heavy vehicles more than fourfold, from Tk 57 to Tk 230. The decision prompted the Chattogram Prime Mover Owners Association to suspend container transport from October 15, causing deliveries to plunge by nearly 45 percent and rapidly building

backlogs at the port. Despite the mounting opposition, the government moved decisively at the year's end. In mid-November, it signed agreements with Denmark's APM Terminals and Switzerland-based Medlog SA for the construction and operation of the Laldia Container Terminal and the operation of the Pangoan Inland Container Terminal.

Street mobilisation followed swiftly. Rallies, torch processions and hunger strikes swept Chattogram, demanding cancellation of foreign operator agreements and reversal of tariff hikes.

Legal challenges soon followed. On November 9, the High Court stayed the tariff hike for one month, offering temporary relief to port users. Later in November, the court ordered a suspension of all activities related to the proposed foreign operator contract for the NCT, following a writ petition challenging its legality.

Meanwhile, the fate of the NCT remained unresolved. On December 4, a High Court bench delivered a dissenting verdict on the writ petition challenging the NCT contract, leaving the matter pending before the chief justice, effectively guaranteeing that the controversy will spill into 2026.



12.40 crore tonnes, which was the highest so far.

The total number of vessels handled so far reached 4,396 compared to 3,867 in 2024.

EARLY-YEAR DISRUPTIONS

The year began with operational strain. In early February, container transport between the port and inland container depots was disrupted after clashes involving prime mover drivers and helpers at DC Park in the port city, temporarily halting cargo movement and exposing the fragility of last-mile logistics for days.

The interruption set an early tone for a year marked by repeated disruptions to port operations. The next month, the CPA sharply increased storage charges for containers remaining beyond the free period, introducing a fourfold hike.

Customs agents and importers warned that the move would inflate logistics costs and compound congestion rather than resolve it. The decision was widely seen as an early signal that port users would face higher charges after decades of relative stability in tariffs.

The true chaos began in the second quarter. Operational pressure intensified during April and May, when a nationwide strike by National Board of Revenue (NBR) officials – protesting an ordinance restructuring the revenue administration – severely affected

By June, labour and political opposition to foreign operators at Chattogram port moved into a more organised protest. On June 15, the Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal, aligned with the port workers' federation, launched a six-day protest programme opposing plans to lease the NCT to UAE-based DP World.

Demonstrators argued that handing over the port's largest operational terminal would undermine national control over a strategic asset and threaten workers' jobs. The issue became a topic of national debate, making headlines regularly. All the while, port operations continued to struggle.

The opposition was notable not only for its intensity but also for its ideological breadth. Political parties from opposing ends of the spectrum, including left-leaning groups and right-wing nationalists, raised similar objections, framing foreign terminal operations as a question of sovereignty, transparency and long-term national interest. Government officials and port authorities countered that involving experienced global operators was essential to modernise port operations, reduce vessel turnaround time and handle rising trade volumes.

They repeatedly pointed to competition from ports in India, Sri Lanka and Southeast

backlogs at the port.

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REHAB fair sees weak turnout ahead of polls

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Attendance at this year's REHAB fair fell short of expectations, as the country's premier property exhibition ended yesterday amid a cautious mood among investors.

Developers and financiers reported fewer serious inquiries and spot loan approvals, attributing the slowdown to the political climate ahead of the national election.

However, visitor numbers rose slightly on the final day of the four-day fair, organised by the Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh at the China-Bangladesh Friendship Conference Centre in Agargaon, offering hope for post-fair engagement.

"We primarily focus on luxury projects in prime locations, which is why we don't have a very high number of projects," said Ahsan

Habib, assistant general manager and cluster head (sales) at Rangs Properties Ltd. "This year, we've showcased around 25 projects, both residential and commercial, mostly in Dhanmondi, Gulshan, Banani, Mohakhali, DOHS, Uttara, Bashundhara, and an ongoing project in Mirpur."

Footfall has been "significantly lower" than last year, he added. "People are being more cautious due to the upcoming elections and overall political uncertainty. Recent events have also made city movement more difficult."

Mid-income buyers were the most active segment, Habib said, targeting units priced between Tk 1.5 crore and Tk 2 crore, ranging from 1,300 to 2,000 square feet. Rangs' projects range from over Tk 1 crore to Tk 25-Tk 26 crore.

Mohammad Rakib Hossain, general manager (sales) at Tropical Homes Ltd, expressed similar



PHOTO: STAR

concerns. "Compared to six or seven months ago, the real estate sector hasn't seen much improvement. Still, we believe the market will rebound," he said.

Tropical Homes showcased 25 projects for low- to upper-middle-income buyers, including the country's tallest commercial

high-rise. Prices range from Tk 30 lakh for a Tongi commercial unit to Tk 12 crore for premium projects. Residential units are priced at Tk 7,000-Tk 23,000 per square foot, with sizes up to 4,000 square feet.

Credence Housing Ltd presented 54 projects in prime Dhaka neighbourhoods such as Dhanmondi, Lalmatia, Kalabagan, Elephant Road, Siddheswari, Gulshan, Banani, and Uttara.

"Our core focus is delivering on time and earning customer trust," said Abdur Rahman Khan, team leader of Credence's planning and investment department. "We cater to mid- to high-income buyers who prioritise location and lifestyle facilities."

Most buyers rely on financing, with banks covering 70-80 percent of the property value, he added.

Rice output may rise in MY26

USDA says on Bangladesh

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh is likely to harvest more rice in the marketing year (MY) 2025-26, ending with the Aman paddy harvest, which is currently underway in the southern region, due to increased acreage and production.

The overall rice output, the country's staple crop, may rise to 3.76 crore tonnes in MY26 from 3.66 crore tonnes in MY25, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) said in its grain and feed update on Bangladesh released last week.

The USDA said Aman season rice is the last crop of MY26. Transplanted in July-August 2025, the harvest has been completed in the northern, northwestern, and central regions. The southern regions are expected to finish harvesting by the end of December 2025.

"Farmers in the northern districts of Bangladesh reported a good harvest of Aman season rice despite higher production costs," the report said.

Citing its contacts and the latest crop production data from the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), the USDA estimated Aman season rice acreage and production at 58 lakh hectares and 1.48 crore tonnes, respectively.

"Agriculture offices from various field locations reported good harvests this season," it added.

The US agency expects the cultivated area of Boro rice, the first crop of the marketing year, to remain unchanged in MY26, with production forecast at 2.05 crore tonnes.

However, it has raised Aus rice production forecasts to 23.5 lakh tonnes from 21 lakh tonnes in the previous year.

Despite higher domestic production and imports, prices of all types of rice in Bangladesh have risen.

POTATO PARADOX

Just another curry on the rice plate? This will not solve the price problem

SUKANTA HALDER

Punishing retail prices during low output and throwaway rates during bumper harvests have become a familiar cycle for potato farmers. The swings are recurring and costly, leaving as many as half a crore growers exposed to debt in good years and public anger in bad ones.

Yet agri experts and supply chain players say the problem has little to do with farmers, or even with production. Instead, it reflects how potatoes are treated in policy and planning.

Unlike many other countries, Bangladesh largely views the crop as just another vegetable eaten with rice, not as a basic industrial raw material.

That distinction matters. When production overshoots domestic demand, prices collapse. Farmers absorb the losses, while the economy misses out on value addition that could stabilise incomes and absorb surplus output.

Bangladesh is the world's seventh-largest potato producer. Still, it remains far behind global peers in industrial use of the tuber.

In China, about 15 percent of potato output goes into industrial processing. In the Netherlands, Germany, France and the United States, the share ranges from 60 percent to 65 percent. Russia and Ukraine process 20 percent to 30 percent, while neighbouring India, with similar food habits, uses 5 percent to 7 percent.

Bangladesh, by contrast, processes only 3 percent to 4 percent of its total output, according to industry insiders.

The difference is decisive. In countries where potatoes feed factories, surplus strengthens supply chains. In Bangladesh, surplus simply crashes prices.

After rice, potatoes are the second most produced crop in Bangladesh and a pillar of food security. Yet more than a quarter of output is lost after harvest, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization, which points to weak storage, handling and processing capacity.

WRONG VARIETIES, WEAK PLANNING

Kamruzzaman Kamal, marketing director of Pran-RFL Group, the parent of the local agro processing giant Pran, said industrial processing is limited because most locally grown potatoes are table varieties, not processing grade crops.

"These potatoes have high moisture and sugar content, which makes them unsuitable for products like French fries. They lose colour and become soft after frying," said Kamal.

Globally, potatoes used for fries, chips and flakes require dry matter of around 22.5 percent. But locally grown potatoes usually contain only 16 percent to 19 percent dry matter, according to scientists.

While potatoes are locally used at home to make chips, and in factories to produce crackers, biscuits and chanchur, the backward linkage industry for flakes and starch is still underdeveloped. Only one or two such factories are currently in production.

Kamal said farmers are not encouraged to grow processing varieties because crop planning is mostly individual driven rather than coordinated. Many existing varieties are disease-prone, poorly adapted to climate stress and quick to spoil.

Inadequate storage, no grading

and sorting at farm level, insufficient cold chain infrastructure and limited warehousing have further constrained both industrial use and exports, added the Pran-RFL marketing director.

Khurshid Ahmad Farhad, general manager for international business and corporate affairs at Bombay Sweets and Company Limited, a popular food processing brand, said the absence of integrated crop planning and unpredictable weather has kept industrial processing from reaching scale.

Factories producing flakes, slices, chips and biscuits need potatoes of specific size and quality. Bangladesh does not produce enough of these at consistent volumes,

from 1.06 crore tonnes the previous year.

The oversupply sent field-level prices tumbling to Tk 9 to Tk 11 per kg, well below the estimated average production cost of Tk 14. In northern regions, costs were higher, at around Tk 20 per kg, according to the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE).

For farmers, the result was debt rather than profit. For the economy, it was another missed chance to channel surplus into value-added uses.

TYPICAL COLD STORAGE ONLY DELAYS LOSSES

Bangladesh has expanded cold storage capacity to about 35-40 lakh tonnes. Processing capacity, however, is remarkably low.

800 kg if uniformly graded, high-quality potatoes were available, he said.

A POLICY BLIND SPOT

FH Ansary, managing director of ACI Agribusiness, said potatoes need to be viewed through four lenses: food, industry, environment and health.

