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Tarique, family offer prayers for Khaleda Zia

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Tarique Rahman, acting chairman of the BNP, attended a doa and milad mahfil for former prime minister and party chairperson Khaleda Zia at Gulshan Azad Mosque yesterday.

He entered the mosque at around 4:00pm, accompanied by senior party leaders. Earlier, Tarique offered Juma prayers at another mosque in Gulshan.

Meanwhile, family members of Khaleda visited her grave at Zia Udyan in Dhaka yesterday morning.

They arrived around 10:30am, led by Khaleda's granddaughter Zaima Rahman. Also present were Sharmila Rahman, widow of Khaleda's younger son Arafat Rahman; their daughter Zahia Rahman; and other relatives.

Standing by the grave, they recited verses from the Holy Quran and offered prayers. The family remained there for about 20 minutes.

Public access to the grave, which had been open since after Fajr prayers yesterday, was temporarily restricted for about an hour during the family's visit.



From left, BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman attends a doa and milad mahfil for his mother, party chairperson and former prime minister Khaleda Zia, at Gulshan Azad Mosque yesterday. Khaleda's family members, including her granddaughter Zaima Rahman (centre), offer prayers at her grave at Zia Udyan in the morning.

PHOTO: BNP MEDIA CELL



Neighbourly ties will improve in due course

Says Indian FM, wishes Bangladesh well for polls

UNB, Dhaka

Wishing Bangladesh well for the upcoming national election, Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar yesterday said neighbourly ties in the region will improve in due course.

"Right now, they (Bangladesh) are heading for elections. We wish them well. We hope that once things settle down, the sense of neighbourliness in this region will grow," he said while responding to a question at an interactive session in Chennai.

Highlighting India's growth, Jaishankar said if India grows, all its neighbours will grow too.

"We will have many more opportunities. That, in a sense, is the message that I took to Bangladesh," said Jaishankar, who visited Dhaka on Wednesday to attend the funeral of BNP chairperson and three-time prime minister Khaleda Zia.

He handed over a letter on behalf of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

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IMRAN KHAN'S ARREST Pak court jails journo for life over protest ties

REUTERS, Karachi

A Pakistani anti terrorism court sentenced eight journalists and social media commentators yesterday to life imprisonment in absentia after convicting them of terrorism-related offences linked to online activity in support of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan.

The convictions stem from cases registered after violent protests on May 9, 2023, when Khan's supporters attacked military installations following his brief arrest. Since then, the government and military have launched a sweeping crackdown on Khan's party and dissenting voices, using anti-terrorism laws and military trials to prosecute hundreds accused of incitement and attacks on state institutions.

In its ruling, the court said actions by the accused "fell within the ambit of terrorism" under Pakistani law and that their online material promoted "fear and unrest" in society.

GM Quader

FROM PAGE 1
including Tk 3 lakh from house/shop rent, Tk 30 lakh from shares and deposits, and Tk 11 lakh as opposition leader's allowance.

At that time, Quader held Tk 49.88 lakh in cash, nearly Tk 36 lakh in bank deposits, and jewellery worth Tk 1.12 lakh.

In the latest affidavit, he listed Tk 60.32 lakh in cash, noted that bank deposits were submitted separately, and declared Tk 40 lakh in savings certificates/fixed deposits. His jewellery holdings remain unchanged.

Meanwhile, his wife, Sharifa Quader, has been described as a singer and businessperson. In 2024, she had Tk 59.59 lakh in cash, and now she has Tk 48.90 lakh.

Quader's movable assets are valued at Tk 1.95 crore, while Sharifa's are valued at Tk 1.72 crore. The couple also have houses in Lalmonirhat and Dhaka. Quader's properties are worth Tk 1.59 crore, while Sharifa's Dhaka house is valued at Tk 70 lakh.

Quader's vehicle is valued at Tk 84.98 lakh, while Sharifa owns one worth Tk 80 lakh.

The affidavit also notes 12 criminal cases against Quader, all under investigation, and a personal loan of Tk 12 lakh.

Since the death of his elder brother, Jatiya Party founder and former president HM Ershad, GM Quader has been serving as party chairman. He has contested six parliamentary elections, winning five. He was elected from Lalmonirhat-3 in 1996, 2008, and 2018, and from Rangpur-3 in 2001 and 2024.

Akhter earns

FROM PAGE 1

and furniture valued at Tk 1.20 lakh. The affidavit does not mention ownership of any electronic goods by the couple. It also says that the couple has no outstanding loans.

Akhter, 28, holds a postgraduate degree, works as a trainee lawyer, and earns Tk 85,000 from agriculture, Tk 1.80 lakh from business, and Tk 2.40 lakh from employment annually.

Sanjida, a homemaker, owns movable assets worth Tk 14 lakh (current value Tk 16 lakh), including Tk 4 lakh in cash and jewellery worth Tk 10 lakh.

In his latest income tax return, Akhter showed an annual income of Tk 5.05 lakh and paid Tk 10,500 as taxes. The return also mentioned that he has assets worth Tk 14.35 lakh.

Akhter declared 118 decimals of agricultural land -- 18 decimals in Rangpur's Kaunia bought for Tk 23,000, and 100 decimals inherited but not yet formally divided, registered, or mutated.

For his election campaign, Akhter plans to spend Tk 50 lakh, with Tk 1 lakh from his legal practice and Tk 49 lakh raised through public crowdfunding. The affidavit also states that Akhter faces two criminal cases and is currently out on bail in both.

ACC to scrutinise affidavits of aspirants

FROM PAGE 1

ACC spokesperson and Director General (Prevention) Akter Hossain said the commission has already begun scrutinising affidavits submitted by candidates.

"If any affidavit is found to contain incorrect or false information, we will take action in accordance with ACC laws and regulations," he said.

He added that the ACC's intelligence unit is working on the issue. "We are monitoring news reports in the media regarding candidates' affidavits."

ACC officials said candidates who provide false information could face charges for possessing wealth beyond known sources of income.

Under Section 27(l) of the ACC Act 2004, individuals found to own property disproportionate to their declared income must explain the source in court. Failure to do so can result in three to ten years in prison, fines and confiscation of the assets.

An EC official said the commission would consider any ACC recommendation only after assessing its legal authority, the nature of the allegations and whether the issue falls within the ambit of the law.

However, the EC has made clear that it will not independently verify affidavits unless objections are raised. This position has remained unchanged since the system was introduced in 2008.

Since then, candidates have been required to submit detailed affidavits with their nomination papers, following a High Court directive. These disclosures include educational qualifications, criminal records and the assets, income and liabilities of candidates and their dependents.

A November amendment to the RPO further requires candidates to disclose assets held abroad. The High

Court also instructed the EC to make affidavit information public so voters can make informed decisions.

Yet election experts and governance campaigners say the verification mechanism has never been enforced.

Election expert Abdul Alim, a member of the now-defunct Electoral Reform Commission, said neither the EC nor the ACC had scrutinised affidavits since 2008.

"The commissions of 2014, 2018 and 2024 lacked the leadership or mindset to take it forward. In fact, the Election Commission never had the courage to verify these affidavits. Such ideas were never in their plans," he said.

