

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

MILLIONS MOURN

Manik Mia Avenue, other roads overflow as people bid farewell to Khaleda Zia

SAJJAD HOSSAIN and ZYMA ISLAM

The entire city stood in solemn tribute to Bangladesh's first female prime minister yesterday.

From Agargaon in the north to Shahbagh in the south, mourners filled thoroughfares and alleyways to say goodbye to BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia.

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People across the country joined their counterparts in Dhaka, united in collective grief.

For someone who had devoted a lifetime as one of Bangladesh's strongest advocates of democracy — a lawmaker who had never lost a single election — her final moments above ground were the finest show of the people's mandate.

The gathering for her namaz-

e-janaza at the South Plaza of the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban began around 7:00am, with BNP leaders and activists arriving from across Dhaka and other districts.

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Sobhanbagh, Farmgate, and by the time the janaza began, the tailback of the bereaved stretched to Shahbagh. Elderly citizens, women, and young

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She rests next to her husband at Zia Udyan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP chairperson and three-time former prime minister Khaleda Zia was yesterday laid to rest with state honours beside the grave of her husband, former President Ziaur Rahman, in Dhaka.

Her only surviving son, Tarique Rahman, placed her body in her final resting spot, which she visited just three months ago after a gap of seven years.

Tarique, the acting chairman of BNP, laid the first soil on her grave, followed by male members of her family, senior BNP leaders, high-ranking government officials and the heads of the three armed forces.

The emotional burial took place around 4:30pm at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, following

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From rooftops to streets, the city unites in tribute

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People from all walks of life converged in overwhelming numbers at the Jatiya Sangsad complex and its surrounding areas yesterday to attend the namaz-e-janaza of BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia, turning the zone into a vast landscape of mourning, prayer, and remembrance.

From early morning, streams of people arrived on foot, by rickshaw, and via public transport, filling Manik Mia Avenue and adjoining roads. By noon, the crowd flowed in from Dhanmondi 32, Mohammadpur, and Karwan Bazar, extending beyond the main avenue to Holy Cross College Road, Bijoy Sarani, Jahangir Gate, Farmgate, and Shahbagh.

Roads and alleys in the surrounding areas were also packed with mourners, some holding BNP flags and Khaleda's placards.

Markets came to a halt as shopkeepers joined the crowd, while pedestrians remained in place as movement became difficult. Many climbed rooftops, terraces, overpasses, and bridges for a better view,

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'Please pray for my mother's eternal peace'

Says Tarique at janaza

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He addressed the massive crowd at the funeral as he stood beside his mother's coffin, which was draped in the flag of Bangladesh.

His speech was announced through

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BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman and his family members stand in solemn silence as his mother Khaleda Zia is being buried next to his father president Ziaur Rahman, the founder of the party, at Zia Udyan yesterday.

PHOTO: BNP MEDIA CELL

Foreign dignitaries pay last respects

They conveyed their deepest condolences on behalf of their governments and expressed confidence that Khaleda's vision and values would continue to guide the development of Bangladesh's foreign relations.

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Foreign dignitaries, including top officials from India and Pakistan, paid their last respects to former three-time Bangladesh prime minister Khaleda Zia at her funeral in Dhaka yesterday.

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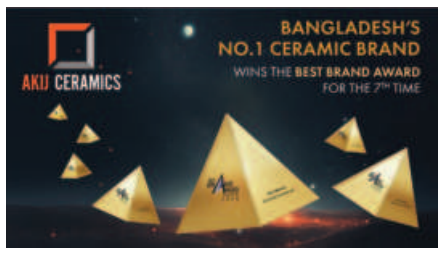


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DEAR PATRONS,
THANK YOU!
 FOR YOUR CONTINUED TRUST IN US THROUGHOUT 2025



34 PROJECTS HANDED OVER
 IN A CALENDAR YEAR

23 AHEAD OF SCHEDULE

11 ON TIME

HAPPY NEW YEAR 2026



Home ministry bars Bishwa Jtama

Order issued citing upcoming polls

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Gazipur

In light of the prevailing situation in the country and in order to smoothly conduct the upcoming national election and referendum, the home ministry has ordered that the "Khurujor Jor" and "Bishwa Jtama" scheduled at the Tongi Bishwa Jtama Maidan not be organised in 2026.

According to the instructions, the Khurujor Jor scheduled January 24, 2026, and the Bishwa Jtama scheduled January 22-24, 2026, cannot be organised.

Confirming the matter yesterday morning, Officer-in-Charge (OC) Shahin Khan of Tongi West Police Station told The Daily Star that on Tuesday, deputy secretary of the political branch of the home ministry, Md Anwar Parvez, issued a notification in this regard.

The notification mentioned that on behalf of Tabligh Jamaat Bangladesh, Mohammad Zubair, khatib and principal of Madrasa Ulumiddinia Malwali Mosque and Ahle Shura, had applied to organise Khurujor Jor and Bishwa Jtama at the Tongi Jtama ground.

However, in order to conduct the 13th national parliament election and the 2026 referendum in a fair, peaceful and uninterrupted manner, necessary measures were ordered to be taken not to organise Khurujor Jor, Bishwa Jtama or any other type of gathering or event at the Tongi Bishwa Jtama Maidan during the pre-election period. OC Shahin further said that necessary measures have already been taken in view of the letter from the ministry.



Farmers loading bundles of leftover Aman paddy they bought from the landowner after harvesting and selling the crop to take home and feed their livestock. The photo was taken from a char adjacent to the Arial Khan River in Barishal Sadar yesterday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

A year of deadly dengue outbreak

2025 sees 413 deaths, 1,02,861 cases

HELEMUL ALAM

With 68 new dengue cases reported in the last 24 hours till yesterday, the total number of cases this year reached 1,02,861, the second-highest tally recorded in Bangladesh over the past 25 years.

The country also recorded 413 dengue-related deaths this year, making it the third deadliest on record.

The highest 3,18,749 dengue cases and 1,705 deaths were recorded in 2023.

Among the divisions, Barishal recorded the highest 21,551 dengue cases this year, followed by Dhaka division (outside city corporations) with 17,386 cases, and Chattogram with 15,116 cases.

Within Dhaka city, 17,059 cases were reported in Dhaka North areas and 14,623 in Dhaka South city corporation areas, according to data of the Directorate General

of Health Services (DGHS).

Of the total dengue cases, 62.5 percent were male and 37.5 percent female, while 52.1 percent fatalities were male and 47.9 percent were female.

Month-wise data shows that November recorded the highest 24,535 cases this year, followed by 22,520 in October, 15,862 in September, 10,684 in July, and 10,496 in August.

To prevent a similar situation next year, entomologists and health experts stressed that preventive measures to control Aedes mosquitoes must begin as early as January.

GM Saifur Rahman, an entomologist at National University, stressed the need for full adoption of an Integrated Mosquito Management System, establishment of a dedicated mosquito-control authority, and implementation of coordinated nationwide programmes.

"There must be a consistent surveillance system followed by continuous control mechanisms," he said.

He also noted that dengue prevention efforts lack uniformity. "We cannot have one system in Dhaka North, another in Dhaka South, and a different one in Chattogram. There must be a single top authority issuing unified instructions nationwide," he said.

He also identified late case reporting as a critical issue. "If cases are detected early and information is shared promptly, early control measures can prevent severe outbreaks and epidemics," he explained.

"We always act after widespread transmission begins. This must change," he also said, citing Brazil, where dengue cases rose to 6.5 million by 2024.

"Our situation could worsen even faster due to our high population density," Saifur added.

KUMARKHALI OF KUSHTIA No landfill even after 156 years

Garbage being dumped along Kushtia-Rajbari highway

ANIS MONDOL, Kushtia

For years, garbage from Kumarkhali Municipality in Kushtia has been dumped on both sides of the Kushtia-Rajbari regional highway along a 500-metre stretch, due to the absence of a designated landfill site.

The waste emits an unbearable stench, causing serious inconvenience to commuters and local residents.

Even after 156 years since its establishment, the municipality has yet to develop a proper landfill site for waste disposal.

Experts say such open dumping poses significant health risks, pollutes the environment, and degrades cropland.

During a recent visit, this correspondent observed people travelling on foot or in light vehicles covering their noses with masks or handkerchiefs to avoid the foul odour.

Md Khokon, a rickshaw-van puller, said, "The stench is so unbearable and stomach-churning that unless I cover my nose, I end up vomiting."

Montu Sheikh, an auto-rickshaw passenger, said, "Earlier, the garbage used to be dumped in different nearby shoal areas. For the past several years, it has been dumped here. The garbage contains raw waste that rots in the open, causing

a foul smell that can be felt from half a kilometre away."

Local farmers said during the monsoon, the waste is washed into adjoining agricultural land, damaging crops and degrading soil fertility.

Residents also complained that children in the neighbourhood often suffer from various diseases.

Asked about the health risks of

cancer."

Contacted, Md Akramuzzaman, assistant engineer of Kumarkhali, said waste is being dumped there as the municipality does not have its own land for disposal.

"The previous upazila nirbahi officer made efforts to establish a landfill on vacant land across the river but was forced to abandon the



open waste dumping, Hossain Imam, resident medical officer at the 250-bed Kushtia General Hospital, said, "Prolonged proximity to such waste dumping sites may allow various toxic substances and pathogens to enter the body. This can lead to a range of health complications, from bronchitis and pneumonia to even

plan following protests by locals. We have sent letters to the ministry concerned seeking allocation in this regard and have received no response," he said.

Farzana Akhtar, UNO and administrator of the municipality, said she would look into the matter and take necessary measures.

Prof Sayedur Rahman resigns as CA's special assistant

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prof Sayedur Rahman, special assistant to the chief adviser for the health ministry, has resigned from his post.

The president has accepted his resignation, according to a gazette notification issued by the Cabinet Division on Tuesday.

Prof Sayedur's resignation will come into effect immediately, the notification added.

The reason behind his resignation could not be known yet.

Prof Sayedur, former vice-chancellor of Bangladesh Medical University, was appointed special assistant to the chief adviser with the status of a state minister in November last year.

His resignation came within a week of the resignation of Khuda Baksh Chowdhury, special assistant to the chief adviser for the home ministry.



এডহক আর্মি স্যাটকম ইউনিট
ঢাকা সেনানিবাস, ঢাকা-১২০৬

দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি

১। এডহক আর্মি স্যাটকম ইউনিটের তত্ত্বাবধানে বরাদ্দকৃত অর্থ দ্বারা বিবিধ টেলিযোগাযোগ সরঞ্জামাদি ক্রয় করা হবে। আত্মহী প্রকৃত সরবরাহকারী/মেরামতকারী সংস্থার নিকট হতে নিম্নে বর্ণিত স্থানীয় কর্তৃপক্ষের বরাবরে দেশীয় মুদ্রায় সীলমোহরযুক্ত উন্মুক্ত দরপত্র আহবান করা যাচ্ছে। ক্রয়তথ্য/মেরামতব্য সরঞ্জামাদির তালিকাসহ বিস্তারিত বিবরণ দরপত্রের সিডিউলে উল্লেখ থাকবে।

২। আগামী ০৭ জানুয়ারি ২০২৬ইং তারিখ অফিস চলাকালীন সময়ে (০৭:৩০ ঘটিকা হতে ১৪:০০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত) ৭৫০.০০ (সাতশত পঞ্চাশ মাত্র) টাকা (অফেরতমোধ্য) প্রদানপূর্বক প্রয়োজনীয় বিনির্দেশ/শর্তাবলীসহ দরপত্রের সিডিউল এই অফিস হতে সংগ্রহ করা যাবে। উক্ত সিডিউলের শর্তাবলী মোতাবেক আগামী ১১ জানুয়ারি ২০২৬ তারিখ সকাল ১১:০০ ঘটিকার সময় এই অফিসে রক্ষিত দরপত্র বাস্তব দরপত্র ফেলাতে হবে এবং ঐদিন ১১:৩০ ঘটিকায় দরপত্রদাতাগণের উপস্থিতিতে দরপত্র বাস্তব খোলা হবে।

আইএসপিআর/সেনা/৮৮২

অধিনায়ক
এডহক আর্মি স্যাটকম ইউনিট
ঢাকা সেনানিবাস

GD-2797

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Bangladesh Police
Office of the Commanding Officer, Rapid Action Battalion-14
Aqua Bypass, Mymensingh

Invitation for e-Tender

For financial year 2025-2026, e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (www.eprocure.gov.bd) for the procurement of:

SL	Tender ID No. & Reference No.	Description of goods	Last selling date & time	Closing/opening date & time
1	1204538, RAB14/14232/Q/ Ration/3 Date: 30/12/2025	Procurement of High Quality Soybean Oil for Ration of RAB-14, Mymensingh (3rd quarter) FY 2025-26 (January-2026 to March-2026)	14-Jan-2026 17:00	15-Jan-2026 12:00
2	1204594, RAB14/14232/Q/ Ration/3 Date: 30/12/2025	Procurement of High Quality Lentil for Ration of RAB-14, Mymensingh (3rd Quarter) FY 2025-26 (January-2026 to March-2026)	14-Jan-2026 17:00	15-Jan-2026 12:00

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 Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required.

The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP Portal have to be deposited online through any registered bank branches.

Further information and guidelines are available in National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd). Tenderer having clarity requirements are requested to contact at 01777711403 (Assistant Director, Quarter Master).

Naimul Hassan
Addl DIG
CO, Rab-14, Mymensingh
Phone: 02223376750

GD-2795

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

International Labour Organization (ILO) Dhaka announces a notice for a job opportunity for the following:

Position : National Programme Officer - Private Sector Engagement- 01 position.
Vacancy No. : DC/Dhaka/NO/2025/09
Grade : NO-A
Contract Type : Fixed Term (FT)
Duration : One year (possibility of extension)

For the details description, contract duration and instructions to apply for the position of National Programme Officer, please visit the following link below:
https://jobs.ilo.org/job/National-Programme-Officer-Private-Sector-Engagement/13449-en_GB/

The closing date of application is 7 January 2026 for the above position.

Female candidates are encouraged to apply.

Earlier, the garbage used to be dumped in different nearby shoal areas. For the past several years, it has been dumped here. The garbage contains raw waste that rots in the open, causing a foul smell that can be felt from half a kilometre away.

MONTU SHEIKH
An auto-rickshaw passenger



TRIBUTES AND RESPECTS FROM ACROSS BORDERS

Foreign dignitaries, including top officials from India and Pakistan, paid their last respects to BNP chairperson and three-time prime minister Khaleda Zia at her funeral in Dhaka yesterday. Indian External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar, Pakistan's National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, Nepal's Foreign Minister Bala Nanda Sharma and Bhutan's Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade Lyonpo DN Dhungyel met BNP acting chairperson Tarique Rahman and conveyed the deepest condolences on behalf of their governments. On the sidelines, Jaishankar and Sardar Ayaz Sadiq exchanged greetings.

PHOTO: BNP MEDIA CELL

She rests next to her husband at Zia Udyan

FROM PAGE 1
a namaz-e-janaza at the South Plaza of the National Parliament that saw the largest gathering in the history of Bangladesh.

After the namaz-e-janaza was completed at 3:05pm, Khaleda's body was transported to Zia Udyan in the national flag draped freezer van in which Khaleda began her final journey starting from Evercare Hospital in the morning.

At the Zia Udyan, her coffin was transferred to a special ceremonial carriage. After the flag-draped coffin was brought close to the burial site, members of the army and navy carried it on their shoulders and marched slowly to the grave, with Tarique following behind.