"We treat potatoes as just a vegetable. Elsewhere, they are protein sources, pharmaceutical inputs, packaging material and industrial feedstock," he said.

Ansary said farmers focus on table potatoes because the market is guaranteed. Seeds of processing varieties are scarce, quality-based cultivation is limited, and there is no price assurance or buy-back mechanism.

THE PROBLEM

Boom-bust prices every year
Farmers lose in gluts, get blamed in shortages
Surplus crashes prices instead of adding value

2025 GLUT SNAPSHOT

Production: 1.15cr tonnes
Demand: Nearly 90 lakh tonnes
Farm price: Tk 9-Tk 11 per kg
Production cost: Tk 14-Tk 20 per kg

SYSTEM FAILURES

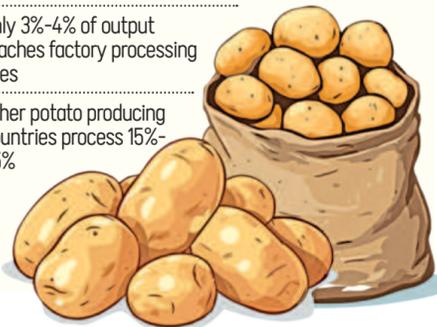
Wrong varieties (low dry matter)
No crop planning or zoning
Weak cold chain, grading

REASONS BEHIND THE CRISIS

Potatoes treated as a vegetable, not an industrial crop

Only 3%-4% of output reaches factory processing lines

Other potato producing countries process 15%-65%



he said. Even when quality potatoes are available, production costs are often far higher than international benchmarks, making local products uncompetitive.

"In recent times, costs have risen so sharply that a Dubai-based trader told me they could supply potato flakes at a lower price than we can," Farhad said.

Globally, the largest potato-based industrial products include mashed potatoes and French fries. In Bangladesh, suitable varieties have yet to be developed at a commercial scale, leaving much of the segment untapped.

Although government agencies hold relevant crop data, it is neither centrally coordinated nor used for forecasting, Farhad said. As a result, annual output swings widely between about 80 lakh tonnes and nearly 90 lakh tonnes, with no early warning for the industry.

"This uncertainty is the biggest obstacle. Planning depends on assured availability and consistent quality of raw materials," he said.

THE GLUT, THEN THE CRASH

Strong prices in the 2024 season encouraged farmers to expand potato acreage massively this year in the hope of better returns. Instead, excessive output triggered a severe glut and eventual price fall.

According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, potato production reached a record 1.15 crore tonnes last season, far above annual domestic demand of around 90 lakh tonnes.

Cultivated area rose 8 percent year-on-year to 4.92 lakh hectares in fiscal year 2024-25, while output increased 9 percent

Md Mohsin Ali, head of supply chain at Quasem Industries Limited, which produces Sun Chips, said processing capacity stands at just 70,000-80,000 tonnes.

The shortage of modern cold storage designed for processing grade potatoes is one of the sector's biggest constraints, he said. "Therefore, typical cold storage facilities currently delay losses. It does not create value," he said. "Without factories that can absorb surplus, price crashes will continue."

In many countries, he said, potatoes are a staple food and a major industrial input. In Bangladesh, those consumption patterns and industrial linkages have yet to emerge.

According to Ali, weak policy support, lack of dedicated processing policies and limited investment in research and development are major barriers.

DEMAND EXISTS, QUALITY DOES NOT

Apart from the unavailability of commercial-grade potatoes, the shortage of premium grade crops is visible even in high-end kitchens.

Md Ershad Ali, assistant sous chef at Pan Pacific Sonargaon Dhaka, a five-star hotel, said they serve potatoes to their guests at every meal, with each buffet offering at least one potato dish.

Some international recipes, however, cannot be prepared with local potatoes due to inconsistent size and grading. Overseas, potatoes arrive uniformly graded and ready for consistent cuts and presentation. Local supplies vary widely.

The hotel uses about 500 kg of potatoes each week. That could rise to

"The bridge between farmers and industry is broken," he said. "Without it, neither industrial use nor price stability will be achieved."

M Masrur Reaz, chairman of local think tank Policy Exchange Bangladesh, said processed potatoes generate far higher value than fresh ones. Globally, fresh potatoes account for about half of export volume but only 20 percent of value. Processed potatoes make up a third of the volume yet generate more than half of the trade value.

In Bangladesh, processing is limited to 3 percent to 4 percent of output, while exports stand at just 62,000 tonnes, said the economist. "Without value addition, price crashes during bumper harvests will keep hurting farmers."

Agriculture contributes about 12 percent to the gross domestic product of Bangladesh. The processed food sector accounts for only 1.7 percent.

Mohammad Khurshid Alam, chief scientific officer at the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI), said the short winter season limits dry matter accumulation in potatoes. Excessive use of urea further delays maturity and raises moisture content. He said contract farming and area-based zoning are important, with specific regions designated for processing and export varieties.

Other solutions, the scientist said, include developing high dry-matter varieties through public private partnerships, expanding good agricultural practice certification, improving post-harvest management and rebuilding links between farmers and industry.

Merged banks' deposits to be transferred to Sommilito Islami Bank next week

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The process of transferring depositors' accounts from the five banks undergoing a merger to the newly formed Sommilito Islami Bank is nearing completion and is expected to be finalised within the next week, according to Bangladesh Bank (BB).

Once completed, deposits of customers of the five banks will be automatically transferred to accounts at the new bank, BB spokesperson Md Aref Hossain Khan said in a statement yesterday.

Following the transfer, depositors will be able to withdraw up to Tk 2 lakh using their existing cheque books.

Any remaining balance will remain secured in their accounts, and depositors will continue to receive profit on their deposits at the prevailing rates, he said.

The five banks are First Security Islami Bank, Social Islami Bank, Union Bank, Global Islami Bank, and EXIM Bank.

The central bank spokesperson expressed hope that public confidence in the newly formed bank would be strengthened, as it will operate as a state-owned institution.

"People's trust is expected to increase, which should significantly reduce pressure from deposit withdrawals," he added.

Following the transfer, depositors will be able to withdraw up to Tk 2 lakh using their existing cheque books

The merger of the five troubled shariah-based lenders into a single entity is part of the government's broader effort to stabilise the banking sector and restore confidence amid mounting concerns over asset quality and liquidity, according to the statement.

Last week, the BB instructed the five shariah-based banks undergoing a merger to declare their shareholders' equity at zero after assessments showed the net asset value of their shares to be negative.

"An assessment found that the net asset value per share of these banks is negative," Khan said. "As a result, the shareholders' equity has been written down to zero."

On November 30, Bangladesh Bank granted the final licence to Sommilito Islami Bank PLC, formed through the merger of the five lenders. It is now the largest state-owned shariah-based bank in the country.

The central bank said the approval was part of a broader banking sector reform programme launched in September 2024 to restore governance, ensure accountability and bring discipline to the financial system.

The office space for the new bank has been fixed at Sena Kalyan Bhaban in Motijheel. Besides, a seven-member board has been formed for the bank, and former senior secretary Mohammad Ayub Mia has been appointed as its chairman.

However, the official operations of the bank have yet to begin, as the lender is still without a management team.

Earlier this month, the government called for applications by December 22 for the appointment of managing director and CEO of Sommilito Islami Bank.

In a notification, the finance ministry said applicants should hold a postgraduate or master's degree, preferably in economics, finance, accounting, banking, management or business administration from a recognised university.

BRAC Bank partners with Infrastructure Finance Fund for SME financing

STAR BUSINESS DESK

BRAC Bank PLC has partnered with Bangladesh Infrastructure Finance Fund Limited (BIFFL) to expand access to affordable financing for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), with a focus on strengthening the food value chain.

Under the partnership, BRAC Bank has joined a low-cost loan programme as a participating financial institution funded by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to support the Food Value Chain Improvement Project.

The initiative aims to enhance SME capacity in priority sectors by improving access to long-tenure financing at competitive rates, according to a press release.

The partnership agreement was



Md Shaheen Iqbal, deputy managing director and head of wholesale banking of BRAC Bank, and SM Anisuzzaman, chief executive officer of Bangladesh Infrastructure Finance Fund Limited, pose for photographers at BRAC Bank's head office in Dhaka on December 17.

signed on December 17 at BRAC Bank's head office in Dhaka, by Md Shaheen Iqbal, deputy managing director and head of wholesale banking of BRAC Bank, and SM Anisuzzaman, chief executive officer of BIFFL.

Tareq Refat Ullah Khan, managing

director and CEO of BRAC Bank, Syed Abdul Momen, additional managing director and head of SME banking, Tanveer Kamal, head of structured finance, and other senior officials from both organisations were present at the ceremony.

Pubali Bank holds 1,500th board meeting

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Pubali Bank PLC held its 1,500th meeting of the board of directors on December 24, marking a milestone in the bank's long-standing practice of corporate governance, regulatory compliance and strategic leadership.

Former chairman Hafiz Ahmed Mazumdar, alongside current board members and senior management of the bank, attended the meeting, according to a press release.

The meeting was presided over by Monzurur Rahman, chairman of the board. Notably, Rahman had also chaired the first board meeting of Pubali Bank after its transition to the private sector in January 1985, reflecting continuity in leadership and institutional stewardship over four decades.

Directors present at the meeting included Habibur Rahman, Rumana Sharif, Azizur Rahman, Rana Laila



Monzurur Rahman, chairman of the board of Pubali Bank, poses with other officials of the bank at the meeting on December 24.

Hafiz, Arif Ahmed Choudhury and Shahinuzzaman Yaqub.

Independent directors Shahdeen Malik and Mohammad Naushad Ali Chowdhury, as well as alternate director Nadir Ahmed, were also in attendance.

Mohammad Ali, managing director and chief executive officer of Pubali Bank, attended the meeting

along with senior executives.

Among others present were Mohammad Esha, deputy managing director, Mohammad Liton Mia, general manager and chief financial officer, Md Anisur Rahman, general manager and company secretary, and Md Shah Alam, general manager and chief protocol officer of Pubali Bank Securities Limited.

Citizens Bank opens Bogura branch



Alamgir Hossain, managing director of Citizens Bank, inaugurates the Bogura branch of the bank in the presence of other officials on December 24.

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Citizens Bank PLC opened its Bogura branch in the Borogola area on December 24.

The branch was inaugurated by Alamgir Hossain, managing director of Citizens Bank, in the presence of deputy managing directors Md Mostafizur Rahman and Md Abdul Latif, along with other senior officials of the bank, according to a press release.