A former election commissioner echoed that view, saying the EC lacks the capacity to verify wealth statements within the short time before polls, particularly when it comes to assets held abroad. He added that he was unaware of any government agency scrutinising affidavits since the 2014 election.

Against this backdrop, the ACC's decision has been welcomed as long overdue.

Experts and campaigners, however, stressed that a joint effort involving the ACC, the EC, and the National Board of Revenue (NBR) is essential to uncover the true picture.

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman praised the initiative but stressed that its impact would depend on proper execution.

"If carried out without fear or favour, it can help curb entrenched malpractice in electoral politics and improve transparency and accountability," he said.

He said investigators should focus on verifying the credibility of submitted data, including

inconsistencies between declared income and actual wealth, as well as beneficial ownership, through case-by-case field investigations.

Experts also stressed the need for coordination. If nationwide scrutiny proves difficult, they suggested starting with random sampling.

Iftekharuzzaman said the NBR must cooperate by sharing income tax data to allow meaningful comparisons.

"For the EC, it is about the validity of candidacy," he said. "For the NBR, it is about tax compliance. For the ACC, it is about illicit wealth."

According to EC data, 2,569 aspirants -- 2,091 party nominees and 478 independents -- submitted nomination papers ahead of the February 12 election. Returning officers will scrutinise the papers until January 4.

Election Commissioner Abdur Rahmani Masud said the EC would not send affidavit information to the ACC or NBR, but those agencies are free to examine the documents independently.

"From the EC's side, there is no objection," he said.

Asked whether the EC would act on ACC recommendations, Masud said the commission would first consider its legal authority and the nature of the allegations, and would act only if the matter falls within the law.

Explaining why the EC does not independently verify affidavits, he cited time constraints.

"There are only a few days," he said. "Unless there is an objection, the information is deemed correct."

He added that candidates, who are running for a public office, declare their information to be true to the best of their knowledge, and the EC accepts it unless evidence suggests otherwise.

Manna, Azad among 34 disqualified

FROM PAGE 1

In the same constituency, Jatiya Party candidate Shariful Islam Jinnah was rejected for not submitting the asset statement form with his affidavit.

In Munshiganj-3, BNP district unit member secretary Md Mahiuddin, who sought to contest as an independent, was rejected after discrepancies were found in the signatures of one percent of supporting voters, said Returning Officer Syeda Nurmahal Ashrafi.

Two BNP rebel candidates in Munshiganj-1, Mir Sarafat Ali Sopa and Momin Ali, faced disqualification for the same reason.

In Pabna-1, independents Khairun Nahar Miru and Eunus Ali were

rejected for failing to provide the required voter signatures, said Additional District Election Officer Sayed Abu Sayeed.

For the same reason, seven candidates in Natore-1, Natore-2 and Natore-4 were also excluded, according to District Election Officer Md Nazrul Islam.

In Kurigram-3, BNP's Rangpur Divisional Assistant Organizing Secretary Abdul Khalek was disqualified for forgery in voter signatures, confirmed Abu Bakkar Siddique, assistant commissioner and executive magistrate.

In Cumilla, 12 candidates, including Jamaat and Jatiya Party nominees, were rejected. Jamaat's Yusuf Sohail

in Cumilla-3 was disqualified for concealing information about dual citizenship, while Jatiya Party's Iftekhar Ahsan for incomplete financial statements. CPB General Secretary Abdullah Al Kafi Ratan, contesting Cumilla 5, was excluded for inconsistencies in signatures.

In Brahmanbaria, six independents were rejected: two in Brahmanbaria-1 and four in Brahmanbaria-3.

A total of 2,582 candidates had submitted nomination papers to contest the national election scheduled for February 12, according to the Election Commission.

[Our correspondents from respective districts contributed to the report]

A positive move

FROM PAGE 1

missive, bear particular significance. This visit by Jaishankar must also be seen in the context of Pakistani and Chinese enthusiasm to engage with the interim government as well as the political parties of Bangladesh. The Indian establishment has been keenly observing this development which must have seemed like Dhaka slipped out of its fold.

Foreign adviser Touhid Hossain later said that the visit of foreign dignitaries was purely out of courtesy and insisted that Jaishankar's visit had nothing to do with politics or bilateral relations. But the gesture from Delhi is unmistakable and Modi's letter clearly suggests that it is very much about bilateral relations and politics.

In the letter, Narendra Modi recalls his meeting and discussions with Khaleda in Dhaka in June 2015. He writes, "She made many important contributions to the development of Bangladesh, as well as to the strengthening of India-Bangladesh relations."

This was echoed by the Indian defence minister as well. Rajnath Singh visited the Bangladesh High Commission in Delhi and signed a condolence book. He wrote in flowing cursive, "Her notable contributions to strengthening India-Bangladesh ties will always be remembered."

It may be recalled here that the relationship between Bangladesh and India during the last BNP tenure (2001-2006) had been strained, to say the least. But Modi's letter shows that India is willing to look past all that as he expresses confidence in Tarique's "able leadership of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party" and that it will "ensure a new beginning

and the enrichment of the deep and historic partnership between India and Bangladesh".

Of note here, is that Modi not only accepts Tarique as BNP leader, but hopes that bilateral relations will flourish between the two countries with him as the leader. Considering that Tarique is not in office, it is implicit that should the BNP come to power, India would be ready to engage constructively and positively. In fact, one might even suggest that the Modi government is not just willing but looking forward to working with the BNP as its counterpart in Bangladesh.

This also indicates a shift in New Delhi. While a number of statements and remarks from the neighbouring country have insisted on "inclusive" elections, which can be taken to mean India's insistence that all parties be allowed to participate in the upcoming election, one might wonder if Modi's letter indicates a slight realignment of his government's expectation. As such, Khaleda's funeral offered New Delhi the occasion to extend an olive branch to BNP.

However, building good relations with one party as India had done during the Awami League regime will hardly be enough for warmer bilateral relations. There is widespread anti-India feeling across the Bangladeshi spectrum that stems from a feeling that the larger neighbour has never treated us as an equal sovereign nation. India must rid itself of the tendency to appreciate our agreement but admonish Bangladesh's assertion. The onus here actually lies with India to develop a genuine people to people relation that could be the foundation of the "new beginning" as Modi puts it.

Porwar's assets worth Tk 1.14cr

FROM PAGE 1

deposited in banks and financial institutions. He also declared electronic goods worth Tk 80,650 and furniture valued at Tk 1.10 lakh. The total acquisition value of his movable assets is about Tk 15.05 lakh, with a current estimated value of around Tk 14.09 lakh.

His wife, Kamrun Nahar Salma, is a homemaker. The annual income of Porwar's dependents is shown as Tk 3,330. She has Tk 2,675 in cash and Tk 4,345 deposited in banks and financial institutions.

Altogether, her movable assets, including 15 bhoi of gold, had an

acquisition value of Tk 52,020, but their current estimated market value is about Tk 22.57 lakh.