The coffin was then gently opened, and the armed forces folded the flag and handed it to the family.

Tarique went down to the grave to receive his mother's body while his aides held the BNP flag on top for privacy.

The event was held under tight security, with police, army and Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) personnel securing the area to ensure safety.

After her burial, Khaleda was given a Guard of Honour by armed forces under the supervision of the President Guard Regiment.

Following the burial, Tarique stood

by the grave with his wife, Zubaida Rahman, daughter Zaima Rahman, and other family members.

The widow of Khaleda's younger son Arafat Rahman Koko and his daughters stood in quiet reflection, along with other close family members, including Khaleda's brother Shamim Eskander, his wife Kaniz Fatema, another sister-in-law of Khaleda Nasrin Ahmed, sister Selina Islam.

As the burial concluded, mourners gathered outside the Zia Udyan entrance gate, trying to watch inside.

At 4:53 PM, the Guard of Honour was held. Then the chiefs of the army, navy and air force; Law Adviser Asif Nazrul and Tarique laid wreaths at the grave. Two wreaths were also placed on behalf of President Mohammed Shahabuddin and Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus.

The ceremony concluded with the solemn playing of the Last Post by bugles.

At 5:06 PM, a prayer was held for Khaleda Zia. Tarique raised both hands, with his gaze fixed on the grave of his mother. After the prayer, Tarique met with attending officials before leaving for his Gulshan residence with his family by bus.

Earlier in the day, strict security measures were implemented, with law enforcement agencies restricting access

to the area.

No outsiders were allowed to enter as Khaleda's body was transported to Zia Udyan, and police along with BGB forces were deployed at the entrance.

Before the burial, a massive crowd had gathered at the National Parliament and Manik Mia Avenue for Khaleda Zia's funeral prayers.

People began arriving early in the morning, and by noon, the streets from Manik Mia Avenue to Karwan Bazar were packed with mourners.

Khaleda led the BNP for 41 years and earned the title of the 'uncompromising leader' during the anti-autocracy movement of the 1990s.

She served as a member of parliament five times, as the Prime Minister thrice and the leader of the opposition twice. She never lost an election she contested.

Khaleda's last public appearance was on November 21 at the Armed Forces Day reception at Dhaka Cantonment. Two days later, she was admitted to Evercare Hospital for routine tests, during which doctors detected a chest infection and kept her under observation. She was also suffering from pneumonia.

She breathed her last at the capital's Evercare Hospital around 6:00am on December 30, just five days after Tarique returned to Bangladesh after 17 years in exile.

Jamaat open to unity govt with BNP

Says its chief in interview with Reuters; talks held with several parties

REUTERS, Dhaka

Jamaat-e-Islami is open to joining a unity government after February's parliamentary vote, and has held talks with several parties, its chief told Reuters yesterday.

Opinion polls suggest that Jamaat-e-Islami, a once-banned Islamist party, will finish a close second to the BNP in the first election it has contested in nearly 17 years, as it marks a return to mainstream politics in the predominantly Muslim nation of 175 million.

Jamaat last held power between 2001 and 2006 as a junior coalition partner with the BNP and is open to working with it again.

"We want to see a stable nation for at least five years. If the parties come together, we'll run the government together," Jamaat Ameer Shafiqur

Rahman said in an interview at his office in a residential area in Dhaka, days after the party created a buzz by securing a tie-up with a Gen Z party.

Jamaat advocates Islamic governance under sharia law but has sought to broaden its appeal beyond its conservative base. Shafiqur said anti-corruption must be a shared agenda for any unity government.

The prime minister will come from the party winning the most seats in the February 12 election, he added. If Jamaat wins the most seats, the party will decide whether he himself would be a candidate, he said.

The party's resurgence follows the ousting of long-time prime minister Sheikh Hasina in a youth-led uprising

in August 2024. Hasina, whose Awami League party is now barred from the election, was a fierce critic of Jamaat, and during her tenure, several of its leaders were sentenced to death for alleged war crimes during the 1971 independence war with Pakistan, a war Jamaat opposed.

Jamaat had been banned from elections since 2013 after a court ruled its charter violated the country's secular constitution. An interim government led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus lifted all restrictions on the party in August 2024.

TIRES WITH INDIA AND PAKISTAN
Shafiqur said Hasina's continued stay in India after fleeing Dhaka was

SEE PAGE 10 COL 7



The addresses that witnessed Khaleda's life

FROM PAGE 2
often alone. Visitors were restricted to a small circle of close friends and political colleagues. She could neither move freely nor leave the house. In 2013, trucks and lorries blocked her residence, preventing her from going out, an act her supporters described as profound disrespect toward the nation's first woman prime minister. In 2015, from her party office, she bid farewell to her son, Arafat Rahman Koko, who died during his exile in Malaysia, returning once again to solitude at Firoza.

On February 8, 2018, a healthy Khaleda Zia walked into the old jail on Nazimuddin Road. After more than two years, she emerged gravely ill. Her condition deteriorated during incarceration, prompting her transfer to Bangladesh Medical University,

formerly known as PG Hospital. From then on, illness became her constant companion.

During the Awami League regime, court appearances became routine. At times, with special permission, she attended hearings from Firoza or the hospital. These repeated summons added further strain to her declining health.

Evercare Hospital, formerly Apollo Hospital, became another defining address in her later years. Frequent stays turned the hospital into a second home.

Another landmark in her journey was parliament. As first lady, prime minister, and leader of the opposition, the Jatiya Sangsad served as a central stage of her political career.

Her namaz-e-janaza was held at the

parliament complex — the same place where her late husband's funeral prayer had once been offered.

Just days before her final hospitalisation on November 23, Khaleda visited Ziaur Rahman's mausoleum to offer prayers. Yesterday, she was laid to rest beside him. His mausoleum has now become her final home.

The Cantonment house, Firoza, prison, Evercare, and parliament were not merely addresses. They shaped the "uncompromising leader" she became.

When she said, "Bangladesh is my only address. Where will I go, leaving my country?" she meant it. This soil, this nation, and its people were her life. In the end, the land of Bangladesh became her eternal address.



REPORTERS' NOTEBOOK

2025 RECAP

Economy shows signs of recovery

The economy showed signs of recovery as balance-of-payments deficits narrowed, reserves increased and exchange rates stabilised. Remittances remained buoyant, while exports slowed and imports rose.

Inflation stays high

Inflation finally fell below 9 percent after three years in June, but stayed high at over 8 percent. Amid continued erosion of purchasing power, lower- and fixed-income groups were forced to cut their food intake.

Drought in private investment

Private investment growth remained subdued, with credit growth to the sector falling to a historic low of 6.23 percent in October 2025. Foreign investment, however, increased, buoyed by reinvested earnings.

LDC graduation moves forward

Bangladesh moved towards graduating from a least developed country in 2025 as a fresh UN assessment reaffirmed readiness, while businesses urged deferment, citing the risk of preference losses.

Five troubled banks merged

The government merged five troubled Islamic banks into the state-run Sammilito Islami Bank, backed by an injection of Tk 20,000 crore in capital. Initiatives were also taken to liquidate nine non-bank financial institutions.

US tariffs spark uncertainty

A good part of 2025 was marked by uncertainty and fear over the imposition of 37 percent reciprocal tariffs by the US on local exports. Despite the tariff later being reduced to 20 percent, it affected overall shipments, including garments.

Tax reforms gain pace

The government issued an ordinance that separates tax policy from tax administration and seeks to dissolve the National Board of Revenue. The move triggered unprecedented protests from revenue officials, disrupting revenue operations, international trade, and forcing an amendment to the ordinance.

New tariffs at Ctg port

In the first major revision in nearly 40 years, authorities increased tariffs by up to 41 percent on different services at Chattogram port.

Deals with foreign firms for port terminals

Amid widespread opposition from various corners, authorities signed deals with two foreign firms for the development and operation of the Laldia Container Terminal in Chattogram and the management of the Pangaon Container Terminal in Dhaka's Keraniganj.

Can economy turn around in 2026?

AHSAN HABIB

After a couple of challenging years, economists are cautiously optimistic about 2026. The national election scheduled for February is expected to boost confidence among entrepreneurs and investors, both local and foreign.

Many hope this political clarity will create the conditions for higher job creation and stronger GDP growth.

Inflation, stubborn through much of 2025, is also expected to ease. Analysts cite softer global food and energy prices alongside stabilisation in the domestic economy. Yet a full economic turnaround may take time, as any new government will need several months to implement policies effectively.

A source of some relief is progress in the balance of payments and foreign exchange reserves. Over the past year, the interim government tried to mend gaps in the macroeconomy and halt the erosion of foreign reserves.

The financial sector also endured a difficult 2025, grappling with mounting non-performing loans. The merger of five struggling banks provides a stronger foundation for lending and financial stability in 2026.

Prof Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), said that the primary hope for the year is the democratic transition in February.

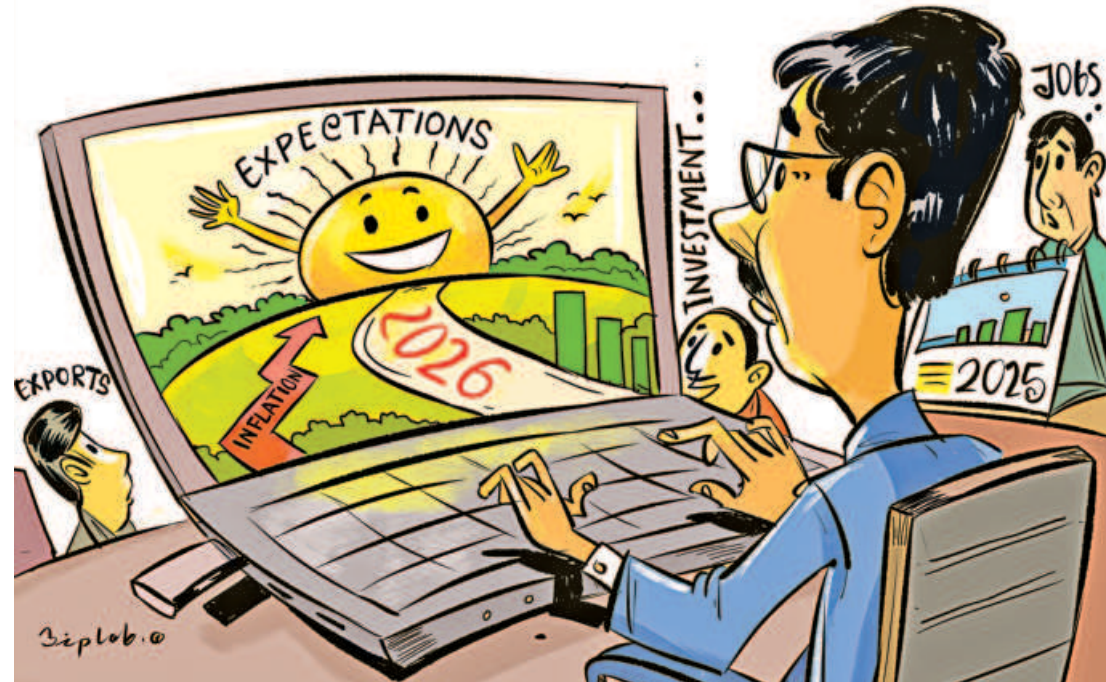
He added that a new government must channel this political mandate into higher economic growth that is inclusive, equitable, and just.

M Masrur Reaz, chairman and CEO of Policy Exchange Bangladesh, expressed a similar view, saying, "The big hope for next year is the national election."

He said that ongoing reforms, combined with the stability offered by a five-year policy horizon, would give businesses the confidence to invest. Higher investment, he said, would boost employment, purchasing power, and overall growth.

Reaz also mentioned the role of international partners. He said global investors, trade partners, and development agencies are expected to engage more actively if political and economic stability is maintained.

According to him, lower energy and food prices, along with stronger global supply chains, could further support growth, provided no major disruptions occur.



Meanwhile, CPD's Rahman said several challenges from 2025 will continue into the new year. Investment remains sluggish, and creating decent jobs is an urgent task.

He said inflation requires careful management through market oversight and supply-side measures. Rising debt repayments demand stronger domestic revenue mobilisation, which can be achieved through the digitisation of the tax system, reducing VAT leakages, and expanding income tax collection.

He added that income and asset inequalities must also be addressed. Export growth has slowed in recent months, highlighting the need to reduce the cost of doing business, improve turnaround times, and develop specialised industrial parks.

According to economists, product and market diversification has long been discussed, but progress remains limited. As Bangladesh prepares to graduate from LDC club this year, these measures will gain greater urgency.

Reaz listed four priorities for 2026. First is addressing ongoing macroeconomic challenges.

Second, stimulating growth drivers that have slowed, including investment, exports, small businesses, and domestic demand. Third, restoring economic governance across the financial sector, including banks, insurance firms, non-banks, and the capital market. Fourth, rolling out a structured economic reform programme.

He said that despite some improvement, inflation is still high, private investment lags at around 22 percent of GDP, and export and product diversification are weak. Small businesses have received limited targeted support over the last 15 months.

Kamran T Rahman, president of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce & Industry, Dhaka (MCCI), said, "All of our focus is on the election. If it is held and a democratic government comes to power, they will address all the economic problems."

He added that a stable democratic government allows people to engage in dialogue and anticipate long-term policy, which in turn boosts the confidence of entrepreneurs. "Once a democratic government is in place, the law and order situation is expected to improve," he said.

the BUSINESS

Five most-read stories of 2025

FEDA AL HOSSAIN

What business stories did readers care about most in 2025? The answer is wide-ranging and, at times, pleasantly unexpected.

From US tariffs and dollar swings to gold ornaments and a cattle trading village in Pabna, readers showed curiosity that cut across policy, pocketbook and people. Based on website data, the following stories recorded the highest engagement.

First consignment of US wheat arrives

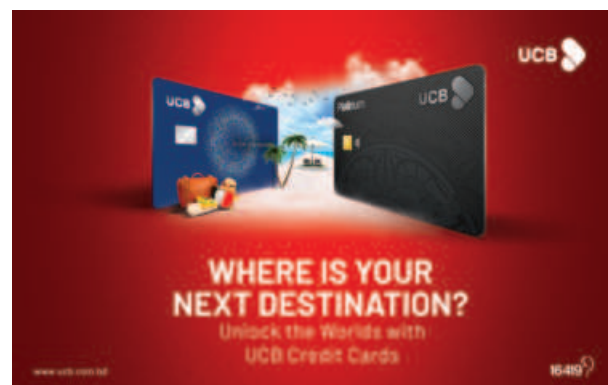
The arrival of the first consignment of US wheat on October 25 drew strong reader interest as Bangladesh moved to narrow its trade gap with the US.

Star Business reported that a vessel carrying 57,000 tonnes of US wheat docked at Chattogram port. The imports were meant to diversify sourcing and strengthen food security, placing the story at the intersection of geopolitics and daily bread.

Gold prices fall once again

If there were a metal of the year, gold would be a strong contender, with even slight dips making news after repeated rallies.

On November 18, Star Business reported that gold prices fell for the second time in a week. Local jewellers' association fixed the price at Tk 206,907 per bhoiri after record highs in October. Price volatility



kept readers hooked, amplified by gold's role as both a financial shelter and a wedding staple.