Local business leaders from various sectors, as well as professionals and community representatives, were present at the inauguration ceremony.

NRBC Bank organises annual risk confce

STAR BUSINESS DESK

NRBC Bank PLC organised its Annual Risk Management Conference 2025 on December 27 at a hotel in Dhaka through a hybrid format, focusing on strengthening risk governance and sustainable banking practices.

Md Sirajul Islam, executive director of Bangladesh Bank, attended the conference as the chief guest, while Md Nurul Haque, independent director of NRBC Bank and chairman of the risk management committee, was present as a special guest, according to a press release.



Md Sirajul Islam, executive director of Bangladesh Bank, and Md Nurul Haque, independent director of NRBC Bank and chairman of the risk management committee, attend the bank's annual risk conference at a city hotel yesterday.

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR: LATE S. M. ALI

An education system without direction

Systemic flaws threaten demographic dividend

A year-end review, by this daily, lays bare the dire state of our education sector. It has dangerously deteriorated due to teacher protests, police crackdowns, student clashes, textbook delays, arbitrary policy reversals and terrible examination results. However, the chaos all throughout 2025 did not create the education crisis—it exposed it. Decades of neglect of the sector and failure to address fundamental weaknesses were amplified. Also, poor governance and inability to prevent crisis resulted in total disruption of the academic calendar for students in primary schools, colleges and universities, causing millions of students to lose irreplaceable learning time.

Particularly jarring was the state's response to protesting teachers—with batons, water cannons and sound grenades. The teachers were protesting decades of stagnant salaries and allowances as well as institutional disregard. Could this not have been handled through meaningful dialogue instead of the hardline approach? Meanwhile, the SSC and HSC pass rates plunged to their lowest levels in years. Officials attributed this to the absence of "sympathetic marking" long practiced in previous times. But this only confirms what education experts have been warning for long. That inflated grades were hiding serious learning deficits. Sadly, this deficiency was also present in the budget for the sector. Allocation for primary education fell by more than Tk 3,000 crore, with total education spending remaining at a paltry 1.72 percent of GDP. The result of this neglect includes more dropouts, increase in child labour and early marriage and a generation slowly drifting out of the system. It is also surprising that an education reform commission did not materialise as part of the reform agenda for the interim government.

With the national elections scheduled for February 2026, the responsibility of overhauling the ailing education sector will fall on the next elected government that will inherit a system weakened by years of misgovernance. The new government's first task must be to declare education a national priority not as lip service but through significant administrative reforms and financial commitment. Teachers' grievances must be resolved through sustainable negotiation. The learning crisis at the foundational level must be addressed. Reforms should be based on honest assessments and include strategies to upgrade reading, writing and numeracy at the primary level. Along with academic teaching, students must be taught values—honesty, empathy and appreciation of diversity. Trust and respect must be restored between teachers and students. Public spending on education must rise according to international benchmarks, especially for primary education. Besides, transparency in how these funds are spent must be maintained.

The next government must understand that education reform can only be possible with the input of all stakeholders—teachers, students, parents and experts. Undoubtedly, how well we can improve the quality and accessibility of education will determine how equipped our young people will be to avail high skill jobs, become successful entrepreneurs and professionals as well as how effective they will be as future leaders.

Green farming in Thanchi encouraging

Discourage tobacco cultivation, promote green crops

It is heartening to learn that green crops are gradually replacing tobacco cultivation in Bandarban's Thanchi upazila. Reportedly, over the past few years, farmers have moved away from tobacco and embraced environment-friendly crops such as peanuts, beans, mustard, watermelons, and seasonal vegetables along the banks of the Sangu River. This shift is improving livelihoods while also protecting the hill ecosystems. It has also been found that green crop cultivation is economically more viable than tobacco farming, as farmers are earning better returns without inflicting the severe environmental damage associated with tobacco. At a time when tobacco cultivation and tobacco products are causing immense harm to both public health and the environment, this change in Thanchi is encouraging.

Reportedly, tobacco curing depends heavily on firewood, which accelerates deforestation, degrades hillsides, and damages soil quality. These practices have reduced wildlife habitats and intensified environmental stress in an already vulnerable region like Thanchi. Yet despite these costs, tobacco dominated the agricultural landscape of the area for decades as a primary cash crop. According to Indigenous farmers, tobacco cultivation involved high input costs, constant labour, volatile markets, and long-term damage to their land, prompting many to return to traditional, environment-friendly crops. Reportedly, tobacco occupied 85 percent of the net cultivable land in 2020–21, but this has declined to about 30 percent by 2025–26. This is an encouraging development that must be sustained.

Recent studies have also shown that tobacco imposes an enormous economic burden on Bangladesh, costing Tk 87,544 crore annually—more than double the revenue it generates through taxes. Health-related expenses alone exceed Tk 73,000 crore, while environmental damages add thousands of crores more, reinforcing the fact that tobacco drains national resources rather than strengthening the economy.

Encouragingly, the move away from tobacco in Thanchi is proving both ecologically and financially sound. Farmers have reported improved soil conditions, the return of birds, and increased wildlife movement in areas once stripped for tobacco curing, while peanut and other green crop cultivation offers lower investment requirements, easier maintenance, and more stable returns than the volatile tobacco market. Credit is also due to local agricultural authorities, who have worked year-round with marginal farmers to curb tobacco cultivation and promote green alternatives.

The transformation along the Sangu River shows that with the right policy support, farmers will willingly choose crops that protect both their incomes and the land. The government should, therefore, build on this momentum by providing training, quality seeds, access to credit, and improved market linkages. Using Thanchi as a benchmark, similar pathways towards environment-friendly traditional crops should be developed for other tobacco growing regions of the country. By consistently supporting green farming, the government can significantly reduce deforestation while ensuring sustainable livelihoods, particularly in ecologically sensitive regions.

Is the LNG pathway sustainable for Bangladesh?



Shafiqul Alam is lead energy analyst for Bangladesh at Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA).

SHAFIQU ALAM

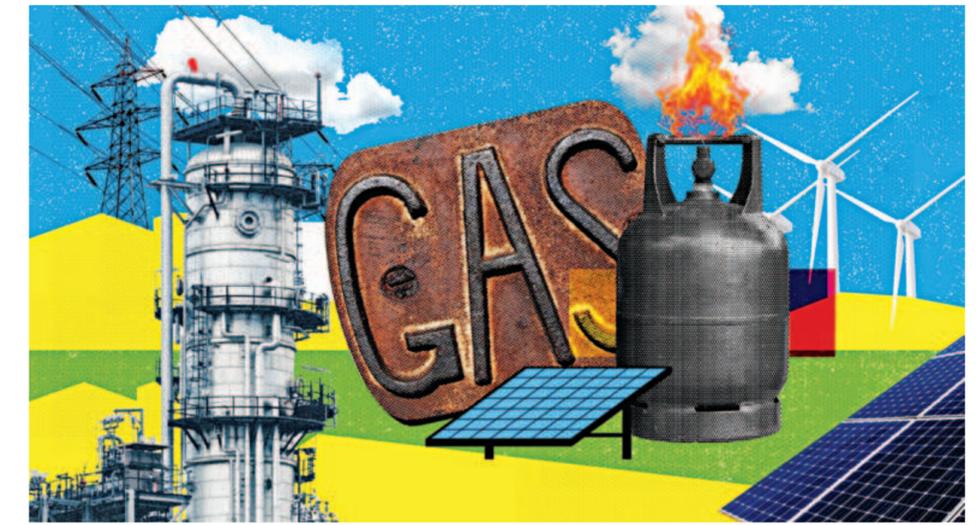
The combination of soaring natural gas demand and plummeting domestic production has pushed the Bangladesh government to diversify its energy sources. In the past, various plans, including the Integrated Energy and Power Master Plan 2023, have attempted to address this concern, but they have driven a shift towards imported liquefied natural gas (LNG) instead. As a result, the LNG pathway, pursued as a fuel diversification strategy without enough investment in domestic gas exploration, has become an economic burden for the country.

With surging LNG imports, the government has drastically increased gas tariffs, making industrial production expensive. Yet, the government pays a hefty annual subsidy on account of LNG imports. Unless Bangladesh streamlines its energy pathway, the reliance on imported LNG may further expose the vulnerability of its energy system, leading to a recurring subsidy problem.

Bangladesh's LNG imports surged by 21.7 percent and 13.86 percent in FY2023–24 and FY2024–25, respectively, following a 15.45 percent reduction in FY2022–23. The country's LNG imports declined in FY2022–23 due to elevated spot market prices and tight fiscal conditions. Imports, however, rebounded in the subsequent years because of affordable LNG prices.

While the contribution of expensive LNG to total gas consumption stands at 28.8 percent, the government is gradually passing the additional costs on to different sectors, excluding grid-based power generation. Between February 2023 and April 2025, the government raised gas tariffs for industrial production twice and captive power generation thrice. The gas price for industrial production increased from Tk 16/ cubic metre (m³) (\$0.13/m³) to Tk 40/m³ (\$0.33/m³), while the gas price for captive power generation soared to Tk 42/m³ (\$0.33/m³) from the same level.

On a ballpark estimate, industries, excluding the fertiliser sector, incurred additional costs of approximately Tk 4,560 crore (\$0.37 billion) in FY2023–24 compared with FY2022–23 due to gas price hikes (calculated using gas consumption and tariffs for the respective years). This occurred despite a 5.9 percent year-on-year decline in



FILE VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

gas supply to the sector.

Likewise, the government received additional payments of approximately Tk 3,160 crore (\$0.26 billion) from gas-fired captive power generators during the same period, driven by higher tariffs. Notably, gas supply to captive power generation declined by 6.5 percent.

Bangladesh's average gas supply in FY2024–25 was 2,679 million cubic feet per day (MMcfd)—derived from the annual consumption of 978 billion cubic feet (Bcf)—against a demand of around 4,000MMcfd. This implies a gas supply deficit of more than 1,300MMcfd. With domestic production declining at an average rate of 4.64 percent per annum since FY2018–19, this demand-supply gap may widen further, potentially prompting the government to enhance regasification capacity and increase LNG imports.