In his affidavit, he mentioned that 48 criminal cases had been filed against him and he has been acquitted or discharged in all of the cases.

In the current year, Porwar reported an income of Tk 4,82,478 and paid Tk 5,625 in income tax. His submitted tax return shows total assets worth about Tk 37.81 lakh.

Porwar was elected as an MP from Khulna 5 in 2001 as a candidate of the BNP-led four-party alliance.

Fakhrul's income rose

FROM PAGE 1

Market in Thakurgaon. He earns Tk 7.98 lakh as honorarium from two organisations as a consultant, along with Tk 7,901 from other sources. His income in 2018 was Tk 11.31 lakh.

The affidavit states that Fakhrul is 77 years old and holds a postgraduate degree.

In terms of assets, the BNP leader owns five acres of agricultural land and a portion of a two-storey ancestral house. His movable assets include Tk 1.26 crore in cash and Tk 3.82 lakh deposited in three bank accounts. He also owns a private car, 10 bhoi of gold and other ornaments, and a double-barrel gun, though their values have been marked as "undisclosed". Additionally, he possesses electronic goods worth Tk 1.5 lakh and furniture valued at Tk 1.4 lakh.

The affidavit further reveals that 50 cases have been filed against him. He has received relief in 47 cases and been acquitted in the remaining three.

His wife, Rahat Ara Begum, owns assets worth approximately Tk 2.44

crore -- more than Tk 1 crore higher than her husband's declared assets. Her movable assets total Tk 1.21 crore, including 20 bhoi of gold, while her immovable assets are valued at Tk 1.21 crore.

Rahat Ara Begum owns agricultural and non-agricultural land acquired for Tk 51.84 lakh, 12 decimals of land in Thakurgaon valued at Tk 39.72 lakh, and a five-katha plot in Purbachal near Dhaka acquired for Tk 8.54 lakh. She also owns a 1,950-square-foot flat in Gulshan-2, valued at Tk 20.50 lakh, and a car worth Tk 26.52 lakh.

According to tax records, Fakhrul paid Tk 72,889 in income tax in the 2025-26 fiscal year, while his wife paid Tk 1,20,585.

In his submission to the EC, Fakhrul said he would finance his election campaign from his own income and estimated campaign expenditure at Tk 51.16 lakh.

The BNP leader has been elected to parliament three times. He took the oath in 1996 and 2001, but did not after winning the 2018 election.

Inqilab Moncho resumes blockade at Shahbagh

DU CORRESPONDENT

Inqilab Moncho yesterday resumed its blockade at Shahbagh, demanding a speedy trial over the killing of its slain spokesperson Sharif Osman Bin Hadi.

Ahead of Juma prayers, the platform called on mosques across the country to offer special prayers seeking justice for Hadi's murder.

After the prayers, protesters brought out a procession from the Dhaka University Central Mosque before occupying the Shahbagh intersection.

Addressing a rally at Shahbagh, Abdullah Al Jaber, member secretary of Inqilab Moncho, warned that the platform would launch a movement demanding the government's resignation if the trial is not completed within the stipulated timeframe.

He said Inqilab Moncho had set a 30-working-day deadline for the government, with 22 days remaining.

"If the state fails to maintain law and order and its intelligence agencies cannot act, we do not want such a helpless authority ruling the country," he said.

He further demanded that by the seventh of the month, the killers and those behind the murder be identified and a charge sheet submitted.

Jaber also announced that once the trial formally begins, Inqilab Moncho will launch

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5



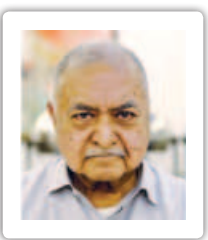
Inqilab Moncho resumed its blockade at Dhaka's Shahbagh yesterday, demanding a swift trial over the killing of its slain spokesperson and July frontliner Sharif Osman Bin Hadi.

PHOTO: STAR

Kamal Hossain hospitalised after falling ill

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dr Kamal Hossain, a key architect of the constitution of Bangladesh and emeritus president of Gonoforum, was admitted to Square Hospital in Dhaka yesterday after falling ill.



According to a party press release, the 88-year-old veteran politician is suffering from lung-related complications.

Gonoforum General Secretary Mizanur Rahman has urged people across the country to pray for Dr Kamal's recovery.

The press release referred to an incident from last Wednesday, when Dr Kamal attended the funeral of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia. It said his name was not included on the official guest list, which resulted in the Special Security Force (SSF) denying his vehicle access through the designated VIP route.

As a result, Dr Kamal had to travel a considerable distance through a dense crowd in a wheelchair, the release said, adding that he fell ill afterwards.

In October 2023, Dr Kamal was elected as Gono Forum's emeritus president after he resigned from the post of party president.

Khaleda, a daughter of Dinaipur
Residents share stories of her formative years



MD QUAMRUL ISLAM
RUBAIYAT, from Dinaipur

Residents of Dinaipur reflected on the childhood and adolescent years of former prime minister and BNP chairperson Begum Khaleida Zia, as news of her demise spread across the country.

Born to Iskandar Majumder and Taiyaba Majumder, Khaleida Zia spent her formative years in Dinaipur before marrying the late president and BNP founder Ziaur Rahman.

Locals recalled her early life in the district with a sense of personal loss and pride, remembering her as a warm and respectful figure long before she rose to national prominence.

Khaleida Zia began her education at a missionary school and later enrolled at Dinaipur Government Girls'

High School, where she completed her matriculation examinations.

Her father, a businessman who migrated to Dinaipur from Jalpaiguri following the Partition, resided at Taiyaba Villa in the Balubari area. He served as president of the Dinaipur Chamber of Commerce and Industries from 1975 to 1984. Her mother, Taiyaba Majumder, widely known for her social work in the district, lived in the family home until her demise.

Following the announcement of Khaleida Zia's passing, BNP leaders and activists gathered at the party's local office in Jail Intersection. Recitations of the Holy Quran were organised there, as well as at her parents' residence, with supporters offering prayers for her departed soul.

Advocate Shamim Bin

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

Country gets first comprehensive urban policy

Govt approves Nat'l Urban Development Policy-2025 to build liveable, climate-resilient cities

BAHRAM KHAN and HELEMUL ALAM

After decades of delays, the National Urban Development Policy 2025 has finally been approved, which aims to guide the country's rapid urbanisation in a more planned and sustainable manner.

The interim government believes it will help build climate-resilient, inclusive, and liveable cities.

Although nearly five crore people, or 32 percent of the population, live in urban areas, Bangladesh previously had no comprehensive urban development policy. After a delay of 21 years, the policy has finally come into effect.

Through decentralisation of cities and towns and the promotion of sustainable development, the policy seeks to ensure overall social and economic prosperity for urban residents.

The policy was approved on Thursday at an Advisory Council meeting at the Chief Adviser's Office, chaired by Prof Muhammad Yunus. Later, Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam briefed the media at the Foreign Service

Academy in Dhaka.

Under the policy, a National Urban Development Council will be formed, with the Local Government Division acting as its secretariat.