US dollar rises against taka

Dollar shortages and a sharply weakening taka dominated headlines in earlier years, which is why news of the greenback strengthening again rang alarm bells. On October 22, Star Business reported banks selling dollars at up to Tk 122.75 amid rising import demand and higher openings of LC.

The story resonated as businesses and consumers tracked implications for import costs, inflation and external payments.

Bkash posts 67% profit growth in 2024

Almost everyone has the bKash app on their phone, right? But fewer expected its earnings to rank among the year's most read business stories.

On May 3, Star Business reported that bKash posted a 67 percent year-on-year rise in profit to Tk 315.77 crore in 2024. Readers viewed the numbers as a window into digital payments growth and consumer spending trends.

Mothurapur: From a quiet village to a dairy cow trading hub

Not all popular stories were heavy on policy or numbers. A November 28 Star Business feature explored how Mothurapur, a little-known village in Pabna, turned into a cattle trading hub using digital platforms and informal networks. Readers responded strongly, a reminder that business stories are, at heart, about people.

বিনম্র শ্রদ্ধা

রাজনৈতিক অঙ্গণের উজ্জ্বল নক্ষত্র, বাংলাদেশের সাবেক প্রধানমন্ত্রী ও বিএনপির চেয়ারপার্সন বেগম খালেদা জিয়ার প্রয়াসে এনসিসি ব্যাংক পরিবার গভীরভাবে শোকাহত। আমরা তাঁর রুহের মাগফেরাত কামনা করছি।

 এনসিসি ব্যাংক
আপনার সাথেই সবসময়

NEIR goes live today

Only new unauthorised handsets to be blocked

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The National Equipment Identity Register (NEIR) system will be activated today, bringing unauthorised new handsets that connect to the network under the blocking process.

Earlier, the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) postponed the launch and extended the deadline for mobile handset dealers to submit information on unsold or stable devices until December 31, 2025.

"No handset, authorised or unauthorised, currently connected to the network will be blocked. Even the unsold stock held by traders, whose handset IMEI (International Mobile Equipment Identity) lists have been submitted to the BTRC, will not be blocked," said Major General (ret'd) Md Emdad ul Bari, chairman of BTRC.

"Only new phones that connect to the network will be affected," a BTRC official said.

Expatriates will be allowed to bring two new handsets in addition to their used one, and will have a three-month grace period to register them with NEIR. During this period, the handsets will not be blocked. These handsets can be registered in the NEIR using travel documents.

"The NEIR will be activated if the advisory council reduces the import and production duties of handsets on Thursday," said Faiz Ahmad Taiyeb, special assistant to the chief adviser with executive authority over posts, telecom, and ICT.

Previously, the Posts and Telecommunications Division granted a three-month delay to NEIR launch after handset sellers, affected by the blocking of grey-market devices, staged a protest at the Karwan Bazar intersection in Dhaka on December 10, which brought traffic to a standstill.

However, a BTRC official said the commission has not yet been officially informed about this decision.



A roadside stall in Rajshahi city displays stacks of comforters and blankets as winter bedding sees strong demand. The photo was taken yesterday.
PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

Comforters replacing blankets as urban winter favourite

JAGARAN CHAKMA

When Rumana Parveen Rinky, a private jobholder, went shopping for winter essentials this year, she opted for something new – a comforter.

"It's light, washable, and easy to use," she said, explaining the reason behind switching from the heavy blanket she used in previous winters. "Blankets are often too warm for Dhaka's winter. The comforter, on the other hand, is just right."

Rinky represents a growing group of urban consumers who are choosing comforters as a convenient and cost-effective alternative to traditional quilts (locally known as lep) or imported blankets. "Even the price of a comforter is lower than a blanket," she added, highlighting a key factor for many middle-income families.

With local brands increasing production and offering a wide range of designs at competitive prices, industry insiders say comforters are not just a passing trend but a long-term change in how urban Bangladesh keeps warm in winter.

Market insiders say the comforter market size is within Tk 200 crore, as it is still largely urban-centric.

With temperatures falling during cold waves, comforter sales have surged. PRAN-RFL Group reported a 40 percent year-on-year growth during this season so far.

"This year, we have seen a stronger response than in previous winters. People now clearly understand the value of comforters," said Kamruzzaman

Kamal, marketing director of Pran-RFL Group. He attributed the growth to the cold wave affecting Dhaka and other urban centres.

Pran-RFL, the country's largest local comforter manufacturer, produces about 5,000 units daily, priced between Tk 1,300 and Tk 3,000.

"People traditionally used cotton quilts or imported blankets from China, Korea, and Thailand. Comforters are gradually replacing those because they are more practical," Kamal said.

He added that comforters are likely to become the standard winter sleeping arrangement in Bangladesh.

While Pran-RFL leads the market, several home textile firms and cushion manufacturers have also entered the segment. Imported comforters and pillows continue to supplement the local supply.

However, Md Musa, owner of Musa Bedding in Uttara Sector 3, acknowledged that comforter demand is gradually rising, but noted that many customers still prefer traditional quilts during peak winter.

"We sell both imported and locally made comforters. Their prices are generally lower than traditional quilts, which makes them an attractive option for cost-conscious buyers," he added.

"Over the past five to six years, we've seen a clear shift. While people in rural areas once used simple cotton layers for warmth, comforters are now becoming the preferred choice," said M Shahadat Hossain Sohel, president of the Bangladesh Terry Towel and Linen Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

He said comforters are a modern upgrade of traditional quilts, made with advanced materials and technology.

In global markets, poly-cotton fabrics with 8 to 12 ounces of padding are standard. Bangladeshi manufacturers have adopted similar methods, using locally produced padding to meet rising demand.

Major players like Youngone and Devonair have strengthened the local supply chain by producing high-quality padding materials. "This has enabled many companies to serve both domestic and export markets," he added.

"Comforters are no longer limited to Dhaka or other big cities. They are reaching villages as well, thanks to local production and better distribution," Sohel said.

"Bangladeshi entrepreneurs are quick to adapt to trends. What we're seeing now in the comforter industry reflects that adaptability," he added.

Md Naim Hossain, an accountant at a comforter shop on Uttara's Jashim Uddin Road, said that demand for comforters has risen sharply this winter.

He said the store has sold several thousand comforters in the past one and a half months, showing strong seasonal demand.

"Home textile manufacturers now offer a wide range of comforters, from regular to premium quality," he said. "Prices usually range between Tk 3,000 and Tk 6,500, and they can be washed with normal water or in a washing machine, which makes them very convenient."

700MHz auction: One operator can get up to 60% of total spectrum

MAHMUDUL HASAN

The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) has recently amended its rules for the upcoming auction of the 700-megahertz (MHz) band, allowing a single mobile operator to acquire up to 60 percent of the spectrum available in the auction.

Under the revised guidelines, if only one operator participates, it may be awarded up to 15MHz out of the total 25MHz on offer.

Currently, the country's largest mobile operator, Grameenphone (GP), and the second-largest, Robi Axiata, have applied to take part in the auction scheduled for January 14. However, Robi has requested a one-month extension. Banglalink, the third-largest operator, and state-owned Teletalk have not applied.

"We have submitted our application as per the instructions. We are now waiting for BTRC's response," said Tanveer Mohammad, chief corporate affairs officer of Grameenphone.

Spectrum is a range of electromagnetic frequencies that telecom operators use to transmit mobile calls, internet data, and other wireless services. These frequencies are divided into bands, each with different technical characteristics that affect coverage, speed, and signal quality.

The 700MHz band is widely regarded as a high-value or "golden" spectrum because it offers wide coverage, strong indoor penetration, and lower network deployment costs compared to higher-frequency bands.

These features make it suitable for both rural and urban areas and for improving the quality and reach of 4G and future 5G services.

OBJECTIONS OVER AUCTION FRAMEWORK, PRICING

Robi has complained that the current approach to auctioning the spectrum does not reflect market reality and is not inclusive.

"The proposed spectrum auction overlooks two critical issues – market competition and customer affordability," said Shahed Alam, chief corporate and regulatory officer, Robi Axiata PLC.

Currently, Grameenphone and Robi Axiata have applied to take part in the auction scheduled for January 14. However, Robi has requested a one-month extension

"We believe spectrum, as a national resource, should not remain unsold. At the same time, customers of operators not participating in this auction must not be deprived of spectrum access later, which is essential for quality service nationwide," he added.

Alam also said that the current pricing assumes all operators will participate, which may not reflect market conditions and could discourage competition.

He urged the regulator to adopt a more inclusive and sustainable approach that ensures competition, affordability, and optimal spectrum use, suggesting the auction should be rescheduled until the remaining spectrum is made available.

The government has approved a 10 percent reduction in the base price of the 700MHz band. Even after the cut, operators say the spectrum is still expensive. The base price is now Tk 237 crore per MHz for a 15-year licence, down from Tk 263 crore per MHz.

Faiz Ahmad Taiyeb, special assistant to the chief adviser for telecom and ICT, earlier said the government had directed the BTRC to revise the price after receiving requests from telecom investors.

He also noted that under the existing telecom policy, operators may qualify for an additional 20 percent discount if they meet network rollout targets within the first two years of allocation.

Banglalink, however, said its decision not to participate was driven by concerns over the auction framework as well as broader industry challenges.

"We decided not to participate due to the high spectrum price and an auction framework that limits fair competition," said Taimur Rahman, chief corporate and regulatory affairs officer of Banglalink.

"This decision also reflects broader challenges in the country's telecom sector, including one of the highest taxation rates globally, where taxes account for nearly 55 percent of industry revenue, and an unpredictable regulatory environment that discourages investment and diversification," he added.

Rahman also said the 700MHz band typically requires at least 10MHz per operator to deliver meaningful performance improvements, and that the proposed 25MHz structure effectively limits participation to two operators.

He added that alternative low-frequency bands, such as the 900MHz EGSM band, could provide a more cost-effective option for expanding coverage and improving service quality.

Nazmul Huda Sarkar becomes DMD of Midland Bank

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Midland Bank PLC has promoted Md Nazmul Huda Sarkar to the post of deputy managing director (DMD), effective from January 1, 2026.

Prior to this promotion, Sarkar was serving the bank as senior executive vice-president and chief technology officer, according to a press release.

He served at Mutual Trust Bank PLC and played a key role in the bank's transition to a new digital platform.

He also worked in Japan with Match.com as a senior application engineer.

He previously worked at Fujitsu, Nissan Motor, IDLC Finance PLC, and National Life Insurance.



Md Nazmul Huda Sarkar

Jafar Sadeq made DMD of Shahjalal Islami Bank

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Shahjalal Islami Bank PLC has promoted Md Jafar Sadeq to the post of deputy managing director (DMD).

Prior to this promotion, Sadeq was serving the bank as senior executive vice-president and chief financial officer.

He began his professional career in 2002 with Hoda Vasi Chowdhury (HVC), Chartered Accountants.

He commenced his banking career with ONE Bank PLC, according to a press release. He later joined Shahjalal Islami Bank PLC in 2006 in the financial administration division.

Sadeq holds a master's degree in accounting from Jagannath University.



Md Jafar Sadeq

Prime Bank clients to get discounts on Fair Face apartments

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Prime Bank PLC has entered into a strategic partnership agreement with Fair Face Holdings Limited, one of the leading real estate developers in Bangladesh, to offer discounts on apartment purchases for its customers.

Mamur Ahmed, senior executive vice-president and head of branch distribution at Prime Bank PLC, and Nur Alam Shaikh, managing director of Fair Face Holdings Limited, signed the agreement at the bank's corporate office in Dhaka recently, according to a press release.

Under this collaboration, Prime Bank customers will enjoy a 5 percent discount on flat purchases from Fair Face Holdings. This benefit is designed to make homeownership more accessible and affordable for the bank's customers.

Through this partnership, Prime Bank reinforces its commitment to delivering lifestyle-driven financial solutions that add value to its customers' aspirations and enhance their overall banking experience, the release added.



Nur Alam Shaikh, managing director of Fair Face Holdings Limited, and Mamur Ahmed, senior executive vice-president and head of branch distribution at Prime Bank PLC, pose for photographs after signing an agreement at the bank's corporate office in Dhaka recently.
PHOTO: PRIME BANK

GPH Ispat declares 5% cash dividend

STAR BUSINESS DESK

GPH Ispat Limited yesterday declared a 5 percent cash dividend for the financial year (FY) that ended on June 30, 2025.

The declaration was made at the company's 19th annual general meeting (AGM), held virtually, according to a press release.

Md Alamgir Kabir, chairman of GPH Ispat Limited, presided over the meeting as the chief guest.

In his address, Kabir said that despite a challenging operating environment marked by economic volatility, rising bank interest rates, and inflation during FY2024-25, GPH Ispat remained focused on improving production efficiency, controlling costs, and maintaining the highest standards of product quality.

He added that the company would continue to prioritise innovation, research and development, quality assurance, and customer satisfaction to support sustainable growth and long-term value creation for shareholders.

Md Mosharraf Hossain, company secretary, conducted the meeting.



Md Alamgir Kabir, chairman of GPH Ispat Limited, virtually presides over the company's 19th annual general meeting yesterday. The meeting declared a 5 percent cash dividend for 2025.
PHOTO: GPH ISPAT

Gold rebounds on int'l market

REUTERS

Precious metals rebounded on Tuesday, after falling sharply in the previous session, as the market refocused on geopolitical and economic risks, reigniting gold's rally to cap its best year since 1979.

Spot gold rose 0.8 percent to \$4,364.70 per ounce at 2:07 pm ET (1907 GMT).

On Monday, it recorded its biggest daily percentage loss since October 21 as profit-taking pushed it down from Friday's record high of \$4,549.71. US gold futures settled 1 percent higher at \$4,386.30.

"We saw very extreme volatility yesterday where we saw strong action in Asian trading to the upside and then rather substantial profit-taking... but things have stabilised somewhat today, the trade remains generally favourable," said Peter Grant, vice-president and senior metals strategist at Zaner Metals.

Gold, seen as a safe-haven asset, has surged 66 percent in 2025 – its steepest climb since 1979 – propelled by a perfect storm of interest rate easing, geopolitical flashpoints, robust central bank purchases and flows into bullion-backed ETFs.

A stunning turnout at a leader's final rites

Khaleda Zia's leadership and silent suffering have touched millions

A funeral with such an overwhelming turnout as witnessed on Wednesday is rare. It speaks volumes about the personality that evoked such an outpouring of love and respect. The janaza of Begum Khaleda Zia—three-time prime minister and the uncompromising leader of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)—was attended by millions of people not only from Dhaka but from many other districts as well. Central Dhaka came to a standstill as waves of people walked on foot to get to the janaza venue in time. With Manik Mia Avenue and adjacent areas filled to the brim, those who could not reach the venue stood together on the streets to join the prayer. She was laid to rest with full state honours.

The presence of Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus, other advisers, and diplomats from 32 countries—along with visits by India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, Pakistan's National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, Sri Lanka's Foreign Affairs Minister Vijitha Herath, Nepal's Foreign Minister Bala Nanda Sharma, Bhutan's Foreign Affairs and External Trade Minister Lyompo D.N. Dhungyel, and the Maldives' Minister of Higher Education, Labour and Skills Development Ali Haidar Ahmed—highlighted the respect commanded by Khaleda Zia not only in Bangladesh, but across the region. International media gave extensive coverage to the first woman prime minister of Bangladesh and a steadfast champion of democracy.