While the government has set a goal of adding local gas of 648MMcfd and 1,500MMcfd to the grid by 2025 and 2028, respectively, it should keep sufficient funds for exploration. The allocation to the energy sector as part of the annual development programme stands at a paltry Tk 2,086 crore (\$0.17 billion), which is inadequate to achieve this year's goal. Available reports suggest that the government's

initiatives may add only 143MMcfd of gas to the grid in 2026.

The government is also planning to float an international tender to explore onshore gas to ramp up local production. In the event of moderate success, if Bangladesh connects 1,000MMcfd of new gas, including the announced 143MMcfd, to the grid by FY2029–30, domestic gas production

is one of the key reasons behind this hefty subsidy burden. For instance, the government charges power plants at Tk 14.75/m³ (\$0.12/m³), which means it must provide a subsidy of around Tk 29.85/m³ (\$0.24/m³) if the LNG price is \$10/MMBtu.

High LNG dependence in the near future may prompt the government to raise gas tariffs for grid-based power

plants, affecting the Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB). With rising generation costs, BPDB's revenue shortfall is likely to widen. The government might pivot to adjust power tariffs to provide BPDB some relief.

As Bangladesh is yet to lock in a very high LNG dependence, the best course of action for the country is to design an alternative energy pathway, focusing on utilising renewable energy and local gas. There are two concrete examples. In 2020, Vietnam installed more than nine gigawatts (GW) of rooftop solar capacity, backed by a guaranteed feed-in tariff. Pakistan imported solar panels and battery packs of 17GW and 1.25 gigawatt-hours (GWh) capacities in 2024, leading to a solar boom amid the country's energy supply crunch and unaffordable power tariffs. This surge in solar power generation resulted in a subdued demand for LNG in Pakistan.

The key to Bangladesh's success in enhancing energy system resilience is to expand renewable energy at a faster rate by focusing on decentralised systems like rooftop solar. Meanwhile, the government can allocate sufficient budgetary resources to explore local gas and strengthen energy efficiency to wean itself off its LNG reliance.

will reach 2,500MMcfd (assuming existing gas supply continues to decline at the current rate of 4.64 percent per annum). Therefore, even to meet the current demand of 4,000MMcfd in FY2029–30, the country will need to import 1,500MMcfd of LNG. The annual LNG import will then rise to 547Bcf, making an annual payment obligation of more than \$5 billion in FY2029–30 (taking \$10/MMBtu of LNG, based on Bangladesh's long-term contracts and recent spot-market purchases).

In a less favourable scenario of limited local discovery and high price volatility, Bangladesh could pay as much as \$8.5 billion in FY2029–30 on account of LNG imports (assuming the government adds 500MMcfd of domestic gas to the grid, existing gas supply continues to fall at the current rate of 4.64 percent per annum, and the average LNG price reaches \$12/MMBtu). Alternatively, the unaffordability of LNG and fiscal constraints could worsen the energy supply shortfall, thereby stifling economic activities.

Despite massive gas price hikes in the last two and a half years, the government allocated a subsidy of Tk 9,000 crore (\$0.74 billion) for LNG imports in its FY2025–26 budget. Low gas tariff for grid-based power plants

How our electric grid fosters inequality



Saba El Kabir is a development practitioner and founder of Cultivera Limited. He can be reached at saba@cultivera.net.

SABA EL KABIR

At 2pm on a sweltering April day in a small workshop in rural Mymensingh, a welding machine goes silent. It was not because there was no electricity connection, but because the power had vanished again. At that exact moment, in a corporate high-rise in Dhaka, an air conditioner hums uninterrupted.

This split-screen reality exposes a structural reality: what Bangladesh has built is not a single power system serving a single economy, but a divided one.

On one side sits the *state economy*: an electricity regime engineered around megawatts contracted, capacity payments guaranteed, and fiscal stability preserved. It reliably powers government narratives, corporate enclaves, and politically insulated industry. Here, energy risk is underwritten by sovereign guarantees and absorbed by the public purse.

On the other side sits the *bottom-of-the-pyramid economy*, spanning agriculture, agri-processing, cottage industries, and small manufacturing. Here, electricity is not a convenience but a precondition for survival. The

grid reaches farms, mills, cold storages, and workshops alike, but reliability does not. Risk here is not insured; it is absorbed by farmers through failed irrigation cycles, by poultry owners through heat losses, by millers through spoiled grain, and ultimately by consumers through food inflation.

For the millions of enterprises in this second economy, the celebrated "100 percent electrification" milestone is a vanity metric. Official data shows access exceeding 99 percent, yet productivity remains hostage to reliability. During the heatwaves of 2024, while urban centres faced manageable load shedding, rural feeder lines sustaining the productive base faced outages lasting six to seven hours a day. Small manufacturers were forced to burn diesel at over Tk 106 per litre just to meet deadlines—a massive cost increase over grid tariffs.

This instability bleeds directly into agriculture. Unreliable power forces farmers into gruelling nocturnal irrigation cycles and exposes poultry operations to catastrophic heat losses; industry bodies reported poultry

sector losses running into Tk 16,000 crore over a single month. Cold storage operators are pushed onto diesel simply to prevent crops from rotting.

This state-designed monopoly logic feeds food inflation by pushing energy volatility from the grid into food prices. When energy risk is forced onto producers, it results in higher food prices, lower wages, and lost jobs. At the end of this value chain sit households: those that cannot absorb the shock go without a meal or two.

As a cottage industry's load approaches and crosses roughly the 50-kilowatt threshold, utility rules typically require a shift to high-tension supply, often necessitating the installation of a private 11 kV/0.4 kV substation, an investment that can cost Tk 15 to 25 lakh. Connection is permitted, but scaling is disincentivised.

Only once this trap is visible does the architecture behind it come into focus. For more than a decade, under the indemnity of the Speedy Supply of Power and Energy (Special Provision) Act, procurement rules prioritised speed over scrutiny, allowing capacity to be contracted without competitive discipline.

The fiscal consequences are now clear. In the revised FY 2024–25 budget, Tk 62,000 crore was allocated to power-sector subsidies. Recent analysis suggests that in FY 2023–2024, nearly 81 percent of this allocation, to the tune of Tk 32,000 crore, was absorbed by capacity charges. These are payments to plants regardless of whether electricity is

actually produced.

This stark division is not a technical inevitability; it is a fiscal choice. The path forward requires treating the *bottom-of-the-pyramid economy* not as a charity case, but as the engine of growth. The updated Renewable Energy Policy 2025 explicitly recognises peer-to-peer electricity trading. If operationalised, a cluster of rice mills in Bogura or a weaving village in Sirajganj could generate, store, and trade solar power through a swarm-grid model. Decentralisation here is not ideological; it is about yield stability and food system resilience.

A quieter reform lies in finance. Every month, millions of farmers and rural entrepreneurs pay electricity bills. By integrating smart-meter usage with digital credit scoring, a farmer's steady irrigation history or a processor's consistent cold storage demand can become bankable proof of productivity. Finance can then follow performance, not paperwork—transforming energy from a recurring expense into financial infrastructure.

As long as the power sector protects the *state economy* while extracting from agriculture and small business, food inflation and broad-based unemployment will remain structural features of the economy. This is not a future risk; it is the present cost of a system that keeps capital comfortable and production expendable.

As such, the lights will stay on in the high-rises. The darkness has already been outsourced to the fields and workshops below.

Tarique Rahman's return, and the Kundera-esque weight of expectations



A CLOSER LOOK

Tasneem Tayeb
is a columnist for The Daily Star.
Her X handle is @tasneem_tayeb.

TASNEEM TAYEB

Tarique Rahman's return to Bangladesh after 17 years in exile has been greeted with a scale of emotion that is understandable. There were crowds, chants, tears, symbolism layered upon symbolism. In a country starved of political closure, it felt, to many, like a long-awaited homecoming. But in 2025, we are not a nation that can afford to confuse emotion with resolution. The country is in a stage where it can completely fall apart as well as heal, depending on the political trajectory. And this condition demands discipline—from leaders, such as Tarique Rahman, as much as from those who follow them.

When talking about Tarique Rahman's "homecoming," it becomes essential to clarify one point: he did not return to Bangladesh politically unformed or disconnected. From London, especially in recent years, he remained a persistent presence in the country's political conversation through statements, video addresses, party directives and policy documents. In a way, he shaped the BNP's oppositional posture and kept himself visible as its central figure. His critiques of democratic erosion, calls for accountability, and insistence on electoral legitimacy were not occasional, random interventions; they were part of a sustained narrative. His exile, therefore, was physical rather than political. What has changed now is not his relevance to the nation's politics, but his proximity to consequences.

That distinction matters. From a distance, political language has a certain freedom. It can be sharp, even uncompromising. It can draw clear moral lines and name injustice without having to manage the fallout. On the ground, words can have different consequences. They address volatile public sentiments, weakened institutions, and a political culture where public trust has been worn thin over time. In Bangladesh today, very little is neutral. Silence is often interpreted. And rhetoric,

even when well-intended, can move crowds in directions no one can quite control.

This is why Tarique Rahman's return should be assessed with a cautious optimism at best, not over-glorification. There is an understandable urge to see this as a historic turning point. But our recent history suggests that such moments, when overburdened with expectations, can just as easily unravel. When leaders are pushed into the spotlight as saviours rather than participants in a fragile political system, politics begins to resemble theatre. Brittle societies like ours can hardly endure that for very long.

Tarique Rahman's speech on the day of his return offered important clues as to how he understands the weight of this moment. His tone was reasonably mature and restrained. There was an emphasis on peace and unity—elements the country is in dire need of right now. Violence was condemned. Elections were framed as the legitimate route to change. There were gestures towards inclusivity and a visible effort to lower the national temperature rather than raise it. In a country where political language has often normalised excess, this restraint was not insignificant and has not gone unnoticed.

The speech was also revealing in where it fell short of the expectations. It did not offer specificity. It did not articulate priorities; it did not chart out a roadmap. It invoked vision more than pathway. Unsurprisingly, it is a familiar feature of political homecomings everywhere, where leaders talk about vision rather than specifics. But in Bangladesh's present condition—where trust in politics and politicians is thin and patience thinner, thanks to its bitter political legacy—the absence of detail matters. People are no longer just listening for reassurance. They are listening for structure, for understanding of how the future will be shaped.