The policy classifies cities into four categories --

AT A GLANCE

Policy focuses on decentralisation of cities and towns

National Urban Development Council to be formed

Cities classified into four categories by population

Industrial growth discouraged in megacities

Investment encouraged in metropolitan and smaller towns

Policy to guide housing, transport, waste management, urban planning

megacities (population of one crore and above), metropolitan cities (population of 5,00,000 to one crore), medium or district towns (50,000 to 5,00,000), and upazila or small towns (20,000 to 50,000).

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NEIR rollout triggers network issues, NID mismatches

MAHMUDUL HASAN

Many mobile phone users were unable to connect their handsets to mobile networks following the launch of the National Equipment Identity Register (NEIR) system on Thursday.

At the same time, numerous users reported that an unusually high number of handsets were shown as registered against their NIDs, according to mobile operators and users.

Sujon Saha of Kurigram yesterday said he had been unable to use his handset since Thursday morning, despite receiving an SMS earlier confirming its registration in the NEIR database. He bought the handset on November 8 last year.



"I am currently using my SIM in another phone," he said.

Mobile operators said thousands of customers are facing similar problems.

Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) Chairman Major General (retd) Md Emdad ul Bari said the commission has so far received a limited number of complaints and a technical team is working to resolve the issues.

He said the disruptions were mainly caused by two factors. First, December 31 was the deadline for deregistering SIMs held by users with more than 10 connections. Of the 90 lakh SIMs identified under such users, around 80 lakh have already

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Trader found murdered at Savar home

UNB, Savar

A man was murdered by miscreants at his residence in Savar, said police yesterday.

The victim -- Delwar Hossain -- was a shoe trader by profession.

Police recovered his body last evening from his house at Baradeshi Uttarpara in Aminbazar, Savar.

Police said the miscreants gouged out Delwar's eyes and severed his genital.

In the afternoon, locals noticed his body lying inside the house and informed police.

The body was sent to the morgue of Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital in Dhaka for autopsy.

Police said Delwar used to buy shoes from different places and sell them to various shops. Savar Model Police Station Officer-in-Charge Arman Ali said police are investigating the incident to identify those involved in the killing.

Access to safe drinking water a basic right: HC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court, in the full text of a verdict, has directed the state to provide free safe drinking water to all citizens of Bangladesh within the next 10 years.

"It is, hereby, declared that access to safe drinking water free of charge is a fundamental right of every citizen as per Article 32 of the Constitution. The state is therefore obligated to provide free, potable and safe water to every citizen and must take consistent, continuous and progressive measures to meet such obligations," the HC bench of Justice Md Ashrafur Kamal and Justice Kazi Waliul Islam observed in the full text, which was released recently.

The bench delivered the verdict on February 27 last year after hearing a suo motu (voluntary) rule issued in 2020 in this regard.

The HC bench directed the authorities concerned to take all necessary measures to protect all water reservoirs and safeguard all surface water and groundwater sources from pollution and destruction.

"The state is directed to undertake an assessment of the impact and risks of privatisation of water in Bangladesh, to undertake necessary measures to prevent further privatisation of water in Bangladesh, and, where possible, restore public ownership of water, water infrastructure and water management services," the court said.

Noting that it is not financially and institutionally possible for the state to provide safe drinking water to everyone at the initial stage, the court instructed the government to gradually provide access to safe

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3



Boatmen sit idle on their empty boats as people stay indoors amid biting cold. The ghat on a channel of the Buriganga in Kamrangirchar, usually used for commuting to Keraniganj, saw little activity. The photo was taken in Kamrangirchar, Dhaka, yesterday afternoon.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

SATCHARI, REMA-KALENGA Illegal logging continues at reserved forests

MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

A vested syndicate has long been engaged in illegal tree felling in the Satchari and Rema-Kalenga reserved forests in Chunarughat upazila of Habiganj, putting the biodiversity of the protected areas at serious risk.

The 1,795-hectare Satchari forest and the 17.96-square-kilometre Rema-Kalenga forest contain a wide range of valuable trees and serve as natural habitats for diverse wildlife species.

In recent times, the activities of the syndicate have intensified. Locals and environmentalists fear the forests could be completely ravaged without immediate and effective intervention.

According to Forest Department sources, on December 17, an organised group entered a forest area at night and illegally felled three large teak trees. Following the incident, the department issued a show-cause notice to forest guard Suman Biswas for negligence of duty.

Locals said such large-scale tree felling would not have been possible without direct or indirect involvement of forest personnel.

On December 23, a joint drive by the Forest Department and Rab seized a truckload of illegally logged timber in the Shayestaganj Notun Bridge area around 8:00pm and arrested five people. A case was later filed with Shayestaganj Police Station in this connection.

The accused were sent to jail following court proceedings. Earlier, on the night of December 11, four forest guards exchanged gunfire with a gang of 50-60 tree smugglers as they attempted to fell teak trees in the Nischintapur area of the Kalenga Beat. Due to a shortage of manpower, the forest guards were forced to retreat. The smugglers fled after Border Guard Bangladesh personnel arrived at the scene.

Nizamul Haque, a resident of the Satchari forest area, said valuable teak trees continue to be stolen while the forest authorities have yet to address the root causes of timber smuggling.

Rema-Kalenga deputy ranger Abdul Hadi said protecting such a vast forest area with limited manpower remains a major challenge.

Satchari Beat Officer Anwar Hossain said the Forest Department is making all possible efforts to recover the stolen teak trees.

He also said a show-cause notice has been issued to forest guard Sumon Biswas and that the matter is under investigation.



Two fishermen sew fishing nets beside a road in the Charmonai area of Barishal, preparing to catch fish in nearby waterbodies. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

RANGPUR CITY

6 years on, children’s hospital still unopened

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Although the infrastructure was completed six years ago, Rangpur Children’s Hospital has yet to open. Built on 1.65 acres of land in the Puratan Hospital area of Rangpur city at a cost of Tk 31.08 crore, the hospital has remained unused.

Sabina Begum, an NGO worker from the Munshipara area, said she went to Rangpur Medical College Hospital about a month ago with her six-year-old son, Sizan Islam. After seeing the unhealthy and overcrowded condition of the children’s ward, she returned without admitting him and later sought treatment at a private clinic.

“Spending such a huge amount of

money to build a hospital and then leaving it unused is unfortunate. If it were opened, quality treatment for children could be ensured at a lower cost,” she said.

Shamser Ali of Gangachara



echoed her.

“Despite seeing the children’s hospital built before our eyes, it has not been opened, and we are suffering every day,” he said.

Executive engineer of the Health Engineering Department, Moni Kumar Sharma, said construction of the three-storey hospital building began on February 6, 2018, and was completed on November 19, 2019. It was handed over to Civil Surgeon’s office on March 8, 2020.

Rangpur Civil Surgeon Dr Shahin Sultana said after completion, the hospital was temporarily used as an isolation centre during the pandemic. Several letters were sent to the health ministry seeking the supply of necessary equipment and furniture, as well as the recruitment of doctors, nurses and other staff to make the hospital fully operational.

“I am still in regular contact with the ministry regarding this matter.”