Khaleda Zia enjoyed immense popularity among her party members and voters, whether as prime minister or leader of the opposition. But Wednesday's spontaneous congregation went beyond political allegiance. It was an outpouring of people's empathy and love for a maternal figure and commanding leader whose personal tragedies evoked deep compassion, making her all the more human. She had to endure the exile of her eldest son, Tarique Rahman, and her own prolonged persecution at the hands of her arch-rival, Sheikh Hasina. She was forced out of her home, falsely convicted on corruption charges, incarcerated and kept in solitary confinement, placed under house arrest during the Covid pandemic, and denied permission to seek medical treatment abroad for illnesses aggravated by the poor conditions of her prison cell. She also had to bear the loss of her second son while her office was under siege by security agencies, leaving her confined and isolated.

While her political rival never missed an opportunity to make derogatory public remarks about her, Khaleda Zia did not stoop to the same level and maintained a stoic dignity. It was this dignified and restrained response to sustained cruelty that endeared her further to the people. Her measured reaction on August 5, 2024 when she was freed—calling for a new Bangladesh and urging the nation to shun the politics of retribution—placed her on a moral high ground that her political rival was never able to attain.

The BNP, and especially Tarique Rahman, while grieving the loss of a matriarch, now face the challenge of upholding the commendable legacy Khaleda Zia leaves behind. It is also incumbent upon the nation to honour her staunch commitment to democracy and national unity, particularly as the country enters an electoral race that promises to be exceptionally challenging.

Act now to stop next dengue outbreak

Preventive measures must begin in January

In the absence of effective dengue control policies and measures by the authorities concerned, another year has ended with a high number of dengue cases. Health authorities recorded at least 412 deaths and 102,673 infections as of December 29, 2025, exposing deep-rooted weaknesses in the state's disease prevention preparedness. Although cases declined with the onset of winter, there is no room for complacency over what has become a year-round threat in recent years. Without decisive and coordinated action right from the start of 2026, as experts have warned, the nation could again face a similar or worse situation.

At present, dengue control remains largely reactive. Authorities tend to act only after widespread transmission begins. As a result, city corporations and municipalities struggle to eliminate breeding grounds, while hospitals become overwhelmed with patients. Experts have repeatedly stressed that *Aedes* mosquitoes require targeted, data-driven interventions, not indiscriminate fogging with ineffective pesticides. Unfortunately, dengue continues to be treated as part of a generic mosquito control programme rather than as a specialised public health challenge requiring dedicated planning and continuous surveillance.

Moreover, the absence of a single, accountable national authority for mosquito control has long weakened the response. Reportedly, different cities and municipalities follow different strategies, resulting in fragmented and often ineffective action. Failures in healthcare preparedness have also contributed to preventable deaths. Delayed diagnosis and late hospital admission remain common, particularly among high-risk groups. Shortages of trained nurses, inadequate logistics, and poor adherence to treatment protocols, especially in private hospitals, have further compounded the problem.

To curb dengue outbreaks, experts have emphasised the need to fully adopt an Integrated Mosquito Management System, establish a dedicated mosquito-control authority, and implement coordinated nationwide programmes. A unified system covering surveillance, source reduction, appropriate insecticide use, and community engagement must be implemented across the country under a single coordinating body. Outdated fogging practices, often carried out without scientific justification, should be replaced with targeted measures guided by real-time data. In addition, dengue care must be decentralised, with affordable testing and well-equipped facilities available outside Dhaka. Strengthening district-level hospitals and ensuring proper training for doctors and nurses are also critical to reducing mortality.

However, dengue control cannot succeed without strong community involvement, which must be prioritised going forward. This cannot wait for an elected government, though we do hope the upcoming government will give priority to strengthening the dengue control drive. Dengue is a preventable disease, but prevention demands consistency and commitment. Another year of fragmented efforts and delayed responses would be an unforgivable failure.

TRIBUTE TO KHALEDA ZIA

An uncompromising leader who carved our democratic path



AKM Wahiduzzaman is information and technology affairs secretary at the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

AKM WAHIDUZZAMAN

Bangladesh stands in grief today. The void created by the death of a political leader is always profound, but the demise of BNP Chairperson and former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has multiplied that emptiness for many, for she was not merely the head of a political party, but also an uncompromising leader of the masses as well as an embodiment of humanity who fought for the people rising above partisan identity.

Khaleda Zia's uncompromising stance against autocracy, fascism, and domination repeatedly showed the nation a path out of democracy-starved circumstances and infused it with the inspiration of liberty and freedom. Her long political journey, people-centric leadership, and steadfast role in upholding Bangladesh's independence and sovereignty will remain an enduring inspiration. Her absence is irreplaceable. With her passing, Bangladesh has lost a guardian—one who embraced the nation with compassion and accountability.

In the long journey of people's emancipation and politics, Khaleda Zia never accepted defeat; at the same time, she proved that victory means living eternally in the hearts of the people and in history.

She did not inherit her rise to power; she earned it through struggle, sacrifice, and dedication. After the assassination of President Ziaur Rahman in 1981, she wished to return to private life, but the reality of that moment did not grant her that opportunity. A woman who had spent 21 long years as a homemaker became the party's senior vice-chairperson in 1983.

In 1984, after being elected BNP chairperson unopposed, she demonstrated that politics is not merely a profession, but a profound responsibility. She assumed leadership at a moment of acute political crisis, when the country was captive to the brutal reality of military rule. Her entry into politics was one of duty and accountability, not personal ambition; later, it transformed into a long, arduous and thorn-strewn journey towards establishing democracy.

During the dark years of military autocracy in the 1980s, Khaleda Zia emerged as a foremost voice of democracy. She remained firm and uncompromising throughout the nine-year movement against HM Ershad's rule. Her decision not to participate in elections under that autocratic regime in 1986 was politically risky but morally

significant. She did not compromise in exchange for power, nor did she retreat from the movement despite arrests and repression.

The 1991 election was a watershed moment in Bangladesh's democratic history. In that election, Khaleda Zia contested from five constituencies and emerged victorious in all, a clear reflection of the people's trust in her.

After assuming office as the first woman prime minister in Bangladesh, her most significant contribution was the reintroduction of parliamentary democracy. Ending the presidential system and restoring parliament to

of VAT, capital market reforms and the establishment of the Privatisation Board were aimed at freeing the economy from elite control. Alongside market-oriented reforms, she sought to maintain social balance. The expansion of the ready-made garments industry and the establishment of the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare during her regime brought tangible change to the lives of millions.

Human empowerment was central to Khaleda Zia's politics. The "Food for Education" programme was a landmark initiative in addressing poverty and illiteracy simultaneously. Food assistance conditional on education laid the foundation for subsequent education policies, while free education and stipend programmes for girls played a crucial role in challenging social conservatism. She firmly believed that a nation's progress depends on women's education.

Her role in women's political empowerment is also undeniable. Increasing reserved seats for women

she was listed multiple times among *Forbes* magazine's World's 100 Most Powerful Women.

Despite prolonged imprisonment, serious illness, and political repression, Khaleda Zia did not leave the country. The safe path of exile was open to her, but she chose her country and people. And in the end, it was on this soil that she breathed her last.

Khaleda Zia contested 23 elections (in terms of parliamentary seats) in her lifetime and won all 23—a unique record in Bangladesh's politics. There were times when she held almost 40 election rallies in a single day. She served as prime minister three times, but even at the height of her power, she did not hesitate to reveal her vulnerability.

Despite long persecution and hardship, she rarely complained nor voiced grievance over the oppression or injustice inflicted upon her. This silent endurance distinguishes her not only as a successful politician but also as a statesman with a unique character.

The love people had for Khaleda Zia



Supporters hold posters of Bangladesh's former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia following her death while receiving treatment at the Evercare Hospital in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on December 30, 2025.

PHOTO: REUTERS

the centre of state power was a historic decision, proving that even in power, she believed in the decentralisation of authority.

Another crucial example of Khaleda Zia's political wisdom was the introduction of the caretaker government system. In 1996, in the face of political unrest and opposition demands, she incorporated this system into the constitution. Despite having the chance to cling to power, opening the path for a neutral electoral system remains an example in South Asian politics. This decision established her as a true statesperson.

At the heart of her governance philosophy lay economic democratisation. The introduction

in parliament was not merely a numerical decision; it was a recognition of women's participation within the state structure. This decision further institutionalised their participation in the political process.

Khaleda Zia deserves a mention in the history of world politics. Following Pakistan's former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, she became the second woman to serve as prime minister of a Muslim country. Her leadership also received international recognition; her inclusion among the world's influential women reflected that acknowledgment. In a 1993 report in *The New York Times*, Khaleda Zia was praised for her contribution to women's empowerment in Muslim-majority countries. Later,

was spontaneous, genuine and almost storybook-like—earned through compassion, empathy and social virtue. The immense sacrifices she made in the struggle for the country and democracy will remain an example worth citing in our political history.

Today, she is no more. But the questions she has left behind stand before us: can we uphold the dignity of parliamentary democracy? Can we restore political civility? Khaleda Zia's life teaches us that democracy is not a gift; it must be achieved through struggle and sustained through morality and accountability. She has now departed, but in the history of Bangladesh's democracy, she will remain one of its brightest stars.

When rumours wound millions



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ZIAUDDIN HYDER

Bangladesh mourned a profound national loss. Begum Khaleda Zia, the country's three-time prime minister, passed away on December 30 at around 6am at Evercare Hospital in Dhaka. She had been receiving intensive medical care in that well-known private hospital. Yesterday afternoon, her namaz-e-janaza was held at the South Plaza of the National Parliament Complex. The janaza drew millions of people—leaders, supporters, and citizens from all walks of life. They gathered to pay their final respects. Following the massive and deeply moving funeral prayers, she was laid to rest at Zia Uddin, beside her late husband, former President Ziaur Rahman. This event brings to a close a life that re-shaped Bangladesh's democratic journey and left an enduring imprint on the nation's political and social history.

Recently, a deeply upsetting narrative has been circulating on social media. It claimed that Begum Khaleda Zia had passed away earlier and that her death was "announced later" for political reasons. This assertion is not only a dirty lie but also extremely irresponsible and corrosive

to the moral foundations of our societal culture. Such malicious falsehoods are particularly disturbing when directed at a woman who rose from the role of a devoted housewife to become one of Bangladesh's most iconic political figures. She stepped into national leadership after personal tragedy, earning the people's mandate through democratic struggle, and emerging over decades as a symbol of national unity, constitutional governance, and political stability at critical moments in the country's history.

Some publicly known social media actors have cynically cited the use of life support in an intensive care unit to justify their claims that Khaleda Zia had died prior to the announcement on Tuesday. This reflects either a deliberate distortion or a serious misunderstanding of basic medical science. Life support is used to maintain normal heart and lung functions during a severely reduced level of consciousness; it does not indicate death. There are numerous documented cases in which people have remained on life support for months or even years, later recovered,

and gone on to live healthy lives. A person is not considered medically or legally dead if there is brain activity, the heart continues to beat, blood continues to circulate, and oxygen continues to reach vital organs. In Begum Khaleda Zia's case, while she was on life support, her heart was functioning and her organs were being physiologically supported; she was even undergoing dialysis, which would not have been possible if she were not alive.

Besides, it is concerning that the rapid expansion and easy accessibility of social media have significantly increased the risk of rumour, misinformation, and deliberate disinformation. In a complex and polarised political environment like Bangladesh's, such unchecked falsehoods about a leader's death can spread quickly, inflame emotions, and undermine public trust, making responsible communication and basic factual literacy more important than ever.

Death is a precise medical and legal determination—it is not a political opinion, not a social media guess, and certainly not a tool for partisan provocation. When individuals knowingly blur this line, they cross not only political disagreement into moral misconduct, but also into a dangerous misuse of modern communication technology. This is not confined to the political arena alone: if social media can be weaponised to malign and dehumanise a nationally revered figure like Begum Khaleda Zia, then no individual, public or private, is safe from similar harm tomorrow.

The damage caused by such rumours

goes far beyond one individual or one family. In Bangladesh, a country with a painful history of political polarisation, misinformation of this kind fuels public frustration, emotional distress, and collective cynicism. It reinforces a vicious cycle in which false narratives thrive, trust erodes, and basic human decency is sacrificed at the altar of political point-scoring.

Even those who may strongly disagree with Begum Khaleda Zia's politics, or with the Bangladesh Nationalist Party more broadly, must recognise that respect for truth and respect for life are non-negotiable democratic values. Democracies do not survive on elections alone; they survive on norms, truthfulness, restraint, and empathy. When these norms collapse, politics becomes a theatre of cruelty rather than a contest of ideas.

Spreading rumours about a former head of government, let alone any lay person, is not "free speech." It is a form of social vandalism. It humiliates families, confuses citizens, and degrades the public sphere. Worse still, it normalises the idea that lies are acceptable if they serve a political purpose.

This behaviour must be condemned unequivocally—not selectively or quietly. Political leaders, media professionals, civil society actors, and citizens alike have a responsibility to push back against such falsehoods. At a time when our nation seeks stability, dignity, and democratic renewal, let us reject rumour as politics and cruelty as strategy. Truth is not a partisan asset; it is a national necessity.

2026: A year of repair, not miracles



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ASIF BIN ALI

A new year often starts with personal reflection. Each of us reflects on what went wrong, what we endured, and what we hope to change. Every Bangladeshi has their own story of loss, small gains, and ongoing struggles. While I can't relay each individual's story, I can try to tell our shared one: what went wrong for us as a country last year, what went right despite the challenges, and what we can reasonably expect from 2026.

A year before, on August 5, 2024, the Hasina government was ousted. It was not a sudden storm but the delayed result of over a decade-long suppressed anger. Many of us hoped that something fundamental might change. We hoped that the republic was getting a second chance.

To be fair, some hopeful things did happen. We saw political parties sit in the same room, discussing a framework for transition. On television talk shows and social media, people began uttering aloud the names of individuals and institutions that many would only whisper about at home earlier. Family members of enforced disappearance victims sat in front of cameras and told the country what had happened to their dear ones. It did not bring anyone back, but it broke the silence. It reminded us that this country still has a bit of conscience left.

But the promise of better law and order quickly collided with the reality of weak institutions. We saw a political leader shot in the head in broad daylight. Revenge attacks turned entire localities into zones of fear. In the name of protecting religion, angry groups beat and burned people alive. Shrines and homes were once again targeted in 2025, becoming convenient outlets for intolerance and political frustration. Newspapers and cultural organisations were attacked and set on fire, as if silencing newsrooms and burning cultural centres could somehow fix the country's crisis.

In some cases, the state did act. There were events when police intervened quickly to save targeted minorities or disperse violent crowds. However, in most cases, we saw a state that often stood on the edge of the scene rather than at the centre. A sense grew



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

that the interim government was reacting to events rather than shaping them—a vacuum filled by a familiar cast of actors, including local strongmen, religious demagogues, as well as political businessmen and ideological entrepreneurs, who push ideologies on digital platforms to gain followings. They have learned that a few charged words on Facebook or a fiery speech at a rally can be converted into very concrete gains on the ground. The language of sanity and logic was frequently drowned out by the louder sound of anger and past humiliation.

This brings us to the core problem that 2026 will have to confront: the collapse of

public trust in state institutions. During its tenure, Awami League abused institutions such as the judiciary, police and civil administration. Most of the time, the opposition responded by attacking the ruling party and questioning the institutions. But during the July uprising and its aftermath, the institutions themselves came under attack. In other words, the institutions were abused from above and delegitimised from

below. The result is a country where many people no longer believe that going to court or filing a complaint will lead to justice. Instead, they look for "big brothers" who can solve a problem through pressure, money, or violence, regardless of their motive for doing so. Groups with muscle, money and social media influence are happy to play that role. They mobilise under the banners of religion, nationalism, or justice, and take the law into their own hands. Violence on the street becomes an informal dispute-settlement mechanism.