Which again brings us to the question of expectations, the central tension of this

moment. Tarique Rahman returns not just with popularity, but with dockets, as back up. The BNP's 31-point outline on structural reforms is a serious attempt to respond to the institutional damage of recent years. It speaks to long-standing demands: restoring a non-partisan election framework, limiting executive overreach, reforming the judiciary, repealing repressive laws, and rebalancing

implementation. Neither the 31 points nor the 19 points function as roadmaps. They tell us what should change, but not how that change will be shaped, financed, legislated, or politically negotiated where required, and who will be its owner and ultimately see it through. They talk about commissions, reforms, and principles, but stop short of outlining timelines or accountability mechanisms.

I said before, now Tarique Rahman does not enjoy the leverage of distance, now he has to shoulder the weight of his words in a Milan Kundera-esque style.

In addition, there is the inevitable and more prominent expectation of electoral anchoring from Tarique Rahman. Having long argued that elections are the only legitimate pathway to change, Tarique Rahman is now expected to bind his political project firmly to that process—perilous and imperfect as it may be. This means discouraging disruption, resisting brinkmanship, and committing to outcomes that are not predetermined. In a country scarred by boycotts and flimsy mandates, it is a basic expectation.

However, and most critically, there is an expectation of temperature management. Bangladesh is not only polarised; it is at the boiling point. Years of repression, economic strain, and civic space shrinkage have resulted in a public mood that vacillates mostly between rage and outbursts. Leadership in such a context is not only about discouraging violence, but also creating space: for institutions to regain public trust, for politics to come to a steady pace, for disagreement to exist without becoming violent and for the people to heal.

This will perhaps be Tarique Rahman's most critical test of political acumen.

Tarique Rahman's return is therefore not a conclusion, but a test of his political maturity. He arrives with a powerful legacy, a solid, mobilised base to a country watching and hoping for stability, justice and a new era that will decide the nation's trajectory for the next leap to progress. Having said all these, he also arrives at a moment where miscalculation carries unforeseen risks.

Therefore, assessing Tarique Rahman's homecoming with cautious optimism is justified.

Bangladesh does not need another myth. It needs politics that can tolerate difference of opinion, navigate ambiguity, create unity and resist the urge to relent to chaos. Whether Tarique Rahman can meet all the expectations should be decided not by the scale of his welcome, but slowly, in how he handles power and formally holds it, when the time comes, regardless of the role he occupies in the next parliament.

The much-awaited return has happened. Expectations now carry weight—and the country will witness how they are borne.



FILE PHOTO: BNP MEDIA CELL

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) acting chairman Tarique Rahman waves from a vehicle after his arrival from London in Dhaka on December 25, 2025.

the relationship between the state and the citizen. It signals an awareness that Bangladesh's crisis is perhaps not merely electoral, but constitutional.

Alongside this is the 19-point programme—the foundational vision articulated by Ziaur Rahman decades ago, and repeatedly invoked by his son. It is broader, more philosophical, concerned with sovereignty, self-reliance, social justice and national cohesion. Its strength lies in moral clarity rather than operational detail. It reminds supporters that BNP's claim to legitimacy has always rested on nation-building, not simply regime change.

Together, these frameworks suggest that Tarique Rahman is not returning empty-handed. There is ideological intent. There is an attempt—at least on paper—to move beyond grievance, rhetorical politics.

But we must understand that intent is not

This does not make them meaningless. It does, however, place a responsibility on their author and the BNP's leader—now returned to the country—to translate these well-articulated outlines into processes.

This is where expectations start to become uncomfortable.

And then there is also the expectation of restraint that goes beyond mere rhetorical condemnation of violence. In a political environment where mob violence is seemingly becoming substitute for institutional accountability, leadership requires repeated, unambiguous signalling that disorder is not a legitimate political instrument and will not be accepted as such. This is not about silencing protests; this is about refusing to legitimise disorder. Words must be chosen with an awareness of how quickly they can travel, and how easily they can be twisted to serve the purpose of vested quarters. As

Why we must save institutions that whisper moderation into our society



Altaf Russell
is a PhD researcher in Economics at the University of Glasgow in United Kingdom. He can be reached at altaf12at7@gmail.com.

ALTAF RUSSELL

Bangladesh has long depended on quiet, steady forces that make good choices feel natural: teachers who turn study into habit, newspapers that promote tolerance, and cultural bodies that rehearse pluralism in public life. Behavioural economists Richard H Thaler and Cass R Sunstein call these "nudge" forces that shape the choice architecture so people lean towards better options without coercion. Nudge theory accommodates both liberalism and paternalism because liberalism alone cannot create good habits. In a country where formal systems—especially education—are uneven and people are time-pressed, nudges are practical nation-building tools that can create an informed and inclusive society.

Everyday decisions are influenced as much by defaults, framing, and social cues as by deliberate reasoning. Our brain operates through two systems: automatic and reflective. Our mother tongue flows from the automatic system, while speaking another

language requires reflective effort. When we act from the reflective system, caution replaces instinct. Thaler and Sunstein's framework draws on this dual-process psychology: keep good choices in the automatic system while respecting individual freedom.

For decades, mainstream newspapers and secular cultural organisations have played this role and helped shape civic norms in Bangladesh. Publications like *The Daily Star* championed merit and fairness, often through reporting on education and stories that fostered social harmony. Cultural institutions such as Chhayanaut advanced pluralism through music and performance, reinforcing secular ideals. These efforts formed part of the behavioural architecture of a democratic society.

Individual citizens often lack the capacity to make better choices alone. This is where wealthy countries intervene and surround their citizens with invisible nudges; in poorly educated societies like ours, these

institutions are fewer. Unlike welfare states, our government makes limited attempts to build such architecture. Only a handful of media and cultural organisations shoulder this responsibility.

That architecture is now being dismantled by social media. Engagement-optimised feeds give more weight to outrage and attention-grabbing content over accuracy and balance, systematically amplifying polarising content. Uncritical platforming normalises extreme statements by inflating perceptions of societal support. In Bangladesh, extremist campaigns mobilise online and spill offline into harassment or attacks on media and cultural organisers. Their goal is not only intimidation—it is to delegitimise the institutions that anchor shared norms.

Recent mob attacks on *The Daily Star*, *Prothom Alo*, and cultural centres including Chhayanaut mark a dangerous escalation. Arson and vandalism against these spaces are not just violence against property—they are assaults on Bangladesh's traditional "nudge" institutions. These organisations have long shaped social, cultural, and educational norms, making moderation and pluralism the default experience of civic life. In an age dominated by misinformation and outrage-driven algorithms, their role is more critical than ever. Protecting these institutions is not optional; it is a prerequisite for safeguarding the behavioural architecture of a democratic society.

Secular content creators have tried

to counter hate with facts on Facebook, YouTube, and short-video platforms. But the playing field is tilted: algorithms reward heat, not light. "Civility" nudges on platforms struggle to reduce engagement with harmful posts, even if they boost attention to harmless content. That is worthwhile, but it rarely beats virality engineered for rage. Secular content creators have not shown success in cooling down the mob created by extremist content creators.

Should secular voices abandon social media, then? Not entirely—but they must stop treating it as the main battlefield. Secular actors who anchor their strategy on platforms built for engagement are effectively playing away, under hostile referees. Moreover, outperforming social media influencers in traditional media is easier for secular and informed voices. No powerful influencer has succeeded in traditional media with a few exceptions. In most cases, they fail to create knowledge and turn to social media that rewards shallow provocation.

Our Bangalee culture has long been upheld by cultural activities, but their scope has shrunk in the age of social media. Extremists exploit this vacuum to spread hate speech online. Secular activists cannot match this reach through cultural events alone. The good news: institutions like *The Daily Star*, *Prothom Alo*, and Chhayanaut remain relatively credible and capable of reaching the masses. They uphold our cultural identity and sense of independence. We must save them.

In Bangladesh, we have fought hard for the political aspect of democracy, but rarely for its cultural dimension. Democracy cannot be smooth or sustainable unless political democracy aligns with its prerequisite cultural democracy. Bangladesh's independence movement in 1971 was a long journey towards that alignment—but we have struggled to hold it. Today, Bangladesh faces a severe deficit of cultural democracy and is mired in an environment of cultural authoritarianism. At times, we defeated cultural authoritarianism while tolerating political authoritarianism; at other times, we fought political undemocratic forces by enforcing cultural intolerance. This cycle must end. We need to defeat both simultaneously. That is why traditional "nudge" institutions are essential—not only to sustain democracy but to deepen it.

The smarter move? Stop treating social media as the main stage. Use it tactically, not existentially. Reinvest in the quiet infrastructure—mainstream media and cultural forums—that once made decency the default. These spaces still command trust, reach, and depth. They can inoculate society against the rage economy.

If we want pluralism to remain Bangladesh's everyday common sense, the answer is not to shout louder on an outrage machine. It is to protect and strengthen the institutions that whisper moderation into our civic life. Because when the quiet guardians fall, the noise will rule.

CROSSWORD
BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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19 SOS indication
22 Sailor's call
23 The Emerald Isle
26 Young lady
29 June honoree
32 Greek consonants

33 Serving feat
34 Grove fruit
36 Scheme
37 Lover of drama
38 Greek consonant
39 Clarifying words
40 Snowy wader
41 Play group
42 Gander's mate

DOWN
1 Sounded hoarse
2 She loved Hamlet
3 La Paz language
4 Miseries
5 Once known as
6 Excellent
7 From the area
8 Not available

9 Did kitchen work
11 Scenes of a lot of shooting
15 Cobbler's cousin
17 Checking for fit
20 Male cat
21 Polite address
24 No slacker
25 Houdini feats
27 Take to court
28 Capitol group
29 Column type
30 Fragrance
31 Titled women
35 Dapper
36 When repeated, a Samoan city
38 Beer container

FRIDAY'S ANSWERS

A	D	M	I	T		A	I	M	E	D
B	R	I	A	R		S	C	E	N	E
H	A	M	M	E	R	H	E	A	D	S
O	P	E		M	O	E		T	O	P
R	E	D	H	O	T	S		P	R	O
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E	V	A	S		C	E	E			
T	E	D		L	U	N	A	T	I	C
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A	G	R	E	E		N	O	I	S	E
S	E	A	T	S		G	E	N	T	S

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Ultra-processed foods under fire as experts called for global action!

A major new three-paper series published in The Lancet warned that the rapid rise of ultra-processed foods (UPFs) in diets around the world had become an urgent public health issue and required coordinated government action.