Khaleda, a daughter

FROM PAGE 3

Golap recalled that his mother, late Doulatun Rahman, had served as headmistress of Dinajpur Government Girls’ High School during Khaleda Zia’s student years.

“She was friendly, maintained warm relations with everyone, and always showed deep respect for her elders,” Shamim said.

He also recounted a memorable incident from later years. “After she became prime minister, my mother – then serving as a district education officer – visited the Ministry of Education in Dhaka on official work. When the education minister informed Khaleda Zia of her arrival, she immediately asked that my mother be brought to her office. Upon seeing her former head teacher, Khaleda Zia stood up from her chair and warmly welcomed her.”

Advocate Shamim said

his mother cherished the gesture and often spoke of it fondly until she died in 2011.

Khaleda Zia’s maternal cousin, Abu Taher, also shared his memories. “She was affectionate towards relatives and always listened to everyone,” he said.

Former Dinajpur mayor Syed Jahangir Alam, who submitted his nomination papers for Dinajpur-3 constituency from BNP on party instructions as an alternative candidate to the BNP chairperson, recalled his long association with her.

“I have countless memories with our leader over my 43-year political career,” he said. “She always asked about my family and affectionately called me ‘Pagla.’”

Khaleda Zia last visited Dinajpur on September 22, 2012, when she addressed a public rally at Gor-e-Shaheed Maidan.

Access to safe

FROM PAGE 3

drinking water in all major public places in Bangladesh within the next one year.

These places include railway stations, bus terminals, train stations, launch terminals, airports, raw food markets, rural markets, shopping malls, government hospitals, all public educational institutions, places of religious worship, dedicated venues in coastal saline areas where water is scarce, water-critical areas declared under the Water Act, citizens living in remote mountainous communities, and all court and bar associations of Bangladesh.

The HC also said the rule regarding this issue shall remain in force as a continuing order and will come up for order on February 27.

The government has been directed to submit an affidavit stating the progress made in implementation.

NEIR rollout triggers

FROM PAGE 3

been deregistered, while the remaining 10 lakh are in the process of deactivation.

Second, a large number of handsets were found to be registered under the same IMEI numbers, leading the system to block new connections using those IMEIs. He said the problems would be resolved shortly.

Shahed Alam, chief corporate officer of Robi Axiata, said some customers experienced network access issues after the NEIR launch. “We are working closely with the BTRC and the NEIR technology partner to identify the causes and resolve the issues as quickly as possible,” he said.

Gazi Towhid Ahmed, head of corporate communications at Banglalink, said despite earlier confirmation from the BTRC that handsets connected before December 31, 2025 would not be affected from January 1, 2026, unexpected disconnections occurred.

NEIR SHOWS EXCESS HANDSETS

Many users also reported seeing an unusually large number of handsets linked to their NIDs.

One such user, Biplob Rahul, said 212 handsets, or IMEIs, appeared to be registered under his NID, although he currently uses only two phones.

In a Facebook post, Faiz Ahmad Taiyeb, special assistant to the chief adviser on telecom and ICT, said authorities had received more than three billion datasets from mobile operators, as both historical and current data were uploaded. As the system currently shows the migration date as the present date, many users are seeing inflated numbers of SIMs or handsets linked to their NIDs, he said.

Taiyeb said the BTRC and mobile operators are jointly working to resolve the issue and that fresh instructions have been issued to conduct another round of Vulnerability Assessment and Penetration Testing on the NEIR system.

He further noted that the allowable number of

SIMs per NID in Bangladesh was initially set at 20, later reduced to 15 and is now being lowered to 10. As a result, historical mapping naturally shows a higher number of handsets against many NIDs.

The system, he said, would help raise public awareness by allowing individuals to see how many SIMs and devices were used under their NID, which is important for identifying potential financial crimes linked to mobile banking or online gambling.

Meanwhile, a Dhaka court yesterday sent 45 people to jail in a case filed over the attack and vandalism at the BTRC building that took place on Thursday over the implementation of the NEIR system.

Earlier in the day, Muhammad Ashrafuzzaman Jahed, assistant director of the Legal and Licensing Division of BTRC, filed a case with Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Police Station under sections 15(3) and 25D of the Special Powers Act, accusing 54 people. Moreover, 500 to 600 unidentified persons were also accused in the case.

Inqilab Moncho

FROM PAGE 3

a public campaign ahead of the elections to inform voters whom they should and should not support.

He said the platform would reach out to “pro-Bangladesh” political and cultural organisations today and tomorrow to seek solidarity in demanding justice for Hadi’s killing.

He also said on January 7, demonstrations would be held in front of Bangladesh High Commissions in at least 100 countries, demanding justice for Hadi. The blockade programme began last Friday. On Monday night, protesters temporarily withdrew from the intersection and shifted to an online campaign due to a cold wave.

The programme was later postponed following the death and funeral of BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia.

Country gets

FROM PAGE 3

According to ministry sources, efforts to formulate a national urban policy began in 2004, but disputes between the Ministry of Local Government and the Ministry of Housing and Public Works, along with pressure from vested interest groups, delayed approval for years.

Even under the current interim government, several attempts failed before final approval was granted. The policy has been drafted since 2022 with support from UNDP and funding from the United Kingdom.

The policy notes that urbanisation is now the main driver of Bangladesh’s economic growth. While 32 percent of the population lives in urban areas, they contribute more than 60 percent to national production.

The urban population currently exceeds 5.5 crore and is growing at an annual rate of 3 percent. Unplanned urbanisation has put severe pressure on the environment, biodiversity, and civic infrastructure, making housing, water supply, waste management, and climate risks major challenges.

The policy aims to address these challenges and ensure sustainable and well-planned urban development.

Meanwhile, the Advisory Council also decided to reduce duties, advance tax, and VAT on mobile phone imports and local production from 61.80 percent to 43 percent.

Shafiqul Alam said the government has decided to keep NID services under the Election Commission for now, reversing an earlier plan to transfer them to a proposed Civil Registration Commission, which has yet to be formed.

At the same meeting, the Bangladesh Hi-Tech Park Ordinance-2025 was placed before the Advisory Council, but was not approved.

Cop killed as dump truck hits motorbike in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Chattogram

A police constable was killed after a garbage-carrying dump truck of Chattogram City Corporation hit his motorcycle in the port city’s Kadamtali area early yesterday.

The deceased, Mubinul Islam, 28, hailed from Chakaria upazila of Cox’s Bazar and was serving in the Reserve Force at the Dampara Police Lines of Chattogram Metropolitan Police.

The dump truck hit Mubinul’s bike from behind when he was heading to a restaurant from the police lines for a meal.

Mubinul was rushed to Chittagong Medical College Hospital, where the on-duty doctor pronounced him dead on arrival.

Aftab Uddin, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station, said a case was filed in this connection, while police seized the truck and detained the driver’s helper.

“A drive is on to arrest the absconding driver,” said the OC.

PATURIA-DAULATDIA Ferry services resume after seven hours

UNB, Paturia

Ferry operations on the Paturia-Daulatdia river route resumed around 10:00am yesterday after remaining suspended for seven hours due to dense fog.