Against this background, what can we reasonably expect from 2026? By February-

March, we hope to see a democratically elected government in office. No one should romanticise the task that the new government will face. It will inherit a society where political fatigue lives alongside political rage, where some actors quietly believe that they benefit more from instability than from calm, and where divisions along lines of nationality, religion, ideology, and class have deepened rather than softened.

Bangladeshi citizens have the right to expect that the coming election will be genuinely competitive, free, fair, and participatory. That independent voices will observe and report on the election without being harassed. Without such an election, every later promise about reforms will stand on shaky ground. But beyond elections, one expectation stands above the rest. The next government must treat rebuilding institutions as its central task, not as a decorative slogan. Restoring the credibility of the judiciary, the police, and the civil administration is not a technical reform programme; it is a survival strategy for the

state. That means the government should remove political elements or influence from the routine business of state institutions as much as possible, enforce written protocols and laws, and promote individuals based on competence rather than party loyalty. People should find themselves in a system where they no longer have to rely on informal phone calls to access and receive public services. If ordinary citizens start to believe that a court case, a formal complaint, or a visit to a police station will be handled according to law rather than according to party colour, half the journey towards stability will already be made.

Stability in this sense is not a substitute for forced order imposed through fear. Bangladesh does not need the kind of "stability" where dissenting voice and opposition is beaten off the streets, and journalists are forced into silence. The stability we need in 2026 is different: predictable institutions, fair procedures, and a basic sense of safety for all communities. A Hindu family in a small town, an Ahmadiyya mosque in a village, a Christian hospital in a remote district, an Indigenous community in the hills, a Bihari camp, a secular blogger, a conservative imam, a labour organiser in an export factory, a business owner in a district town—all of them should feel that the state protects their right to exist and speak rationally, even when they disagree with each other.

If the next government fails to restore stability and rebuild trust in institutions, the country will face a grim future. Street clashes will become routine. Politics will turn into a permanent emergency rather than a method of governance. Talented young people will quietly leave the country for better opportunities. Those staying behind will try to adapt to a life where insecurity is normal. This is not the future anyone can possibly ask for.

As citizens, we make choices every day. We choose which leaders to support, which stories to share online, and whether to hold onto anger or revenge. We also decide which lines we won't cross. If we want strong institutions instead of angry groups, our actions, both online and offline, need to reflect that, even when we're upset.

Perhaps, the best way to look at 2026 is not as a magical turning point, but as a year for patient repair. We won't see all our dreams come true in just 12 months. What we can hope for is simpler: that people in power and regular citizens try to work together and rebuild some basic safety and trust by fixing our broken institutions.

Democracy cannot survive when its defenders are set on fire



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"I can't breathe anymore. There's too much smoke. I'm inside. You are killing me." This was the social media post made by *The Daily Star's* Zyma Islam in the early hours of December 19. When I first saw the post, it sent a chill down my spine. I could not believe my eyes. Was this really happening?

Two media buildings, located within a few hundred yards of each other, were set ablaze that night. They housed Bangladesh's two most influential daily newspapers: *Prothom Alo* and *The Daily Star*. These were not some secretive arson attacks. They happened right in front of thousands, both on the streets and those watching live on social media. The journalist I quoted was trapped inside along with some of her colleagues.

Although they were eventually rescued by the firefighters and security forces, the event left a deep scar on the nation's collective psyche. The reason for this lunacy is so absurd, so detached from logic, that no sane observer can plausibly connect cause and consequence.

In every measurable sense, these papers' circulation, reach, credibility, and agenda-setting powers are unrivalled pillars of Bangladesh's news industry. For decades, they have shaped public discourse, built narratives around national events, and set the professional standards by which journalism in Bangladesh is judged. Even those who resent their editorial stance routinely rely on their coverage for verification of facts, simply because hardly any comparable alternative exists that combines professionalism, consistency, and institutional memory. That is precisely why they were under attack.

Both *Prothom Alo* and *The Daily Star* are unapologetically liberal and secular in orientation. From their inception, this has earned them the hostility of ultra-conservative factions that see secularism not as a constitutional principle but as an existential threat. At the same time, it would be disingenuous to pretend that these papers have always practised immaculate

impartiality. There were moments where their coverage in certain respects didn't meet the lofty standard set for journalism.

But complete neutrality in journalism is an illusion, not a realistic benchmark. In every society, media institutions reflect values, worldviews, and editorial judgments. The relevant question is not whether absolute impartiality exists, but whether professional standards, fact-checking, source verification, and editorial accountability are upheld. On that score, these two dailies do not merely meet the threshold; they exceed it. That is why they became indispensable institutions rather than partisan actors.

Their credibility did not shield them from power. In fact, it made them frequent targets. Every government in Bangladesh has resented these newspapers for one reason or another, but the hostility reached its zenith during Sheikh Hasina's rule (2009–2024). Her regime, marked by systemic corruption, enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and the decimation of democratic institutions, found its most persistent critics in these two outlets.

Hasina made her contempt explicit. She publicly stated that she avoided reading *Prothom Alo* and *The Daily Star*. Their reporters were routinely barred from attending press briefings. Their editors, Matiur Rahman and Mahfuz Anam, faced lawsuits, intimidation, and financial strangulation. Advertising pressure was applied through state influence over major companies. There were even credible fears that the regime wanted to engineer a hostile takeover of these papers, echoing how India's major business groups aligned with the Modi government absorbed influential media outlets.

Their "crime" was simple: they reported corruption and human rights abuses when silence was the safer option. Here lies the central paradox. Sheikh Hasina was arguably New Delhi's most reliable partner in South Asia. Her government systematically addressed India's security and strategic

concerns, often at the expense of Bangladesh's own democratic accountability. In return, India provided unwavering diplomatic cover, shielding Hasina's brutal dictatorial regime from international scrutiny, particularly from Western powerful countries.

Even after Hasina's fall in August 2024, India continued to provide her material and political support. Hasina fled to India and has since been allowed to issue vitriolic statements

or facilitating her return. These dynamics have also emboldened local radical actors. Younger political figures, student wings such as Bangladesh Islami Chhatrashibir, and even emerging groups like the National Citizen Party (NCP) have adopted openly confrontational rhetoric towards India.

But getting back to the point, if the two newspapers were Hasina's most consistent critics, and she sought to hurt or attack them



If *Prothom Alo* and *The Daily Star* were Hasina's most consistent critics, and she sought to hurt or attack them repeatedly, how could they also be "pro-fascist" or "pro-India"? This claim collapses under basic scrutiny.

FILE PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

against Bangladesh's interim government frequently. Numerous Awami League leaders and former ministers are also reportedly residing in India, often appearing on Indian talk shows and digital platforms to denounce the current political transition. There is also a pervasive though unsubstantiated belief in Bangladesh that India's intelligence agency, RAW, which allegedly penetrated multiple sectors of Bangladesh during Hasina's rule, is now collaborating with fallen Awami League operatives to destabilise the country.

Moreover, under the laws of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina has been convicted in absentia and is therefore legally liable to face justice in the country. Yet India has shown no indication of cooperating with any extradition process

repeatedly, how could they also be "pro-fascist" or "pro-India"? This claim collapses under basic scrutiny.

Yes, there were moments when these papers softened their criticism of Hasina, but those were dictated by a survival instinct, not any ideological alignment. A regime that weaponised laws, courts, regulators, advertisers, and police left little room for open defiance. Even then, these newspapers continued to expose major corruption scandals and rights violations, often at great institutional risk.

So, what their current branding as "acolytes" of Hasina or India actually reflects is something more dangerous: manufactured hatred.

Following Hasina's fall, some Islamist parties, long suppressed under the guise of a "war on terror," re-entered public life with renewed confidence. Social media influencers sympathetic to extremist views pushed a toxic narrative: that *Prothom Alo* and *The Daily Star* were ideological extensions of Indian hegemony, allegedly poisoning Muslim minds through secular liberalism. These narratives blended fragments of truth with deliberate falsehoods. In a society plagued by illiteracy, algorithmic amplification, and rising religious radicalism, such claims spread rapidly. Over time, a segment of the population was led to view these newspapers in adversarial terms, creating an opening that vested interest groups were quick to exploit.

The assassination of Sharif Osman Hadi became the spark. Though there is no evidence linking the newspapers to the killing, they became symbolic targets. Burning down major narrative-building institutions accomplishes multiple goals, including weakening ideological enemies, undermining the democratic process, and creating fear and chaos in the country.

Perhaps most disturbing was the role or absence of the state. Security forces were deployed late, despite prior intelligence indicating imminent violence after Hadi's assassination. The inaction suggested either gross incompetence or tacit consent. Some observers are quite confident that certain elements within the interim government were themselves involved in this planned inaction. The major reason, one may imagine, is their alleged alignment with political actors who stand to lose ground or power in a proper democratic transition.

Meanwhile, threats and mob violence continue. These are not isolated events. They are symptoms of a state losing its monopoly over violence while the country is being destabilised in the process. In this struggle for power, ideology, and control, there is only one consistent loser: Bangladesh. Businesses stall. Investment retreats. Social trust erodes. Institutions crumble.

Right now, what we need is not more manufactured enemies, but a free, fair, and timely election leading to the return of democratic governance rooted in accountability and pluralism. Silencing narratives will not save Bangladesh or restore faith. Only democracy and the rule of law can. And democracy cannot survive when its most ardent defenders—newspapers like *The Daily Star* and *Prothom Alo*—are set on fire.

Towards hope

FROM PAGE 14
With dissent no longer throttled and certain political factions no longer hounded, this year saw huge rallies that was also a means to show their strength if only to give more weight to their demands. Helazat-e-Islam, Jamaat-e-Islami and more recently, the BNP, among others staged their "showdowns" in a bid to outnumber the other. But it must have been Khaleda's funeral that witnessed a genuine outpouring of love and affection as mourners clogged almost the entire Dhaka city for hours.

This was supposed to be the year when Bangladesh adopted reforms and accordingly, negotiations and discussions went on for months under the auspices of a consensus commission. The resulting July charter, which is going to be put up in the referendum in the coming elections, understandably fell short of the lofty expectations that the young July rebels had in mind. So much so, that the party born out of the July uprising, the National Citizen Party, refused to sign it. While the reform commissions came forward with their reports, genuine reforms are still to be instituted save for one or two instances. We have to wait till after the election.

Perhaps the most outwardly visible characteristic of this year has been the mob, stemming from ever increasing intolerance and dogmatism. Faced with an equally timid administration that has been kept not to be tough, angry crowds often got out of hand. This only ended up in costing lives and property as we have seen across the country, but most recently in Mymensingh where a man was lynched and then in Dhaka where this newspaper, along with Prothom Alo, survived a violent bout of arson attack and vandalism that halted the publication of both newspapers for a day. The same night two other cultural organisations - Chhayanaut and Udichi - known for their involvement in theatre and music were attacked and vandalised as well. Law enforcement agencies of the government showed little resolve to address the worsening law and order.

Yet it is only with strong resolve that we can turn the page and turn around. It is with that resolve that we usher in the new year and wish every one a peaceful, healthy, prosperous and happy new year.

FROM PAGE 14
submissions by Samajtantrik Dal (JSD-Inu), an ally of the AL.

Though EC records show that seven aspirants from JSD-Inu filed nominations, the party said it would not participate in the polls.

On Monday, the party announced a boycott of the election, alleging the authorities were attempting to stage an "unconstitutional referendum" and a "one-sided parliamentary election."

Sajjad Hossain, the party's office secretary, questioned the authenticity of the nominations. "We are not taking part in the polls. Our president is in jail, while the general secretary has been absent from work for a long time. So, who issued their nomination letters?" he asked.

EC Public Relations Officer Ruhul Amin Mollik, who provided journalist with the data, said the EC compiled it based on information submitted by the aspirants themselves. Election Commissioner Tahmid Ahmed told this newspaper that the matter would be examined during the nomination scrutiny period.

EC data also indicates that no nominations were submitted by Bangladesher Samyabadi Dal (Marxist-Leninist), Krishak Sramik Janata League, Bangladesh National Awami Party,

51 of 59 parties turn in nominations

Workers Party of Bangladesh, Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh, Bangladesh Tariqat Federation, and Trinamool BNP.

With aspirants from at least 50 parties, the upcoming election is expected to see significantly higher participation than in elections since 2008, when party registration became mandatory.

EC sources said 28 parties, including the Awami League and its allies, contested the 12th parliamentary election in 2024. All 39 registered parties participated in the 2018 polls, which were widely criticised over allegations of ballot stuffing on the night before the voting day, while only 12 parties contested the largely boycotted 2014 election.

All 38 registered parties joined the 2008 polls. Earlier, 54 parties contested in 2001, 81 in the June 1996 election, and 41 in the controversial February 1996 polls. In 1995, 75 parties participated. The 1988 election saw only eight parties participate, as major opposition groups, including the BNP and the Awami League, boycotted the polls.

In 1986, 28 parties contested, though many opposition parties, including the BNP, did not participate. In 1979, 29 parties joined, while the country's first

parliamentary election in 1973 saw 14 parties contest.

PARTY WISE ASPIRANTS
Apart from BNP, Jamaat, Islami Andolon, JP (GM Quader), NCP, and AB Party, Gono Odhikar Parishad fielded candidates in 104 seats, followed by Bangladesh Khilafat Majlis with 94, Khilafat Majlis with 68, Communist Party of Bangladesh with 65, Insaniyat Biplob Bangladesh with 42, and Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal (Basad) with 41.

Bangladesh Islami Front submitted nominations for 27 seats, JSD (Rab) for 31, Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal (Marxist) for 30, Liberal Democratic Party for 24, Jonotar Dal and Gano Forum for 23 each, Islamic Front Bangladesh for 22, Bangladesh Supreme Party for 21, and Bangladesh Sangskritik Mukti Jote for 20.

Bangladesh Labour Party aspires to contest in 19 seats, Bangladesh Congress and Ganosamhati Andolon in 18 each, Amjonotar Dal in 17, Bangladesh Muslim League in 14, Bangladesh Republican Party and Jatiya Party in 13 each, and Nagorik Oikya and Bangladesh Khilafat Andolon in 11 each.

Bangladesh Nationalist Front, Bangladesh Minority Janata Party, and Bangladesh Jasad filed nominations in nine seats each; Nationalist

Democratic Movement and Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Andolan in eight each; Revolutionary Workers Party of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Muslim League (BML), and Zaker Party in seven each; and Bangladesh Nezame Islam Party and Gano Front in six each.

Bangladesh Jatiya Party (Sirajul) and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Bangladesh aspirants have filed nominations for five seats each, while several smaller parties submitted nominations in three seats or fewer.

INDEPENDENT ASPIRANTS DROP
According to the data, the number of independent candidates this time has dropped sharply compared to the 2024 and 2018 polls.

In 2024, a record 747 independents filed nominations, with 437 contesting. Experts viewed this as the Awami League's bid to boost turnout, though the presence of rebel candidates from the then-ruling party led some to dismiss them as "dummy candidates."