Authored by 43 global experts, the series reported that UPFs – such as packaged snacks, sugary drinks and many ready-to-eat products – were increasingly replacing fresh and minimally processed foods. Powerful food corporations, using aggressive marketing and political lobbying to boost sales and block effective regulation, drove this shift, according to the authors.

The first paper reviewed more than a decade of research and found strong links between high UPF consumption and poorer diet quality, overeating and higher risks of conditions including obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, depression and early death. National surveys showed UPF intake had risen sharply in countries such as Spain, China, Brazil and Mexico, while remaining at very high levels in the UK and USA.

The second paper set out policy options to curb UPFs, including clearer front-of-pack labelling, tighter restrictions on advertising – especially to children – bans in schools and hospitals, and taxes on selected products to help fund access to healthier foods. Successful examples, such as Brazil's school meals programme prioritising fresh food, were highlighted.

The final paper argued that corporations, not individual choices, were driving unhealthy diets. It compared the situation to tobacco control and called for global action to protect health policy from industry influence and to build fairer, healthier food systems that benefited communities rather than shareholders.



Endometriosis: The common condition affecting millions of women worldwide

STAR HEALTH DESK

Endometriosis affects an estimated 10% of women of reproductive age globally, around 190 million people. It is a chronic and often painful condition in which tissue similar to the lining of the uterus grows outside the womb, causing inflammation, scarring, and the formation of adhesions.

Symptoms vary widely but commonly include severe period pain, heavy menstrual bleeding, ongoing pelvic pain, infertility, and abdominal bloating or nausea. The condition most often occurs in the pelvis, but in some cases it affects other parts of the body, including the abdomen and chest. Endometriosis can also interfere with sexual intercourse, bowel movements, and urination, and it is linked to depression, anxiety, and other mental health challenges.

Endometriosis affects women from the start of menstruation through to menopause, regardless of ethnic or social background. It can also affect transgender men and non-binary people who menstruate. Despite its prevalence, there is no known cure. Treatment focuses on managing symptoms and reducing long-term impacts, using medicines or, in some cases, surgery.

Diagnosis remains a major challenge. Symptoms are often diverse or mistaken for "normal" period pain, leading to long delays in care. On average, it takes between four and 12 years to receive a diagnosis.

Treatments include pain relief such as non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and hormonal therapies, including contraceptive pills, progestins, and other hormone-based medicines. Surgery can remove lesions, adhesions, and scar tissue, though symptoms sometimes return.

Fertility treatments such as IVF may be recommended for those struggling to conceive. Multidisciplinary approaches, including physiotherapy and cognitive behavioural therapy, can also help manage pain and improve quality of life.

Endometriosis has wide-reaching health, social, and economic impacts. Chronic pain, heavy bleeding, fatigue, infertility, and poor mental health significantly reduce quality of life. Many individuals miss work or education, leading to lost income and financial strain. Social stigma and the normalisation of period pain often worsen these challenges, leaving many affected people feeling isolated or misunderstood.

There is currently no way to prevent endometriosis. Health experts stress that better awareness, earlier diagnosis, and access to quality care can help limit disease progression and long-term harm. Raising awareness, reducing stigma, and ensuring equitable access to diagnosis, treatment, and support services remain crucial. The condition continues to be a global health priority, particularly in low- and middle-income countries where access to specialised care is limited.

While there is no cure, early diagnosis, effective symptom management, and access to appropriate care can greatly improve quality of life.

SOURCE: WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION



COLD WEATHER CARE

Protect your hands

DR K K PANDEY

You must have often heard your relatives or acquaintances saying that their fingers become numb in cold or snowy weather and often turn blue and swollen and cause severe pain. Sometimes, when one spends a lot of time in snowy weather, fingers turn black. Have you ever wondered why this happens?

People suffering from Raynaud's disease should avoid cold and ice

People suffering from Raynaud's disease, 90% of whom are women, should protect their fingers in cold weather. People who are associated with the food preservation industry should also take special care of their hands in cold weather. The hands of these people come in contact with cold and hot water frequently. People who use rotating tools like drilling machines, mixers or hair dryers in beauty parlours or spend a lot of time on pianos, harmoniums and typing machines should also protect their hands in icy cold weather.

Patients with diabetes should take extra care

Due to the continuous accumulation of fat and calcium in the pure blood vessels of the hands of diabetic

patients, the supply of pure blood is already less, and it reduces even more when cold hits them. If carelessness is shown, the fingers of the hands turn black. Therefore, diabetic patients should always keep their hands clean and dry. Always keep their hands covered with cotton or woollen gloves in cold and snowy weather. Never apply heat to the hands with an electric heater or a hot water bottle! Go for a morning walk only when the sun is shining! If black colour or a black scab is seen in the fingers of the hand, then immediately contact a vascular surgeon.

Tobacco chewers and smokers should be careful in winters

You must have noticed that often people who smoke hookah, tobacco and cigarettes have one or two fingers that are black or already cut. Often in extreme cold, the redness or tingling sensation in the hands of such people increases, and sometimes the pain becomes unbearable. The blood pipes of the hands of such people are already constricted due to the nicotine of tobacco, and on top of that, the supply of whatever blood is left in the hand is completely disrupted due to exposure to cold and frosty air. The result is gangrene and wounds

in the fingers. Such patients should completely stop consuming tobacco and smoking. If the pain is becoming unbearable and the colour of the fingers is turning black, then definitely consult an experienced vascular or cardiovascular surgeon; otherwise, in such circumstances, there can be a situation of losing fingers.

Vasculitis patients should take special care of their hands

The arrival of winter brings problems in the hands of patients suffering from vasculitis, i.e., inflammation of the walls of blood pipes of the hand. In winter, the walls of blood pipes swell, and often blood clots accumulate in the swollen blood pipes, and the flow of pure blood is completely blocked, and fingers of the hands may turn black. Such patients should protect their hands from cold and use some special medicines so that the clots do not accumulate in the blood vessels. Vasculitis patients should contact a vascular surgeon before the onset of winter and keep taking advice.

The writer is a Senior Vascular & Endovascular Surgeon at Indraprastha Apollo Hospitals, Sarita Vihar, New Delhi. E-mail: drpandeykk@gmail.com

Global review reinforced vaccine safety on autism!

A new analysis from a World Health Organisation (WHO) global expert committee found no evidence of a causal link between vaccines and autism spectrum disorders (ASD), reaffirming WHO's long-standing position on vaccine safety.

The Global Advisory Committee on Vaccine Safety (GACVS), an independent group of international experts, reviewed the latest scientific evidence on vaccines and autism. The analysis was discussed at the Committee's meeting on 27 November 2025.

The review examined evidence from 31 major research studies published between 2010 and August 2025, using data from multiple countries. The findings showed a strong safety profile for vaccines used during childhood and pregnancy and confirmed there was no causal association between vaccines and ASD. This included vaccines containing thiomersal, a preservative that has been widely debated in the past.

The Committee also assessed evidence on vaccines containing aluminium adjuvants, drawing on studies conducted between 1999 and 2023, as well as a large nationwide cohort study from Denmark covering children born between 1997 and 2018. The evidence showed no link between the very small amounts of aluminium used in some vaccines and autism.

GACVS reaffirmed its previous conclusions from 2002, 2004 and 2012 that vaccines, including those containing thiomersal or aluminium, do not cause autism. WHO advised governments to base vaccination policies on the strongest scientific evidence, noting that childhood immunisation has saved at least 154 million lives globally over the past 50 years.

SOURCE: WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION

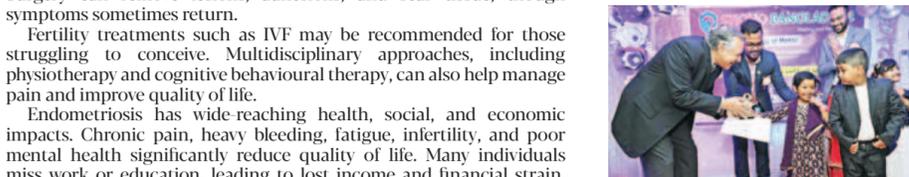


Gaibe Ora, Shunbe Prithibi: Hearing-impaired children redefine the power of music

STAR HEALTH REPORT

Shono Bangladesh Hearing & Speech Clinic, an organisation dedicated to improving the quality of life of children with hearing and speech impairments, officially launched a special musical video entitled "Gaibe Ora, Shunbe Prithibi" (They Will Sing, and the World Will Listen) in the capital recently.

The video portrayed the real-life and inspiring journeys of children who had been born with hearing impairment as well as cochlear implant recipients, who, once unable to hear or speak, had embarked upon a new journey into the world of sound through modern medical intervention, cochlear implantation, and regular speech therapy, celebrating their courage, confidence, and remarkable achievements.



The event was honoured by the presence of distinguished guests, including Mr Mahfuz Anam, Editor & Publisher of The Daily Star; Mr Glen McGhee, Trustee Member of CRP (UK), on behalf of Dr Valerie Ann Taylor; Prof Dr Md Zakariya Sarker, Former Director of the National Institute of ENT & Hospital; Brigadier General Md Towfiq Hasan of BRAC Health Care; and Dr M Mainul Hafiz, Otolaryngologist. The speakers emphasised that with timely diagnosis, proper medical intervention, and consistent therapy, children with hearing impairment could grow into fully capable and self-reliant members of society, noting that such initiatives had played a vital role in raising public awareness about hearing and speech rehabilitation.

Mr Mohammad Saiful Islam, Managing Director of Shono Bangladesh Hearing & Speech Clinic, stated that the video was not merely a musical project but a message of hope for thousands of parents, demonstrating that with the right support at the right time, children with hearing impairment could sing, hear, and fulfil their dreams.

Drug-resistant bloodstream infections set to rise across Europe

STAR HEALTH REPORT

A new study has warned that bloodstream infections caused by drug-resistant bacteria are expected to rise significantly across Europe over the next few decades, largely due to ageing populations. The research, published in the open-access journal PLOS Medicine, was led by Gwenan Knight of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, UK.

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR), where bacteria no longer respond to commonly used antibiotics, is a growing global health crisis. Resistant infections are more difficult to treat and can lead to longer hospital stays, serious illness, and higher mortality. To tackle this problem effectively, health experts need accurate predictions of how the burden of resistant infections is likely to change in the coming years.

In the study, researchers analysed over 12 million blood tests collected between 2010 and 2019 from 29 European countries. These tests measured how susceptible bacteria were to various antibiotics. Using this data, the team calculated the

incidence of bloodstream infections and projected how rates of drug-resistant infections might change up to 2050, taking into account population growth and ageing trends.