Two ferries anchored mid-river during the suspension safely reached the terminals as visibility improved, allowing stranded vehicles to begin crossing the river.

BIWTC Aricha sector Deputy General Manager Abdus Salam said ferry movement on the Paturia-Daulatdia and Aricha-Kazirhat routes was halted from 3:00am because of poor visibility.

At the time, three ferries were stuck midstream, while seven others carrying passengers and vehicles were held at the terminals, he said. With the fog easing in the morning, normal ferry operations resumed, easing congestion at four terminals.



Partners in Population and Development (PPD)
An Inter-Governmental Organization Promoting South-South Cooperation

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT
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Partners in Population and Development (PPD) is a **Southern-led and Southern-run Intergovernmental Organization** of 28 developing countries, headquartered in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

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Applications may be submitted by email or postal mail and must be received no later than **10 January 2026**.

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Only shortlisted candidates will be contacted for an interview.

YEMEN PROVINCE

Seven killed as Saudi coalition strikes UAE-backed forces

AFP, Mukalla

Airstrikes killed seven people in Yemen yesterday as a Saudi-led coalition attacked UAE-backed separatists who have seized huge swathes of territory, an official for the group.

More than 20 people were also wounded as seven airstrikes hit a camp in Al-Khasah, said Mohammed Abdulmalik, head of the separatist Southern Transitional Council in Wadi Hadramaut and Hadramaut Desert.

Saudi-backed forces in Yemen's Hadramawt province launched the operation to "peacefully" take back military sites yesterday after a sweeping advance by UAE-supported separatists raised fears of a major confrontation.

The weeks-long separatist offensive has already prompted airstrikes by the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen and escalated tensions between Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, its fellow Gulf oil producer.



Hadramawt governor Salem Al-Khanbashi announced the operation shortly after he was also appointed to lead the Saudi-backed National Shield forces in the resource-rich province bordering Saudi Arabia.

"This operation is not a declaration of war, nor an attempt to escalate tensions," Khanbashi was cited as saying in a statement by the official Saba Net news agency.

"This operation does not target any political or social group, nor does it target civilians," he said, adding that it "aims to peacefully and systematically hand over military sites".

A source close to the Saudi military warned: "It will not stop until the Southern Transitional Council withdraws from the two governorates."

The STC seized much of Hadramawt, bordering Saudi, and neighbouring Mahra last month.

The wealthy Gulf powers formed the backbone of the military coalition aimed at dislodging the Iran-backed Houthis, who forced the government from the capital Sanaa in 2014 and seized Yemen's most populated areas.



US actress Angelina Jolie speaks with aid agency staff at the Egyptian Rafah border crossing during her visit to North Sinai to inspect aid entering the Gaza Strip. Israel on Thursday said 37 humanitarian agencies supplying aid in Gaza had not met a deadline to meet "security and transparency standards", and would be banned from the territory.

PHOTO: AFP

Gaza survivors face harsh weather in tents

Israeli bulldozers destroy farmland near Ramallah

AGENCIES

The Palestinian Meteorological Department yesterday warned of very cold and unsettled weather across Palestine, with a risk of flash flooding in some areas.

Hundreds of thousands across Gaza are trying to survive in makeshift tents with no electricity or heating. It came a day after another Palestinian child died in the Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza, due to the extremely cold weather.

Displaced from northern Gaza to the centre of the territory, Ahmad is now living in a tent with his daughter after losing their two homes. "I no longer remember how many times I have been forced to flee," he said, in a post on X by UNRWA.

As winter conditions worsen, he described a daily struggle to keep his child safe. "I am trapped between two fears: The cold that seeps into my daughter's small body at night, and the fear for my own life when the rain comes and the tent can no longer protect us."

In the occupied West Bank, Israeli forces bulldozed agricultural land and uprooted olive trees in the town of Turmus Aya, north of



Ramallah, according to the Wafa news agency.

Witnesses told Wafa that Israeli forces stormed the area around the home of the Abu Awwad family, destroying farmland and uprooting dozens of ancient olive trees, reports Al Jazeera online.

Israel's military yesterday issued a statement on its latest incursions across the West Bank, claiming it rounded up more than 100 "wanted" individuals over the past week.

It claimed several of those arrested were "Hamas members plotting attacks against Israeli forces". During a raid in Hebron, the military said its forces seized weapons and more than 1 million shekels (\$310,000) in what it called "terror funds".

A group of Israeli settlers yesterday surrounded Palestinian homes in the Khala'il al-Luz area, near Bethlehem in the West Bank, and hurled stones at them.

According to local sources quoted by the agency, the settlers were shielded by Israeli forces who fired sound bombs and tear gas in the area.

Meanwhile, the Israeli military said yesterday it intercepted what it described as a "false target" in the northern town of Bar'am after sirens were triggered by a suspected drone.

7 dead as migrant boat sinks off Gambia

96 rescued

REUTERS, Banjul

Seven bodies were recovered and 96 people rescued after a boat potentially carrying more than 200 migrants capsized overnight in northwest Gambia, the country's defence ministry said on Thursday, adding search and recovery operations were continuing.

It was the latest deadly incident along one of the world's most dangerous migrant routes frequented mostly by West Africans trying to reach Spain via the Canary Islands.

The boat was reported to have capsized around midnight in the vicinity of a village in North Bank region, and it was later found "grounded on a sandbank," the defence ministry said.

Russia accuses Ukraine of firing drones at hotel

Kyiv denies targeting civilians

AFP, Kyiv

The Ukrainian army said yesterday it only hit "military targets", a day after Russia accused Kyiv of firing drones at a hotel and cafe in Ukraine's occupied south, killing 27 people.

Russian-installed authorities in Ukraine's southern Kherson region said those killed were revellers celebrating the New Year and that two of the dead were children, describing the incident as a "terrorist act".

A source in Ukraine's defence forces confirmed a strike took place, but said the attack targeted a military gathering that was closed to civilians.

The hotel where Moscow says the strike took place lies in Khorly, a Black Sea resort town the Russian army has occupied since early 2022.

The region's Russian-installed governor, Vladimir Saldo, published images on Thursday that appeared to show the burned-out interior of a building as well as fragments of charred bodies.

In comments to AFP, Ukrainian army spokesman Dmytro Lykhoviy accused Russia of repeatedly resorting to "disinformation and false statements".

"Ukraine's Defence Forces adhere to the norms of international humanitarian law and strike exclusively at enemy military targets," he said.

Trump blames bruised hand on aspirin

Denies falling asleep

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump blamed aspirin for large bruises on his hand and denied falling asleep while attending public meetings in an interview with The Wall Street Journal published Thursday.

In the interview defending his health, Trump also changed his previous statement about receiving an MRI scan in October, saying it was instead a quicker CT scan.

Trump, who at 79 is the oldest person to assume the US presidency, told the Journal "my health is perfect" and expressed frustration with scrutiny of his well-being. Trump has based much of his political image on projecting vigor -- whether through his frequent interactions with journalists, constant social media posting, or AI memes depicting him as a superhero.