In 2018, 498 independents filed, and 128 contested, while in 2014, 150 filed and 104 ran. Earlier elections saw 120 independents in 1973, 422 in 1979, 453 in 1986, 214 in 1988, 424 in 1991, 284 in 1996, 486 in 2001, and 151 in 2008, according to EC data.

PARTY WISE ASPIRANTS
BNP 331
Jamaat 276
Islami Andolon 268
Jatiya Party (GM Quader) 224
Gano Odhikar Parishad 104
Bangladesh Khilafat Majlis 94
Khilafat Majlis 68
CPB 65
AB Party 53
NCP 44
Basad 41
MOST ASPIRANTS FOR A SEAT
18 (Dhaka 12, Gazipur 2)
17 (Dhaka 17, Dhaka 18)
16 Dhaka 3
LOWEST ASPIRANTS FOR A SEAT
2 Pirojpur 1,
3 (Dhaka 3, Chattogram 15)
4 (Jamalpur 1, Netrokona 4, Sherpur 3)

Gaza's 'life-saving aid' at risk

EU warns as Israel threatens ban on several aid groups; Palestinian shot dead in West Bank

AGENCIES

The EU warned yesterday that Israel's threat to suspend several aid groups in Gaza under new registration rules would block "life-saving" assistance from reaching the population.

"The EU has been clear: the NGO registration law can not be implemented in its current form," EU humanitarian chief Hadja Lahbib posted on X, after Israel said several groups would be barred from January 1.

"IHL (international humanitarian law) leaves no room for doubt: aid must reach those in need," Lahbib wrote.

Israel warned on Tuesday that it would suspend from January several aid organisations operating in Gaza for failing to provide details about their Palestinian staff, accusing two Doctors Without Borders employees of links to Hamas.

The Ministry of Diaspora Affairs and Combating Antisemitism said in a statement the move was part of Israel's decision to "strengthen and update" regulations governing the activities of international NGOs in the Palestinian territory.

"Humanitarian organisations that fail to meet security and transparency requirements will have their licences suspended," the ministry said.

The foreign ministers of 10 nations on Tuesday expressed "serious concerns" about a "renewed deterioration of the humanitarian situation" in Gaza, saying the situation was "catastrophic".

The warning came a day after US President Donald Trump warned Hamas there would be "hell to pay" if it fails to disarm in Gaza, as he presented a united front with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, reports AFP.

Jamaat open to unity

FROM PAGE 5

a concern, as ties between the two countries have hit their lowest point in decades since her downfall.

India, South Asia's biggest power, had cultivated a close working relationship with Hasina, helping expand business and trade ties between the neighbours.

As New Delhi seeks to engage parties that could form the next government, Shafiqur confirmed meeting an Indian diplomat earlier this year after his bypass surgery. Unlike diplomats from other countries who made open courtesy visits to him, the Indian official asked that the meeting remain confidential, the Jamaat chief said.

"Why? There are so many diplomats who visited me and it was made public. Where is the problem?" Rahman said. "So we must become open to all and open to each other. There is no alternative to develop our relationship."

India's foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Shafiqur's

statement about the meeting or any request for it to be confidential.

An Indian government source confirmed contacts with various parties.

Asked about Jamaat's historical closeness to Pakistan, the Jamaat chief said: "We maintain relations in a balanced way with all. We are never interested in leaning toward any one country. Rather, we respect all and want balanced relations among nations."

He said any government that includes Jamaat would "not feel comfortable" with President Mohammed Shahabuddin, who was elected unopposed with the AL's backing in 2023.

Shahabuddin, the ceremonial head of the country, himself told Reuters this month that he was willing to step down midway through his term.

Shahabuddin, in a telephone conversation with Reuters yesterday, declined to comment on Rahman's position, saying he did not want to "complicate the matter further".



A Palestinian woman collects water near the rubble of residential buildings destroyed during the war in Jabalia, northern Gaza Strip, on New Year's Eve yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Bleak rights record in 2025

FROM PAGE 14

In 2025, at least 197 people were killed in mob attacks, up from 128 in 2024, according to ASK. During the interim government's tenure, at least 293 people were killed in mob violence, it said.

Victims included men, women, religious minorities and marginalised groups. ASK also documented incidents where freedom fighters, members of the Baul community and others were humiliated, assaulted and publicly abused.

It appears that a change in state power has failed to bring the desired improvement in the overall human rights situation, ASK said in a press statement yesterday.

"Instead, longstanding patterns of repression have continued in new forms, allowing authoritarian practices, lack of accountability and discriminatory conduct to persist unchecked. As a result, the human rights situation has been assessed as broadly unstable and deeply concerning," it added.

Meanwhile, MSF recorded 428 incidents of lynching that killed 166 people in 2025.

One of the most shocking incidents occurred on December 18 in Bhaluka, Mymensingh, when garment worker Dipu Chandra Das was beaten and burnt to death

over false allegations of blasphemy.

There were at least 42 attacks on the Hindu community in 2025, affecting 33 homes, according to ASK. These included 36 arson incidents, attacks on four temples, vandalism of 64 idols and nine cases of land grabbing. One person was killed and at least 15 were injured.

ASK said groups identifying themselves as "tawhidi janata" were involved in vandalising historically significant sites and centres of art and culture and harassing women and dissenters.

During this period, various statues and monuments related to Bangladesh's history, including the Liberation War, were vandalised and defaced.

These acts constitute a serious insult to the national symbols deeply connected to the Bengali identity, Bangladesh's Liberation War and its independence, ASK said.

Although political activities were relatively limited in early 2025, internal feuds and violence escalated as the election approached, with groups seeking to assert dominance.

ASK recorded at least 401 incidents of political violence, leaving 102 people dead and 4,744 injured.

MSF documented 599

incidents of political violence affecting 5,604 people. Of them, 86 were killed and 5,518 were injured, including 97 who sustained gunshot wounds.

After the election date was announced, MSF recorded 26 incidents related to nominations and campaigning. Three were killed and 249 were injured in these incidents.

Inqilab Moncho Spokesperson Sharif Osman Hadi was shot dead a day after the Election Commission announced the election schedule.

Both organisations said 2025 was a deeply troubling year for media freedom. MSF recorded 289 incidents affecting 641 journalists, including one killing, injuries, threats and legal harassment. It also cited the continued use of the Cyber Security Act and ordinance to file cases against journalists.

ASK recorded harassment or abuse of at least 381 journalists. Of them, 123 faced legal cases, 118 were physically attacked, 20 received death threats and 23 were targeted by law enforcement. Three journalists were killed, while the bodies of four others were recovered under mysterious circumstances.

Media freedom came under severe threat on December 18, when mobs attacked, looted and set

fire to the offices of The Daily Star and Prothom Alo. New Age Editor Nurul Kabir was also harassed. Fire service operations were obstructed, and both newspapers were forced to suspend print and online editions for one day.

On the same day, cultural institution Chhayanaut was also attacked. ASK described the incidents as a dark chapter in the history of press freedom in Bangladesh.

Deaths in custody and allegations of extrajudicial killings remained major concerns. ASK documented at least 38 extrajudicial killings in 2025, all occurring in law enforcement custody, reportedly during "crossfire" or "gunfights".

MSF recorded 19 incidents of gunfights that left 22 people dead. Twelve of those deaths occurred during joint forces operations led by the army.

In prisons, MSF documented 116 deaths, mostly attributed to illness, but also noted cases of suicide, torture and unexplained deaths.

ASK recorded at least 107 deaths in prisons, including 69 undertrial prisoners and 38 convicts. Dhaka Central Jail reported the highest number of deaths at 38.

As many as 641 unidentified bodies were recovered this year, many with hands and feet bound

with scotch tape, lying by roadsides, stuffed in sacks, floating in rivers, or recovered from railway tracks and canals, MSF said.

Violence against women remained widespread. ASK recorded 749 rape cases, including 569 gang rapes. At least 370 victims were under 18. After rape, 36 women were killed, seven died by suicide and six died after attempted rape.

Children were also severely affected. ASK recorded abuse of 1,023 children and the deaths of at least 410 children due to rape, murder, physical abuse, abduction, suicide and explosions.

Meanwhile, along the Bangladesh-India border, at least 34 Bangladeshis died in 2025, including 24 from BSF gunfire, according to ASK.

Presenting its findings at a press briefing at the Dhaka Reporters Unity yesterday, MSF called for an independent commission to investigate serious human rights violations, stronger protection for journalists and minorities, reforms in policing and prisons, and greater empowerment of the National Human Rights Commission.

ASK echoed similar concerns, saying the government must uphold universally accepted human rights standards in line with public expectations.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Office of the Executive Engineer, RHD
Gopalganj Road Division, Gopalganj
Email: eegopal@rhd.gov.bd

Amendment/Corrigendum of e-GP Tender Notice

This is an online tender, where only e-Tenders will be accepted in e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, please register on e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>). e-Tenders are invited in e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) by Executive Engineer, RHD, Road Division, Gopalganj for the procurement of following works. e-Tender details can be downloaded from e-GP System Portal "<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>" for purchase.

An amendment/corrigendum has issued about (i) Document last selling date and time, (ii) Last date and time for tender security submission, (iii) Closing date and time, (iv) Opening date and time of following e-GP Tender. Other matters remain unchanged of this tender.

Tender ID and Package No.	Name of work	Old date & time				New date & time			
		Document last selling date and time	Last date and time for tender security submission	Closing date and time	Opening date and time	Document last selling date and time	Last date and time for tender security submission	Closing date and time	Opening date and time
192481-30/e-GP/GRD/2025-2026 (OTM)	Supply of Asphalt Mistry, Semi-Skilled & Unskilled Labour for Potholes Repair work at Ch: 00+030m to Ch: 01+950m, Ch: 02+020m to Ch: 03+980m Ch: 04+010m & to Ch: 05+990m of Bijoynasha - Talarhathi-Joynagarhata Road (Z-8420) & Ch: 17+010m to Ch: 18+980m of Satpar-Ramdia-Fukurah Road (2-8419) under Road Sub-Division, Gopalganj during the year 2025-2026.	31/12/2025 17:00	01/01/2026 12:00	01/01/2026 26 12:30	01/01/2026 26 12:30	05/01/2026 17:00	06/01/2026 12:00	06/01/2026 12:30	06/01/2026 12:30

Accepted tenders will be opened online immediately after opening time.

Sheikh Nabil Hossain
ID-602255
Executive Engineer (A.C), RHD
Road Division, Gopalganj

GD-2798

Turkey steps up anti-IS raids

125 suspects arrested

AFP, Istanbul

Turkey yesterday detained another 125 Islamic State (IS) group suspects in a string of nationwide raids, a minister said, following warnings that IS militants were planning attacks over the holidays.

The latest arrests raised to nearly 600 the total number detained over the past week.

"We captured 125 Daesh suspects in simultaneous operations carried out in 25 provinces this morning," Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya wrote on X, using the Arabic acronym for IS.

On Christmas Day, the security forces arrested 115 IS suspects following intelligence warning that the extremist group was "planning attacks during Christmas and New Year celebrations", the Istanbul's prosecutor's office said.

During another nationwide arrest operation on Monday, IS militants opened fire on police in the northwestern coastal town of Yalova, killing three officers and wounding nine others, the interior minister said.

Six IS militants were also killed in the hours-long gun battle in Yalova, which lies on the shores of the Sea of Marmara about 90 kilometres (55 miles) southeast of Istanbul.

A day later, another 357 suspects with ties to IS were arrested in 21 different provinces, the minister said.



An Israeli military excavator demolishes one of 25 residential buildings earmarked for removal in the Nur Shams refugee camp, east of Tulkarem in the northern Israeli-occupied West Bank yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

Mamdani to be sworn in as New York mayor

AFP, New York

Zohran Mamdani, young upstart of the US left, was readying yesterday to take over as New York mayor for a term sure to see him cross swords with President Donald Trump.

After the clocks strike midnight, bringing in 2026, Mamdani will take his oath of office at an abandoned subway stop, taking the helm of the United States' largest city. He will be New York's first Muslim mayor.



His office says the understated venue for the oath-taking reflects his commitment to working people, after the 34-year-old Democrat campaigned on promises to address the soaring cost of living.

But it remains to be seen if Mamdani -- virtually unknown a year ago -- can deliver on his ambitious agenda, which envisions rent freezes, universal childcare and free public buses.

Once an election is over, "symbolism only goes so far with voters. Results begin to matter a whole lot more," New York University lecturer John Kane said.

Turnout at 52pc in first phase of Myanmar polls: junta

REUTERS

Myanmar's junta said slightly more than half of eligible voters cast their ballot in the first phase of a three-stage national election at the weekend, a figure that was markedly lower than the previous two elections.

The election is the first since a 2021 coup and is taking place during a civil war. Analysts expect the military-aligned Union Solidarity and Development Party, led by retired generals, to be returned to power.

The United Nations, some Western countries and human rights groups have said the vote is not free, fair or credible, given that anti-junta political parties are out of the running and it is illegal to criticise the polls.

Zaw Min Tun, a junta spokesperson, told state media that more than six million people, or 52.13 percent of enrolled voters, had voted on Sunday across 102 townships.

"Even in developed democratic nations, there are situations where voter turnout does not exceed 50 percent," Zaw Min Tun said.

ECONOMIC PROTEST

Govt building attacked in southern Iran

AFP, Tehran

Several people attacked and damaged a provincial governor's office in southern Iran yesterday, according to authorities quoted by the justice ministry's Mizan agency, after days of protests over the economy.

"A portion of the provincial governors' office door and its glass were destroyed in an attack by a number of people," said Hamed Ostovar, the head of Fasa city's judiciary, as quoted by Mizan, without specifying how the attack was carried out.

Fasa is located 780 kilometers

south of the capital Tehran, where a spontaneous movement against the high cost of living broke out on Sunday among shopkeepers before spreading to some universities.

Iran's prosecutor general said yesterday that economic protests that had gripped the country were legitimate, but any attempt to create insecurity would be met with a "decisive response".

"Peaceful livelihood protests are part of social and understandable realities," Mohammad Movahedi-Azad told state media after three days of protests by shopkeepers in capital Tehran, which were joined by students across the country.

"Any attempt to turn economic protests into a tool of insecurity, destruction of public property, or implementation of externally designed scenarios will inevitably be met with a legal, proportionate and decisive response."

His comments came days after the Mossad intelligence agency of Iran's arch-foe Israel posted on social media that it was "with you on the ground" in a message to Iranian protesters.

Posting on its Persian-language X account, the spy agency encouraged Iranians to "go out into the streets together".

Trump issues first 2nd-term vetoes

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump scrapped two bills this week, exercising his veto power for the first time during his second term to reject a water pipeline and the expansion of a Native American reservation.

Trump vetoed the bipartisan-backed bills on Monday, the White House announced on social media. Both the Senate and the House would need to pass the bills again by a two-thirds majority to override the president.

One of the bills, "Finish the Arkansas Valley Conduit Act," aimed to complete a decades-long plan to pipe clean water to Colorado's Eastern Plains.

In his letter to Congress explaining the veto, Trump argued it would cost too much, and said he was "preventing American taxpayers from funding expensive and unreliable policies."

The pipeline was initially proposed during John F. Kennedy's presidency in the 1960s, and the vetoed bill had received unanimous support from both houses of Congress.

Global 'fragmentation' fuelling world's crises

Warns United Nations refugee chief

AFP, Geneva

The outgoing United Nations refugee chief fears an increasingly fragmented world is fuelling global conflicts and crises, and inflaming hostility towards people desperately fleeing for safety.