The findings revealed that bloodstream infection rates are expected to increase overall, although the burden will vary by country and by the type of bacteria. Men are projected to experience larger increases than women for most of the bacteria studied, while older adults, particularly those aged 74 and above, are likely to face the steepest rises. In contrast, rates among younger populations are expected to stabilise or decline.

Even with strong public health measures, the study suggested that achieving the United Nations' goal of a 10% reduction in resistant infections by 2030 would only be possible for about two-thirds of bacteria-antibiotic combinations. This highlights the challenges of curbing the rise of antimicrobial resistance across Europe.

Gwenan Knight commented, "Our study shows that the future burden of drug-resistant infections

will not be uniform. There will be substantial differences between countries, age groups, and sexes. The steepest increases are projected in older adults, particularly those over 65. Simply preventing further rises in resistant bloodstream infections would already be a major public health achievement."

She added, "It was particularly striking to bring together different types of data to see the bigger picture. Age and sex are still rarely considered in antimicrobial resistance projections, yet they have a real impact on who is most affected. Combining these factors with demographic and infection trends shows just how challenging it will be to reverse the steady rise in bloodstream infections across Europe."

Coauthor Catrin Moore said, "This research is a major step forward in understanding how age and sex will influence the burden of drug-resistant infections in European countries. It will help us design targeted interventions for those most at risk, ultimately reducing deaths and serious illness caused by these infections in the future."

The study underlines the urgent need for public health strategies that focus on high-risk populations, particularly older adults and men, alongside broader efforts to combat antimicrobial resistance.

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Zaki's final day at field ends in mourning

SPORTS REPORTER

Cricket in the country took a backseat on Saturday after a heart-wrenching incident on the field left everyone in utter disbelief, shock, and grief.

Mahbub Ali Zaki, a renowned local coach and a respected figure in Bangladesh cricket, passed away at the age of 59 after suffering a cardiac arrest. The assistant coach of Dhaka Capitals in the ongoing 12th Bangladesh Premier League, Zaki collapsed while supervising his team's warm-up session ahead of their match against Rajshahi Warriors.

He was given CPR and rushed to a nearby hospital, but doctors later confirmed that he had died on the way.

Although the two scheduled matches of the day went ahead, the results felt irrelevant. Cricket seemed insignificant, and the matches felt like professional obligations, with the loss of someone who was deeply admired across the country's cricketing circles.

Several national cricketers, including Mehidy Hasan Miraz, Shoriful Islam, and Hasan Mahmud, along with Zaki's colleagues and Bangladesh Cricket Board president Aminul Islam Bulbul, rushed to the hospital, where confirmation of his death led to emotional scenes as grief overwhelmed those present.

Within hours, Zaki was back at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium – this time for his namaz-e-janaza, where BCB officials, local and foreign players, BPL authorities, journalists and well-wishers gathered to pay their final respects. His body was later taken to his hometown Cumilla, where he will be laid to rest.

A former fast bowler, Zaki represented Cumilla in the National Cricket Championship and played for top clubs such as Abahani and Dhanmondi. After retiring, he devoted his life to coaching and joined the BCB in 2008 as a High Performance coach, playing a major role in the development of pace bowling in the country.

He was part of the coaching staff of Bangladesh's historic Under-19 World Cup-winning team in 2020 and was serving as the Specialist Pace Bowling Coach of BCB Game Development at the time of his death.

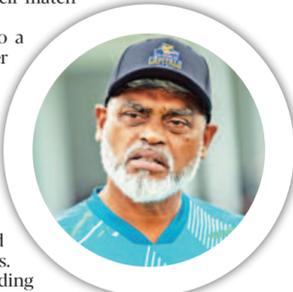
Many leading fast bowlers, including Taskin Ahmed and Mustafizur Rahman, were scouted and groomed by him. For countless cricketers dealing with technical or physical issues, "Zaki sir" was the first person they turned to.

Former pupils from different generations took to social media to express their grief. Mustafizur thanked him for "helping me numerous times in my career", while Shakib Al Hasan recalled "fond memories" and reflected on how "his last moments were at a cricket ground doing the work he loved most."

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza wrote that Zaki "probably understood the biomechanics of bowling better than anyone in Bangladesh", a view shared widely across the cricketing community.

Equally admired by even the foreign coaches he had worked with, Zaki was remembered as a "mentor, a guide, and a constant source of belief during our journey to winning the 2020 U-19 World Cup in South Africa" by U-19 head coach Naveed Nawaz.

The emotional outpouring witnessed since Saturday underlines the lasting impact Zaki had on Bangladesh cricket. While his absence leaves a void in the country's coaching landscape, especially in pace bowling, the legacy he built will certainly endure beyond his passing.



England end long drought amid concern over two-day Test

STAR SPORTS DESK

A 15-year, 18-Test wait for success on Australian soil finally ended as England survived a treacherous two-day contest yesterday, emerging from what many described as an MCG snake pit with resilience and reward.

England's bold Bazball philosophy finally delivered a defining overseas moment. Refusing to retreat into defensive cricket, the visitors attacked from the outset of the modest run chase. Jacob Bethell's fluent 40 set the tempo, while Zak Crawley's assured 37 and Ben Duckett's lively 34 ensured momentum never slipped away. The victory was sealed in front of a packed Boxing Day crowd of 92,045, though many spectators later discovered their tickets for the remaining days were void after the Test ended far earlier than expected.

Despite the celebrations, discomfort surrounded the spectacle. England captain Ben Stokes and Australian skipper Steve Smith both admitted a Test finishing inside two days was far from desirable, echoing criticism from across the cricketing world. The MCG pitch, heavily grassed and offering excessive seam movement,



became the central talking point of the match.

The signs were evident from the opening exchanges. On day one of the fourth Test, 20 wickets fell as Australia were dismissed for 152 before England collapsed to 110 in reply. Batters struggled to survive, let alone build innings, as bowlers dominated proceedings under overcast skies.

The second day offered little change in pattern. Australia were bowled out for 132 shortly after lunch, leaving England a target of 175. Calmness prevailed amid pressure, with Harry Brook unbeaten on 18 and Jamie Smith contributing

three as England reached the target for the loss of six wickets, prompting loud celebrations from the travelling Barmy Army.

"When you go out there and you're faced with those conditions, you've got to crack on and deal with it," said Stokes after the four-wicket victory ended England's long wait for success Down Under.

"But being brutally honest, that's not really what you want. You know, Boxing Day Test match, you don't want a game finishing in less than two days. It's not ideal, but you can't change it once you start the game and you've just got to play what's in front of you," he added.

Smith pointed to the 10 millimetres of grass as a major factor.

"It was tricky. No one could really get in. I think when you see 36 wickets across two days, that's probably too much," he said.

Cricket Australia chief Todd Greenberg was blunt: "Short Tests are bad for business."

A host of former greats have been critical of the Melbourne pitch with former England captain Michael Vaughan on Saturday calling it "a joke" while another ex-England skipper Alastair Cook branded it "an unfair contest".

BY THE NUMBERS

5,468 – Days since England's last Test win in Australia, dating back to the New Year's Test of 2011 (won by an innings and 83 runs).

4 – Men's two-day Tests played in Australia: Melbourne 1931, Brisbane 2022, and two in this series (Perth and Melbourne).

15.08 – Runs per wicket across the two days: the 14th lowest in Ashes history, and the lowest since 1950.

24.3 – Balls per wicket: the second-lowest in all Ashes Tests, behind only Lord's 1888 (20.8).

92,045 – Fans at the MCG on day two, the second-largest single-day crowd in the venue's history, behind the day one crowd of 94,199.

Morocco's 19-match winning streak ends

AGENCIES

Hosts Morocco were held to a 1-1 draw by Mali at the Africa Cup of Nations on Friday, ending their world record run of wins and leaving them still needing to secure progress to the next stage.

Midfielder Brahim Diaz tucked away a penalty in stoppage time at the end of the first half, but Mali equalised from the spot midway through the second half through Lassine Sinayoko.

Both penalties were awarded after VAR reviews in a tempestuous clash at the end of a busy day of action at the tournament.

Morocco top the Group A standings with four points, while Zambia, who they meet next on Monday, have two points, along with Mali, while the Comoros are bottom of the group with a single point.

Morocco had won a record 19 successive internationals ahead of the Boxing Day clash, but the draw brings that run to an end and leaves them still looking unconvincing despite their status as runaway favourites.

Morocco captain Achraf Hakimi's former PSG teammate Kylian Mbappe, the current Real Madrid superstar and France skipper, was among the spectators in the crowd of 63,844 and appeared to be wearing a Morocco shirt with Hakimi's number two on it.



DIABATE DOUBLE PEGS KINGS BACK

Souleymane Diabate sends Bashundhara Kings goalkeeper Anisur Rahman Zico the wrong way as Abahani fought back from two goals down to hold Kings to a 2-2 draw in their Bangladesh Football League fixture at the Kings Arena yesterday. Zico, however, saved a late penalty against Diabate to keep Kings top of the table. Meanwhile, neither Fortis FC nor Rahmatganj MFS were able to cash in on Kings' dropping points as the former drew against Brothers while the latter were held by defending champions Mohammedan.

PHOTO: BFF

A LOOK BACK AT 2025

A year of hope, hype and disappointment

ATIQUE ANAM

Not too long ago, finding a Bangladesh national football team jersey in Dhaka felt like a scavenger hunt. European club jerseys dominated shop displays, while cricket shirts filled whatever space remained. Bangladesh football team jerseys, if available at all, were tucked away in corners.

Fast forward to the end of 2025, and the scene has changed dramatically. The unmistakable white shirt with green patches and red trim now hangs proudly across sports shops and footpath stalls alike, often outnumbering cricket and European club jerseys.

For perhaps the first time in many years, football reclaimed centre stage in Bangladesh's sporting consciousness, briefly unseating cricket from its long-held throne. Crowded galleries at men's international matches, relentless social media buzz and renewed mainstream media attention all pointed towards a revival long craved by supporters.

The spark behind this resurgence was unmistakable. The arrival of Leicester City midfielder Hamza Choudhury electrified



the football landscape, followed by a steady influx of overseas-based players such as Cavalry FC's Shomit Shome and promising youngsters Fahamedul Islam, Zayan Hakim and Cuba Mitchell. With these additions came belief – belief that Bangladesh football was finally turning a corner.