However, the first year of his second term in office has raised growing questions.

His right hand shows persistent bruising, often covered with thick makeup and at times a bandage, and his ankles have appeared swollen.

On occasion, Trump has clearly struggled to keep his eyes open, including during a televised Oval Office meeting with health representatives in November -- a politically sensitive issue for someone who constantly frames his Democratic predecessor Joe Biden as "sleepy."

Labour shortages

FROM PAGE 12

Ruhul Amin, who shops for around 100 people living in a mess in Shahinbagh, said prices of fish, vegetables and other essentials are comparatively lower, though prices of some vegetables have gone up.

He noted that ginger, garlic and onions have declined over the past month.

Yesterday, he bought new onions at Tk 50 per kg, down from Tk

Dense fog disrupts flights

FROM PAGE 12

country, people will not feel much difference from the temperature rise due to the lack of sunlight," he said.

"January is the coldest month in the country, so people will feel cold throughout this month," he added.

Meteorologist Bazlur Rashid said heavy fog during winter may be linked to the absence of western low-pressure systems, which usually bring rain and stronger winds and help reduce fog.

He also said air pollution is a major factor, as tiny dust particles in the air keep fog dense.

Dhaka's air quality remained unhealthy yesterday morning, with the Air Quality Index standing at 155. Earlier on Thursday night, it rose sharply to 277. The main pollutant was fine particulate matter known as PM2.5.

Dense fog caused severe disruption to flight schedules at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, with nine flights diverted yesterday due to low visibility -- four to Chattogram, four to Kolkata in India and one to Bangkok in Thailand.

Airport authorities said normal flight operations resumed once weather conditions improved later in the day.

Aviation experts said frequent flight diversions during winter are caused by low visibility and the lack of a Category 2 Instrument Landing System (ILS) at the Dhaka airport.

Currently, the airport operates with a Category 1 ILS, which requires at least 800 metres of visibility for landing.

Experts said upgrading to Category

2 or ideally to Category 3 ILS would allow aircraft to land in dense fog or near-zero visibility.

Pilots said diversions lead to flight delays, passenger suffering and financial losses for airlines due to additional fuel consumption and airport charges.

Meanwhile, several road accidents occurred due to dense fog on the Dhaka-Bhanga Expressway, leaving one person dead and at least 30 others injured.

The accidents occurred in Feni's Sonagazi upazila, Munshiganj's Srinagar and Louhajang upazilas, and Madaripur's Shibchar upazila between Thursday night and yesterday morning, police and fire service officials said.

In Sonagazi, a motorcyclist named Mohammad Faisal Badsha died after losing control of his steering amid dense fog on the Feni-Sonagazi regional road yesterday morning.

He was taken to Sonagazi Upazila Health Complex, where doctors declared him dead.

Police said the motorcycle was recovered from the scene. Legal action will be taken if the victim's family files a written complaint.

In Srinagar, two buses crashed near the Beigaon bus stand around 8:45pm on Thursday, injuring at least nine passengers.

Later, around 1:15am, a collision occurred near the Chhanbari area involving two trucks and a bus, leaving at least 10 people injured.

Traffic on the expressway was temporarily halted and later restored using alternative routes.

130-150 in mid-December. Ginger was Tk 100 per kg, compared to Tk 150 two weeks ago. Imported garlic dropped by Tk 10-20, selling at Tk 150 per kg.

Visits to several markets in the capital, including Kazipara, Shewrapara, Ibrahimpur and Karwan Bazar, showed fish supplies were normal and prices largely unchanged from last week.

'We will govern expansively

FROM PAGE 12

Mamdani, New York's first Muslim mayor, emphasised the cost of living issues that were central to his mayoral campaign, pledging to help those "betrayed by the established order."

Left-wing allies Senator Bernie Sanders and Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez also spoke in front of some 4,000 ticketed guests.

"Thank you for giving us, from coast to coast, the hope and the vision that we can create government that works for all, not just the wealthy and the few," said Sanders, a former presidential hopeful.

At one point during his speech, the crowd broke into chants of "tax the rich." Mamdani wants to raise taxes on New York's wealthiest residents.

Thousands of people also thronged downtown Manhattan, many wearing yellow and blue beanies emblazoned with "Zohran," to watch the ceremony on large screens.

"This is the first time that either of us in our entire lives has felt some kind of political hope at all," 31-year-old Jacob Byerly, a scientist, told AFP alongside his wife Auburn.

Mamdani, a self-described democratic socialist, comes to power at a time when Trump has pushed a hard-right agenda.

But it remains to be seen if Mamdani can deliver on his ambitious program, which envisions rent freezes, universal childcare and free public buses.

Rhymester Sukumar Barua dies

FROM PAGE 12

blood pressure, diabetes and other ailments.

Born on January 5, 1938, in Madhyam Binajuri village of Raozan upazila, Chattogram, Sukumar began his career in the 1960s as an employee at Dhaka University.

In 1963, he rented a small house on Tophkhana Road and started writing independently.

His rhymes were published in

Kochikachar Ashor, Khelaghar and Mukuler Mahfil.

He retired in 1999 as a storekeeper at Dhaka University.

Over nearly six decades, Sukumar earned titles such as "Chhararaj", "Chharashilpi" and "Chharasamrat".

His works blended satire, humour, moral lessons, and themes of the Liberation War and politics.

His notable rhyme collections

include "Pagla Ghora", "Bhije Beral", "Chandana Ranjanar Chhara", "Elopathari", "Nana Ronger Din", "Chiching Fak", "Kichu Na Kichu", "Priyo Chhara Shatak", "Nodir Khela", "Chhotoder Haat", "Juktoborno", "Chandanar Pathshala" and "Jiboner Bhetore Baire".

For his contribution to literature, the government of Bangladesh honoured him with the Ekushey Padak in 2017.

When the sea stands between life and death

FROM PAGE 12

trained professionals willing to stay on the island.

A field study conducted by the environment ministry in September 2025 also noted that staff shortages, lack of equipment and isolation continue to weaken healthcare, often forcing patients to risk dangerous travel to the mainland for treatment.

Sadia (not her real name), a 26-year-old mother of four expecting her fifth child, said, "The hospital doesn't have proper equipment or medicines. For the past year, there wasn't even a doctor here. Only a few days ago did doctors arrive from outside."

"I can't afford to leave Saint Martin. But if any complications arise during my pregnancy, I'll have to go to Teknaf."

After a year with no officials at the hospital, a 12-member team from Chattogram Ma O Shishu Hospital, including two medical officers and one senior nurse, recently arrived under a one-year agreement with the government.

Speaking to The Daily Star, team leader Dr Md Adib Al Faisal, now in charge of the hospital, said, "We arrived and began working from December 1. I prepared a list of equipment needed for proper treatment and sent it to the Upazila

Health Complex. But it may take time for those to arrive."

He said residents are still facing a "life-threatening" gap in medical care. "If someone has a serious illness, they must leave the island for treatment. Forget drugs for critical conditions -- there isn't even basic medication here."