Reflecting on his decade at the helm of the UNHCR, Filippo Grandi told AFP that one of the most worrying developments had been how divisions had left the world seemingly incapable of resolving conflicts -- and increasingly unwilling to deal with the repercussions.

"This fragmentation of geopolitics that has caused the emergence of so many crises is perhaps the most worrying thing," the Italian diplomat said in his final interview as UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

"This world is unable to make peace; has become totally unable to make peace."

Grandi meanwhile lamented a "race to the bottom" in terms of countries



tightening laws and practices to keep asylum seekers and refugees out.

He noted "a growing hostility, a rhetoric by the populist politicians targeting and scapegoating people on the move".

Speaking at UNHCR's Geneva headquarters a day before the end of his tenure, Grandi said he had been inspired over the past decade by how regular people worldwide showed kindness and hospitality to people on the move.

"In spite of all the politics, in spite of the real challenges that these movements represent," he said, there is still a "deeply entrenched sense that if somebody flees from danger, one has the responsibility to help".

He also highlighted inspiring moments, including in 2021 when he witnessed former Colombian president Ivan Duque grant legal status to 1.7 million Venezuelans.

And more recently, "at the border between Lebanon and Syria and talking to people who had made the choice to go back just a few weeks after the fall of the Assad regime".



2026
Happy New Year

স্বাস্থ্যের
সুস্থতায়
সর্বদাই
সাথে...

...Metabolic Health
Opsonin Pharma Limited

Opsonin Pharma
Ideas for Healthcare

কীর্তিমানের
মৃত্যু নেই

বাংলাদেশের প্রথম নারী প্রধানমন্ত্রী
বেগম খালেদা জিয়ার মৃত্যুতে
আমরা গভীরভাবে শোকাহত।

BEXIMCO
PHARMA
here's to life

FICTION

The manifesto of LAUGHTER

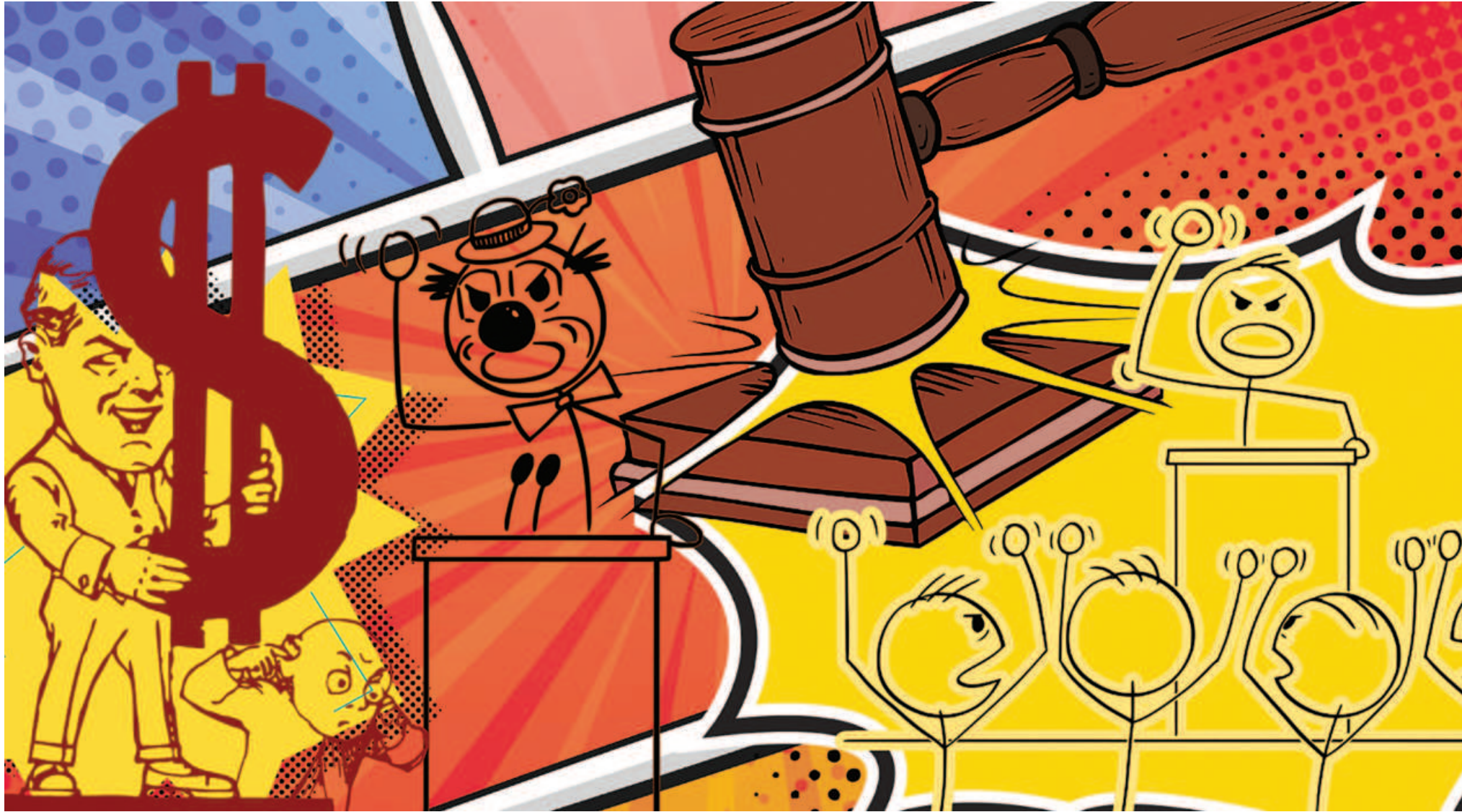


ILLUSTRATION: MAHMUDA EMDAD

Second promise: every MP will live in a tin-shed house six months of the year. Let rain drip on their heads, let mosquitoes sing in their ears. Then they will know what real Bangladeshis live with before signing our fates!

HAROONUZZAMAN

The afternoon sun presses down on Dhaka like a heavy hand. Heat rises from the asphalt in shimmers; buses wheeze as though gasping for breath. Rickshaw bells jangle against each other in the thick, damp air.

In front of the National Press Club, a crowd gathers. Reporters with notepads, Camerapersons hoisting tripods. Curious passersby wiping sweat from their temples.

At the center of it all stands Abdul Karim—Karim Bhai to almost everyone who knows him. Not a politician, not an activist, not even a wealthy man. Just a tea-seller from Motijheel, sleeves always stained with milk and tea leaves. But his laugh—it booms like a dhol in an empty courtyard. His moustache curls with mischief, and his eyes glint as if he's carrying a private joke about the whole world.

Today he has put on a long white panjabi, though tea stains still mark the cuffs. He clammers onto a plastic chair, clears his throat, and announces: "Brothers and sisters, today I reveal my Election Manifesto—for the People!"

The crowd breaks into laughter. Everyone knows Karim: the joker, the street philosopher, the tea-seller who shouts across the road to ministers as if calling after rickshaw-pullers. Yet the journalists hold out microphones. They know what others know too: Karim

draws bigger crowds than many real candidates.

"First promise," Karim declares, holding up a finger. "Free rickshaw rides for all politicians. Why? Because if they suffer once in traffic, they'll fix it in a week!" Laughter ripples outward. A woman fans her child with her dupatta; the policemen stationed nearby try to hide their grins. Karim drinks in the heat, the sweat, the roar of voices.

"Second promise: every MP will live in a tin-shed house six months of the year. Let rain drip on their heads, let mosquitoes sing in their ears. Then they will know what real Bangladeshis live with before signing our fates!"

Pens scratch furiously. Cameras click. Karim wipes nothing, not even the sweat rolling down his jaw.

"Third promise: if a minister lies, he must wear a clown's nose in parliament for seven days. We'll call it the Lal Nak Policy."

The crowd roars. A boy perched on a rickshaw starts chanting: "Lal Nak! Lal Nak!" Soon, voices echo the chant up and down the street.

Karim bows with both arms wide, as though hosting a circus. "I don't seek power. I only remind you: power is a joke. And you are the punchline only if you forget to laugh."

To most, he is only a fool with clever words. But those who sit at his tea stall know differently. He once studied

literature at Dhaka University—until clashes left him beaten and disillusioned. He dropped out, turned to tea-selling for survival, yet never stopped observing.

Every evening, clerks, workers, rickshawpullers, even an occasional official stop at his stall. Between steaming cups of dudh cha and clinking saucers, Karim spins stories. He takes tragedies from the day's headlines and reshapes them into comedies. His laughter, rough and contagious, doesn't just entertain. It gives relief. Sometimes, it gives courage.

"Laughter is like a mirror," he tells his customers one rainy night. The tin-roof rattles above them. "Hold it up, and the king will see his own crooked teeth."

One evening, a sleek black Prado stops by his stall. Out steps a man in a crisp sherwani, wrist heavy with gold—Farid Khan, the special advisor to the government.

"Karim Bhai," Farid says, his voice smooth, "your jokes are famous. Our party needs voices like yours. Why not come and work with us? Write speeches. Make people laugh for us."

Karim studies him over the rim of his tea glass. His eyes flicker—not anger, not temptation, just weary amusement. "So you want me to be your jester in the king's court?"

"Not a jester—strategist," Farid corrects. "Think of the money, the safety."

Karim throws back his head and laughs, a laugh so loud heads turn from across the street. "My parliament is the footpath, bhai. Here, nobody can cut my microphone."

Farid leaves, his smile stiff as starch. Karim watches the taillights fade. Something unsettles him—danger, yes, but also opportunity.

A week later, Karim stages another "press conference." This time he arrives with props: empty rice sacks, fake currency notes, even a rubber chicken. He declares the founding of Hashi Shangha—the People's Party of Laughter (PPL).

He names a rickshawpuller as finance minister, a garment worker as foreign minister, and a street dog as home minister. The dog barks on cue, and the crowd erupts.

But amid the laughter, sharp truths cut through. Karim shakes the empty rice sack: "This is our reserve, brothers. Always empty—except in the minister's godown." He waves the fake notes: "Inflation! Looks like money, buys nothing. Just like their promises."

The next morning, headlines carry his antics. Memes flood Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok. Students chant his slogans at tea stalls. Garment workers repeat his jokes in crowded buses. The ruling party grows nervous. Jokes, they know, travel faster than manifestos.

One humid night, plainclothes

officers appear at Karim's stall. Their boots crush cigarette butts on the ground.

"You talk too much, Karim Bhai," one mutters. "Careful, or you'll laugh yourself into jail."

Karim serves them tea anyway, smiling. "Tell your masters—even in jail, I'll laugh. And my laughter will reach farther than their speeches."

His customers glance nervously, but Karim winks. "Don't fear. A trickster survives because power cannot predict laughter."

Two weeks later, at Suhrawardy Udyan, a ruling party rally thunders with speeches about 'development'. Suddenly, the sound system crackles—and Karim's voice booms through every loudspeaker: "Brothers and sisters! I, your humble candidate from PPL, announce my first act: replace ministerial convoys with rickshaws. Honking will be replaced with harmoniums!"

The crowd explodes in laughter. The minister flails angrily, but Karim's voice continues: "Second act: every MP will sleep at Kamalapur station one night a year. Then they'll know the state of our shelters."

Phones record. Livestreams spread. People cheer more for the unseen joker than the sweating minister. Later, security learns: Karim had bribed the sound technician with nothing but tea and laughter.

As elections near, posters bloom across Dhaka. A cartoon of Karim's smiling face, moustache twirled, with the words: Vote for the Lal Nak Policy!

People laugh, assuming it's a prank—until the Election Commission confirms Karim has officially filed as an independent candidate for Dhaka-7. His paperwork is flawless.

On election day, queues stretch outside polling centers. To everyone's astonishment, Karim secures nearly fifty thousand votes. He doesn't win, but his name eclipses seasoned politicians. Journalists call it a political earthquake.

That night, when results flash on television, reporters rush to his tea stall. But the shutters are down. A scrap of paper flutters on the wall. In neat handwriting, it reads: "The real victory is when people laugh at power instead of fearing it. Don't look for me—I'm already among you, in your jokes, your tea, your courage."

No one sees him again. Weeks later, in parliament, during a heated debate, an MP stumbles. A red clown's nose rolls onto his desk. Cameras catch it. The chamber bursts into laughter.

Somewhere in Dhaka, perhaps in another tea stall, perhaps in disguise, Abdul Karim is surely laughing too.

Haroonzaman is a translator, novelist, poet, researcher, and essayist. Besides teaching English in Libya and Qatar for about 12 years, he has had 20 years of teaching experience in English Language and Literature at Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB).

POETRY

BACKSTAGE

ARIF SHAHJAHAN

In my wildest imagination, away from all rhyme or reason, I weave my realm, unbridled and free, craving for the unfelt and extreme, by all standards but my own. I drift past the obvious, and I leap beyond the stage and its ugly frown, its gray and brown. My tune is forever. Eager to be reshaped a million times wrapped in the unknown. Let me flee, only for thee, unsure of destiny, and assured of mystery. The moment arrives to embrace what I hold dear to me in my moments of solitude and awakening, and in my moments of introspection. Like a truant, I feel free of any convention for my soul purges me of all the strings of attachment and sets me up for only pure flirtation. I love being wicked in the rain and the scent of the wet grass beneath me, lost in the mystery of that mischievous smile that tickles me, invites me, but never promises me. The sense of emptiness and fulfillment

reigns supreme and my senses are full to the brim. I live in the south breeze to playfully ruffle your shiny tress. I live in the warmest kiss that wets the lips of your lovely face. I serenade you with the sweetest tune I know in the crimson afterglow, in the slim hope that your affection might follow. I toy with the spreading wave of colors left behind by your sublime departure, as I intertwine my emotions with the kaleidoscope of nature. You return with a veil, again, and I feel a deep sense of longing with all the passion I possess at this divine height. You turn me and toss me aimlessly with bitter sweet cruelty as I juxtapose you with the sights and sounds of a starry night. I hold you, as the star holds her fleeting light, and dance with you as the sunflowers do with the sun, cheek to cheek in flickering candle light, only to be one. Your glossy red lips, reminds me of my long-lost rain-drenched red rose and strips me of the last vestiges of any reason. This is my page, this is my stage. Oh, the strong wind returns, window closes, the page turns, a flower vase drops

and breaks into pieces to divulge what I dare not hear. Do I have to wear my face, to be a pretender, and to cease to be a weaver? Do you have to turn the page to return my bondage? The stage has changed but I am expected to play roles to their satisfaction. I now have defined dreams and follow the set path to their benediction. Another sun sets, another story ends in applause. The nest is secure and warm, and the resolve is solid and firm. Why am I then so hollow inside and feel the urge to unwind to weave a new one? I scurry to gather the sand to build the castle again, any which way I can. With the fear of a deer I reach behind the curtain. I segue into a deep coma to bid goodbye to all the goals I have, while I keep my eyes still wide open. Fly me home, and take me to the memory lane where I act insane. That's my stage, that's my page.