Expectations soared. The national team became more marketable, sponsorship interest grew, merchandise sales increased and the National Stadium once again echoed with genuine footballing passion. Yet,



as the year unfolded, a familiar and frustrating reality resurfaced: the hype was rarely matched by performances on the pitch.

Bangladesh were handed what many described as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to qualify for the AFC Asian Cup finals for the first time since their maiden appearance in 1980. Drawn in Group C alongside India, Hong Kong and Singapore in an expanded 24-team tournament, Javier Cabrera and his squad had every reason to believe that qualification was within reach.

The campaign began promisingly with a goalless draw away to India in Shillong – a match Bangladesh arguably should have won comfortably. Yet, it felt like a statement performance, one that could have set the tone for the rest of the qualifiers. Instead, it proved to be a false dawn.

Rather than building on that result, Cabrera's men stumbled badly at home, suffering back-to-back defeats against Singapore and Hong Kong. Those losses, both by narrow one-goal margins, effectively extinguished Bangladesh's qualification hopes before the campaign had truly gathered momentum.

While the scorelines suggested close contests, the reality was harsher: Bangladesh were second best for large stretches, even with a partisan crowd roaring them on at the renovated National Stadium.

As results faltered, scrutiny intensified. Questions were raised repeatedly about the head coach's tactical choices, squad selections and the frequent reshuffling of players into unfamiliar positions. However, such criticisms rarely

translated into accountability, as the Bangladesh Football Federation continued to back the Spaniard, who ended the year as the longest-serving head coach in the national team's history.

The sense of underachievement lingered until the year's final act provided a moment of redemption. Bangladesh closed 2025 with a memorable 1-0 victory over India at home – a result that ended a 22-year winless run against their neighbours and delivered a night of unfiltered joy to millions of fans. It was a win rich in symbolism and emotion, one that will be remembered fondly.

But even that triumph could not entirely mask the broader truth.

Despite an influx of quality players, unprecedented public engagement and renewed belief, the Bangladesh men's football team failed to deliver when it mattered most. The year became a familiar cycle of hope followed by heartbreak, of promise undone by poor execution and missed opportunities. The long-awaited win over India arrived, but it came too late to alter the bigger picture.



INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL 2025: GLORY, HEARTBREAK AND HISTORY

2025 was unforgettable in international football. PSG dominated Europe with a 5-0 Champions League final win over Inter Milan, while Inter stunned Barcelona with a last-minute semi-final comeback. Cristiano Ronaldo led Portugal to a second UEFA Nations League title. Chelsea won the first revamped Club World Cup, and Liverpool broke the British transfer record signing Alexander Isak. Ousmane Dembele's incredible comeback earned him the Ballon d'Or. Tragedy struck with Diogo Jota's and Tottenham claimed their first major trophy.

Read the full story on The Daily Star website



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21-year-old tied to pole, hacked in C'nawabganj

2 held; mother accuses Jamaat supporters

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogura

Police have arrested two suspects after a young man was tied to an electric pole and hacked in Shibganj upazila of Chapainawabganj on Wednesday.

The victim, Abu Sufian Siju, 21, was first taken to a local hospital and later referred to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital.

As his condition worsened, he was transferred to the National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (NIOR) in Dhaka on Thursday.

Doctors have said Siju's left arm may need to be amputated after attackers used sharp weapons to hack his left arm, left leg and right hand, his mother Sufia Begum told The Daily Star yesterday.

Blaming local activists of Jamaat-
SEE PAGE 3 COL 2



Inqilab Moncho activists continue their sit-in at Shahbagh intersection for the second day yesterday, demanding arrest of those responsible for the killing of Sharif Osman Bin Hadi; speedy trial of the perpetrators; and resignation of government officials who failed to prevent the murder or arrest the killers. Story on page 1.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

'Section of govt allowed attacks on the media'

Nurul Kabir questions inaction despite prior threats

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Editors' Council President Nurul Kabir yesterday alleged that a section of the government allowed the attacks on Prothom Alo, The Daily Star and Chhayanaut to take place.

"We clearly know that announcements were made a day or two before to destroy Prothom Alo, The Daily Star and Chhayanaut. Everyone, including the government, knows who made them," Kabir said.

The New Age editor made the remarks at the 6th Broadcast Conference of the Broadcast Journalist Center at the International Mother Language Institute in the capital.

Kabir questioned why the authorities failed to act despite open threats, noting that such intimidation constitutes a criminal offence.

"The government did not arrest them beforehand to prevent it. That is why we have said that some part of the government allowed this event to happen," he said, adding that an "organised force" with clear political identities carried out the attacks.

Information Adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan, the chief guest at the event, admitted that the government's response was not proactive enough.

SEE PAGE 3 COL 1

Cold wave, dense fog disrupt flights, ferries

3 killed, dozens injured in road collisions

STAR REPORT

As Bangladesh continues to shiver under the ongoing cold wave, dense fog has blanketed much of the country, disrupting ferry services and flights.

Temperatures fell below 11°C in multiple districts, especially in the northern areas.

"The situation will not improve for another two to three days," said Bazlur Rashid, senior meteorologist at the Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD).

A mild cold wave is sweeping Jashore, Chuadanga, Gopalganj, Rajshahi, Pabna, Sirajganj and Nilphamari, and it may persist in some areas, according to a Met Office bulletin.

Streets and riverbanks wore a misty veil early in the morning yesterday as residents braced against the sudden chill.

Meanwhile, the poor visibility due to dense fog likely caused at least three road collisions yesterday morning, killing three people and injuring 30 others in Faridpur, Tangail, and Munshiganj.

In Faridpur, three people were killed and two others injured in a head-on collision between an ambulance and a truck on the Dhaka-Khulna highway at the Munsurabad bus stand area in Bhanga upazila around 7:30am.

The deceased are Mizanur Rahman, 40, and his sister Beauty Begum, 30, of Keshabpur upazila in Jashore; and Nishan Ullah, 23, son of Rahmat Ullah from Rajganj village in Jashore's Manirampur upazila.

The injured were rescued and taken to Faridpur Medical College Hospital.

Following the collision, the truck driver fled

the scene, said Bhanga Highway Police Officer-in-Charge Helal Uddin.

In Tangail, at least 22 passengers were injured when two buses collided at Haripur in Ghatail upazila around 8:00am. The collision triggered a tailback of hundreds of vehicles, bringing the Tangail-Jamalpur highway to a standstill.



Witnesses said a Dhaka-bound bus of Binimoy Paribahan collided head-on with a bus of Prantik Paribahan.

Of the injured, 11 were admitted to Tangail General Hospital and one to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital; the remaining 10 received first aid and were discharged, according to authorities.

In Munshiganj, at least six passengers were injured when a bus rear-ended a truck on the Dhaka-Mawa Expressway in Srinagar upazila around 12:45am.

Several passengers were trapped inside the bus following the collision. A team from the

SEE PAGE 3 COL 3

'Minorities worry over their safety ahead of polls'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Politics that foments religious or ethnic divisions would ultimately weaken the country, Debapriya Bhattacharya said yesterday.

"Such politics will harm the economy, and, in the future, undermine our international relations and global standing," the noted economist said at a discussion titled "The Current Reality and Expectations of Human Rights of Minorities", organised by the Bangladesh Hindu Bouddha Christian Oikya Parishad at the CIRDP Auditorium in the capital.

He added that religion based politics is already creating an increasingly complex situation ahead of the polls. "Bangladesh should not view its religious minority citizens through the same political lens with which it views neighbouring India."

Dr Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh, said minorities are not attacked solely because of their religious identity. "There is a force behind these incidents, and its main driving power is political. The objectives are partisanship, land grabbing and establishing dominance."

"Over time, political corruption has transformed the state into a bearer of anti-minority practices, and oppression and repression continue."

He added that the National Human Rights Commission has failed to

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Bomb-like objects, chemicals seized at madrasa after blast

3 held; hunt on for prime suspect



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday recovered four crude bomb-like objects and 400 litres of chemical substances from a madrasa in South Keraniganj on Dhaka's outskirts, following an explosion there on Friday morning.

Law enforcers are now searching for several suspects, including Al Amin Sheikh, 33, a director of Ummal Qura International Madrasa, who was previously arrested on terror charges.

Yesterday, police detained three women linked to the incident: Al Amin's wife Asiya,

28; Yasmin Akhter, 30, wife of Asiya's elder brother Harun Or Rashid, both from Hasnabad; and Asmani Khatun, 34, from Basabo.

Meanwhile, preparations were on to file a case in connection with the incident as of the filing of this report around 8:30pm.

The explosion occurred at the madrasa in the Hasnabad Housing area around 10:00am on Friday, causing severe damage to the madrasa building and nearby establishments.

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Myanmar goes to the polls amid civil war

REUTERS

Myanmar heads to the polls on Sunday as it battles a civil war that has ravaged parts of the country as well as one of Asia's worst humanitarian crises.

Already one of Southeast Asia's poorest countries, Myanmar has been hammered by a conflict triggered by a 2021 coup in which the military ousted an elected civilian government led by Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi.

Myanmar's humanitarian crisis is one of the most severe in Asia, driven by the intensifying civil war and repeated natural disasters, including a massive earthquake in March.

The ruling junta has previously suppressed information about a severe food crisis gripping the

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As mustard flowers bloom across fields in the Barind region, farmers have placed beehive boxes amid the green and yellow rows to harvest honey. The photo was taken yesterday in the Darusha area of Paba upazila in Rajshahi.

PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

Thailand, Cambodia agree truce

Weeks of border clashes kill at least 101; Asean to monitor ceasefire

REUTERS, Bangkok

Thailand and Cambodia ended weeks of fierce border clashes yesterday with a second ceasefire in recent months in the worst fighting in years between the Southeast Asian nations.

The ceasefire was holding, a Thai Defence Ministry spokesperson, Rear Admiral Surasant Kongsiri, told Reuters about two hours after it went into effect at noon (0500 GMT).

"So far there's been no report of gunfire," he said.

Cambodia's Ministry of National Defence did not report any clashes after what it said had been a Thai airstrike early yesterday before the ceasefire announcement.

The agreement, signed by Thai Defence Minister Natthaphon Narkphanit and his Cambodian counterpart Tea Seiha, ended 20 days of fighting that killed at least 101 people and displaced more than half

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