Arif Shahjahan is an IT professional currently working in the United States.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

SPORT

What to WATCH

T Sports & Nagorik TV
BPL
Sylhet vs Dhaka
Live from 1:00 pm
Rangpur vs Rajshahi
Live from 6:00 pm

Star Sports 2
Big Bash League
Melbourne Renegades vs Sydney Sixers
Live from 2:15 pm
ILT20
Eliminator

Dubai Capitals vs Abu Dhabi Knight Riders
Live from 8:30 pm
Star Sports Select HD1, HD2
Premier League
Live from 11:30 pm:

Crystal Palace vs Fulham
Liverpool vs Leeds
Live from 2:00 am (Friday)
Sunderland vs Man City
Brentford vs Tottenham



Another year lost to old habits, HOPE RESTS IN THE NEW YEAR

BISHWAJIT ROY

Bangladesh sports, as so often before, has passed another mixed year on the field – fleeting moments of promise overshadowed by structural stagnation off it. Beyond the women's football team's stupendous success of qualifying for the upcoming AFC Women's Asian Cup, there was little that redefined the sporting landscape of the country.

Yes, much has been said about the women footballers who lifted national pride, the renewed curiosity around football following Hamza Choudhury's arrival, hockey's tentative return of belief, and cricket's sporadic flashes of success.

But beneath these sporting narratives lies a far more frustrating reality: as we step into a new year, sports in Bangladesh remains shackled by the same old culture of governance.

It could have been a very different story had initiatives been taken in line with the promises made during the July-August uprising – a movement that raised hopes of systemic reform across sectors, including sports. Instead, the sporting arena appears to have inherited the same outdated practices that have long stalled

its progress.

In an exclusive interview with The Daily Star in September 2024, former youth and sports adviser to the interim government, Asif Mahmud Sajeed Bhuiyan, openly acknowledged the depth of the problems he faced after assuming office on August 8.

He pointed out that the constitutions governing sports federations desperately needed reform to establish democratic practices and a culture of accountability.

He spoke candidly about syndicates, corruption, political influence and the chronic lack of accountability – evils that have consistently undermined sports development in Bangladesh.

Sports, he admitted, was no exception to the decay visible across other sectors of the country. Reforming constitutions of sporting bodies, he promised, would be a top priority.

Yet, as another year closes, those much-needed reforms remain a distant dream. There has been plenty of talk about corruption, but hardly any visible initiative or investigation to unearth the truth. Promises were made, but action failed to follow.

Following the political changeover on August 5, 2024, the youth and sports ministry removed presidents of most national sports federations – excluding cricket, football, hockey, swimming and a few others.

Several general secretaries went into hiding, severely disrupting the functioning of the bodies. On August 29, the ministry formed a five-member search committee tasked with recommending reforms to executive committees, constitutions, election policies and representation in line with the 2018 NSC Act.

The committee, after numerous deadline extensions, worked for nine months, holding over 100 meetings and completing roughly 70 percent of its mandate.

It recommended reforms for more than 50 federations, leading to their dissolution and replacement with ad hoc committees. However, before the process could be completed, the ministry formed yet another committee on June 24, 2025, assigning it to draft a model constitution and redefine policies under the IOC Charter. Its recommendations were finally submitted in December.

In the midst of all this, the NSC instructed ad hoc committees to prepare for elections even before reforms were finalised – raising serious questions about intent and consistency.

The long-anticipated reform of the Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB's) constitution ended before it even began. While the Bangladesh Football Federation largely remained outside government interference, what unfolded during the BCB elections mirrored old practices and stood in stark contrast to the adviser's early promises.

By the time Asif Mahmud resigned in December, sports governance was no closer to reform than when he took office. The arena remained stagnant, burdened by indecision and half measures.

Now, as the country enters a new year with national elections scheduled on February 12, all eyes will be on the incoming government. Whether it can finally deliver genuine reform in sports governance – where so much potential has long been wasted – remains to be seen.

For now, hope persists. But hope alone, as history has shown, is never enough.

BPL's Chattogram phase cancelled

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) on Wednesday announced revised fixtures for the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), cancelling the Chattogram phase completely while extending the Sylhet phase till January 12.

Previously, the ongoing Sylhet phase was set to end on January 2 and the Chattogram phase was supposed to run from January 5 - 12.

After the change in schedule, the tournament will move to Dhaka after the Sylhet phase with matches starting on January 15.

Matches which were scheduled for December 30 but were suspended following the demise of former prime minister Khaleda Zia have been rescheduled for January 4.

BPL member secretary Iftekhar Rahman Mithu informed that along with logistical challenges of moving the tournament to Chattogram, the national team's departure for the ICC T20 World Cup was also a reason behind the changes.

"The Bangladesh team are set to depart on 26th and we need to give the national team some time with the coaches before they depart," he told The Daily Star.

While the matchdays remain the same, fresh match schedules have been announced in the revised fixture. Sylhet Titans will now play nine of their 10 league phase matches in Sylhet while Chattogram Royals will have to play their last three league matches in Dhaka at a stretch. The corresponding matchdays for qualifiers and the eliminator also remained unchanged alongside the final which is slated for January 23.



ARSENAL END 2025 ON TOP

Premier League leaders Arsenal slammed the door shut on charging Aston Villa with a 4-1 home thrashing of Unai Emery's side on Tuesday that put them five points clear at the top of the table going into the New Year. Goals from Gabriel Magalhaes and Martin Zubimendi early in the second half put the Gunners in control of a contest that had looked fraught with danger against a Villa side riding an 11-match winning streak. Leandro Trossard then struck from the edge of the area before substitute Gabriel Jesus capped a flowing move to seal the rout. Ollie Watkins, who missed good chances in the first half, pulled one back for Villa in stoppage time. Arsenal now have 45 points from 19 matches, five ahead of second-placed Manchester City.

PHOTO: REUTERS

WHAT TO LOOK FORWARD TO IN 2026

JANUARY

- Dec 21 – Jan 18: Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON)
- Jan 13 -26: SAFF Men's & Women's Futsal Championship
- Jan 15 – Feb 6: ICC Under-19 Men's Cricket World Cup
- Jan 18 – Feb 1: Australian Open FEBRUARY

FEBRUARY

- Feb 6 – 22: Winter Olympic Games (Milano-Cortina)

Feb 7 – Mar 8: ICC Men's T20 World Cup



MARCH

- Mar 1 – 21: AFC Women's Asian Cup
- Mar 26, 31: FIFA World Cup Qualifier Play-offs (Final 6 spots)
- Mar 27: Finalissima (Spain Vs Argentina)
- Mar-Apr: Bangladesh men's cricket home series vs Pakistan (Dates may change)
- Mar 31: Bangladesh men's football match vs Singapore (AFC Qualifiers)
- TBD: Bangladesh women's cricket home series vs Sri Lanka

APRIL

- Apr 1 – 18: AFC Women's U20 Asian Cup
- TBD: Bangladesh men's cricket home series vs New Zealand

MAY

- May 16: FA Cup final
- May 20: UEFA Europa League Final
- May 27: UEFA Conference League Final
- May 30: UEFA Champions League Final
- May 18 – June 7: Roland Garros (French Open)
- May – June: Bangladesh men's cricket home series vs Australia

JUNE

June 11 – July 19: FIFA World Cup 2026 (USA, Canada, Mexico)



- June 12 – July 5: ICC Women's T20 World Cup (England)
- June 29 – July 12: Wimbledon

JULY

- TBD: Bangladesh men's cricket away series vs Zimbabwe
- July 19: FIFA World Cup final (New York-New Jersey)
- July 23 – Aug 2: Glasgow Commonwealth Games

AUGUST

- TBD: Bangladesh men's cricket Ireland tour (3 ODIs & 3 T20Is)
- TBD: Bangladesh men's cricket tour of Australia (2 Tests)
- Aug 31 – Sept 13: US Open

SEPTEMBER

- Sep 19 – Oct 4: Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games
- TBD: SAFF Championship (proposed)

OCTOBER

- TBD: Bangladesh men's cricket home series vs West Indies
- TBD: Bangladesh women's cricket away series vs Australia
- Oct 31- Nov 13: Dakar Youth Olympic Games

NOVEMBER

- TBD: Bangladesh men's cricket Away Series vs South Africa
- Nov 28: Copa Libertadores final

DECEMBER

- TBD: Bangladesh women's cricket away series vs New Zealand

Damien Martyn 'in induced coma'

AFP, Sydney

Former Australian Test batsman Damien Martyn has been rushed to hospital in an induced coma after being diagnosed with meningitis, media reports said Wednesday.

The 54-year-old, who played 67 Tests between 1992 and 2006 and 208 one-day internationals, was admitted on Boxing Day last week after falling ill while lying down.

Australian media said he was being treated for meningitis, which can be deadly.

Meningitis is an inflammation of the membranes surrounding the brain and spinal cord.

"He is getting the best of treatment," Test great and close friend Adam Gilchrist told The Australian newspaper.

Known as one of the game's great strokemakers, Martyn became a key figure in Steve Waugh's all-powerful Australian side, hitting 13 centuries and averaging 46.37.



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Towards hope, with the vote in sight

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

We step into the new year with hope and optimism as new beginnings are wont to be, the national election on the horizon is all the more reason to look ahead to 2026. The very possibility of being able to practise one's franchise, that prized entitlement of the sovereign citizen, feels all the more precious since many had been robbed of it for long.

Following in the wake of a tumultuous uprising the previous year, 2025 had started with high expectations. The year that had begun with possibilities and potential also turned out to be one of frustration and disappointment. It was a year of quite resilience for households but also a year of recalibration for the economy. Overall, the year has been one where Bangladesh was in transit. Having freed itself from the clutches of an increasingly despotic regime, the nation prepared – sometimes with apprehension and sometimes with affirmation – for the transition to democracy in 2026.

Not quite comparable to the July uprising and its aftermath, 2025 had its own ups and downs. Even as we bid farewell to 2025 and usher in a new year, it coincides with the beginning of a new chapter in the political landscape. We welcome the new year having bid farewell to Khaleda Zia, who had been a fixture of Bangladesh's politics, a force for democracy. Her son, Tarique Rahman, had returned to Bangladesh only a few days before, after 17 years in exile.

It was also the year when Khaleda's arch rival who had tormented her for much of the 16 years that Awami League was at the helm, former prime minister Sheikh Hasina was sentenced to death for crimes against humanity in Dhaka. And although Awami League's activities have been prohibited, the outfit has become a pariah in a land it ruled with absolute authority for three terms.

SEE PAGE 10 COL 1



Fireworks light up the midnight sky above the Sydney Harbour Bridge and Opera House during New Year's Eve celebrations in Sydney, Australia.

PHOTO: AFP

51 of 59 parties turn in nominations

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR and AHMED DEEPTO

Aspirants from 51 of the country's 59 registered political parties have filed

remains withheld. Seven other registered parties also refrained from filing nominations. At least five of them had previously been allies of Awami League-led

deadline. BNP topped the list with 331 submissions, followed by Jamaat-e-Islami with 276, Islami Andolon Bangladesh with 268, and Jatiya Party (GM Quader) with 224. AB Party

TOTAL ASPIRANTS	PARTY ASPIRANTS	INDEPENDENT ASPIRANTS
2,569	2091	478

nomination papers for the national election scheduled for February 12, according to Election Commission data.

The Awami League is formally excluded from the polls as its registration

governments between 2008 and August 2024.

According to EC data, 2,569 aspirants – 2,091 from political parties and 478 independents – submitted nomination papers ahead of Monday's

and National Citizen Party aspirants filed nominations for 53 and 44 constituencies, respectively.

However, confusion arose over the nomination

SEE PAGE 10 COL 2



WISHES ITS VALUED READERS, PATRONS, ADVERTISERS AND WELL-WISHERS A VERY HAPPY 2026

Bleak rights record in 2025

Say ASK, MSF

STAFF CORRESPONDENT


Mob violence, political clashes, deaths in custody and sustained attacks on press freedom defined Bangladesh's human rights situation in 2025, according to two leading rights organisations.

Data compiled by the Manabdhikar Shongskriti Foundation (MSF) and Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) indicate a year marked by shrinking democratic space, widespread impunity, and growing insecurity for journalists, political activists, minorities, women, and children.

Both organisations said mob attacks emerged as one of the gravest human rights violations of the year, while political violence intensified and accountability for abuses by both state and non-state actors remained largely absent.

SEE PAGE 10 COL 1

We Deeply Mourn




We express our heartfelt condolences on the passing of Begum Khaleda Zia, BNP Chairperson and the first female Prime Minister of Bangladesh.

We respectfully acknowledge her remarkable contribution to the nation as a three-time Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

Our sincere sympathies go out to the bereaved family members and well-wishers.

May Almighty Allah grant her Jannatul Ferdous, Ameen



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Begum Khaleda Zia (1945-2025)

We Deeply Mourn

We deeply mourn the sad demise of Former Three-time Prime Minister of Bangladesh and BNP Chairperson, Begum Khaleda Zia (Inna Lillahi wa innailayhi raji'un).

On behalf of the Board of Directors and Member Mills of BTMA we express and convey our deepest condolence to members of the bereaved family.

We sincerely pray for the eternal peace and salvation of the departed soul. May the Almighty Allah in His infinite mercy gives family members strength and fortitude to bear the loss.

President & Board of Directors BTMA



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TRIBUTE TO
KHALEDA ZIA
(SPECIAL PAGE WITH
COMMERCIALS)

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আমরা শোকাহত



(১৯৪৫-২০২৫)

বাংলাদেশের প্রথম নারী প্রধানমন্ত্রী তিনবারের সফল প্রধানমন্ত্রী এবং বাংলাদেশ জাতীয়তাবাদী দলের চেয়ারপারসন বেগম খালেদা জিয়া ৩০ ডিসেম্বর ২০২৫ তারিখে ইন্তেকাল করেছেন। ইন্নালিল্লাহি ওয়া ইন্না ইলাইহি রাজিউন। তাঁর মৃত্যুতে জনতা ব্যাংক পিএলসি'র পরিচালনা পর্ষদ, ব্যবস্থাপনা কর্তৃপক্ষসহ সকল স্তরের কর্মকর্তা-কর্মচারী ও গ্রাহক-স্বভানুধ্যায়ী পরিবার গভীরভাবে শোকাহত। আমরা তাঁর বিদেহী আত্মার মাগফিরাত কামনা করছি এবং শোকসন্তপ্ত পরিবারের প্রতি গভীর সমবেদনা প্রকাশ করছি।



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Tribute

Begum Khaleda Zia
1945-2025

We deeply mourn the passing of Begum Khaleda Zia, former Prime Minister of Bangladesh, whose life reflected steadfast, principled and resilient leadership. Through years of sacrifice and struggle, she played a significant role in fostering democratic values which will be remembered with enduring respect. At this moment of profound sorrow, we offer our prayers for the eternal peace of her departed soul.



সাবেক প্রধানমন্ত্রী
বেগম খালেদা জিয়ার মৃত্যুতে
আমরা গভীরভাবে শোকাহত

TRIBUTE TO KHALEDA



KHALEDA LAID TO ETERNAL REST

Crowds filled Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue as mourners headed towards Manik Mia Avenue for Khaleda Zia's funeral. At their Gulshan residence, Tarique Rahman recited verses from the Holy Quran beside his mother's coffin before it was taken under heavy security to the parliament complex. Draped in the national flag, the coffin was carried by armed forces to the South Plaza of Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban. Before the namaz-e-janaza, Tarique addressed the gathering and sought prayers for his mother. He then joined the namaz-e-janaza alongside senior BNP leaders, political figures, the chief adviser, and the heads of three forces. Later, Khaleda was laid to rest at Zia Uddin beside her husband, former president Ziaur Rahman. Tarique sprinkled soil on her grave and offered floral tributes at the graves of his parents.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN, PRABIR DAS, FIROZ AHMED, PALASH KHAN, BNP MEDIA CELL