"We can only provide care at the earliest stage of complications, such as managing asthma attacks or reducing labour pain. If a woman needs a C-section, we have no option but to refer her outside the island."

"It takes over two hours to reach Teknaf by trawler. A speedboat can make the journey in 30 minutes, but most people cannot afford it. Many deaths occur while families are still trying to arrange transport."

He suggested deploying a naval ambulance or Navy or Coast Guard speedboats for patient transport, saying such an initiative could be lifesaving.

Medical Officer Dr Nusrat Jahan, also part of the 12-member team, is currently providing gynaecological care at the hospital. "After arriving, the most shocking thing I learned was that most deliveries were conducted at home by inexperienced people, resulting in maternal and neonatal deaths."

"Before we arrived, there was only a sub-assistant community medical officer, and people depended entirely on him. There were no proper doctors."

She said high illiteracy rates and a lack of awareness have further worsened the situation. "The education rate is far lower than expected. Most girls are married by the age of 11 or 12, and by their early 20s, many are already mothers of three or four. They conceive at short intervals due to a lack of knowledge about contraceptives, increasing maternal deaths."

Dr Nusrat emphasised the need for adequate manpower, proper equipment, at least one permanent doctor and a full-time consultant to ensure consistent medical care.

Cox's Bazar Civil Surgeon Mahmudul Islam said, "The hospital was built with a modern design, yet there is no manpower or budget to operate it properly. While we are doing our best to support Saint Martin's Island, limited funding remains a major barrier."

"We have submitted a proposal to establish a community clinic. If approved, it will help reduce the crisis. The one-year contract for the new team of doctors will also be renewed, subject to continued support and funding."

A casualty of electoral politics

Political parties fail women as election field remain male-dominated

The statistics on women candidatures, so far, in the upcoming election are deeply disheartening. It is particularly saddening that none of the major political parties appear sufficiently committed to proactively promoting the political empowerment of women. Citing Election Commission data, *Dhaka Tribune* reports that of the 2,582 aspirants who have submitted nomination papers, only 110 are women—amounting to a meagre four percent of the total candidates.

Although the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has nominated the highest number of women so far, after the passing of the party's Chairperson Khaleda Zia—who had been nominated in three constituencies—the number has dropped. The left parties, despite their marginal role in parliamentary politics, nominated women candidates close to BNP's figure. However, almost none of political parties registered with the Election Commission have met the minimum five percent threshold mandated in the July National Charter.

Ironically, the National Citizen Party (NCP)—born out of the July uprising and once at the forefront of advocating the charter as a new political settlement for democratic governance—has now only three women candidates. Even, the fate of these nominations has become uncertain, after NCP's electoral alliance with a Jamaat-e-Islami-led coalition, which may lead to the NCP contesting from fewer constituencies than its original plan. The seat arrangement issue with Jamaat has led several women NCP leaders—who stood at the forefront of the 2024 mass movement that ultimately led to the collapse of Sheikh Hasina's regime—to leave the party.

The number of women candidates among the other parties in the alliance is also negligible. However, the coalition of Islamic parties, including Jamaat-e-Islami, had publicly assured the implementation of the July National Charter if voted to power which reportedly attracted the NCP to the alliance. Yet, with the exception of AB Party, most of these Islamist parties have finalised all-male candidate lists for the February polls. Meanwhile, though Jamaat-e-Islami leaders say that women constitute 35 percent of the party's policymaking bodies, it is puzzling that none of them appear to be aspiring to parliamentary representation.

Even the BNP's number of women candidates falls woefully short of reflecting meaningful participation or advancement of women—either within the party or in national politics. This is particularly striking given that the party was led for over four decades by one of the country's most successful women leaders, Khaleda Zia. The BNP would do well to reassess its approach and actively expand women's representation, especially as several rebel candidates remain in the fray and are reportedly eager to be brought back under the party's fold.

We must not allow a regression in women's empowerment. Of the country's 12.76 crore voters, nearly 6.3 crore are women, and their political representation cannot be confined to quotas alone. The signatories of the July National Charter must also be transparent and honest about their commitment to the pledges they have made.

E-waste management must be prioritised

Weak rules, poor enforcement, and lack of accountability causing problems

Despite the threats that improper handling of hazardous waste, particularly electronic waste (e-waste), poses to human health and the environment, it is concerning to see how governance failures continue to cripple Bangladesh's e-waste management system. The matter has come to light following the unveiling of a new study by Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) that examined the current state of e-waste governance and found serious gaps in enforcement, coordination, and accountability.

At the centre of the problem lie the flawed design of the Hazardous Waste (E-waste) Management Rules 2021 as well as their poor implementation, with key agencies such as the ministry of environment, the Department of Environment (DoE), and customs failing to treat this issue as a priority. TIB's study finds that the scope of the rules is limited, and that many targets outlined in them remain unmet. One of the most glaring shortcomings is the continued exclusion of the informal e-waste sector from regulation. Informal collectors, dismantlers, and recyclers, despite operating across the country, remain outside the DoE's monitoring framework even four years after the rules were introduced. The risk of unregulated exposure to toxic substances for workers—especially women, who are disproportionately involved in collecting and sorting e-waste—cannot be overstated.

Moreover, the continued illegal import of e-waste and old electronic equipment, despite explicit bans, points to what TIB has rightly described as “gross negligence” by the relevant authorities. Weak inter-agency coordination, the failure to hold local government institutions accountable, and the absence of reliable and comprehensive data, along with the lack of any clear action plan or technical guidelines, have further compounded the problem. Adding to this is the fact that the rules were formulated without adequate stakeholder consultation, resulting in unrealistic provisions that do not reflect the ground realities.

Given this, TIB has placed a set of key recommendations that deserve proper follow-up. These include amending the 2021 rules to expand the definition of e-waste, particularly by including emerging sectors such as electric vehicles and solar panels. Introducing clear incentives and penalties, forming a national coordination committee for e-waste management, and issuing specific provisions for e-waste export are also essential. Equally important are detailed technical guidelines covering environmental protection and safe handling of hazardous components and disaster-related e-waste, as well as a dedicated Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) framework for all involved, including manufacturers, importers, and marketers. Properly managed e-waste could be an important source of national revenue rather than the hazard it currently is, so the government must take it seriously.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Mars Exploration Rover Spirit lands on Mars

On this day in 2004, the US Mars Exploration Rover Spirit landed on Mars to study the chemical and physical composition of the planet's surface.

Why does a gender wall still exist within our major political parties?



BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

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

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

A quilting metaphor, unique to our nakshi kantha, aptly describes Bangladesh's politics today. The intricate needlework that underpins the beauty of our nightly wrap-on continues to be a revered tradition, often ignoring the actual individuals who recycle worn-out cloths to infuse it with new vitality. The presence/absence of the women weaver's story in this tapestry is telling of our gendered reality. In theory, half the country is female. They lift trophies in football and cricket, they climb mountains, and they outperform their male peers in classrooms, laboratories, clinics, marketplaces, and factories. Yet, when the time comes to claim spaces of real political power, their role starts becoming scarce. The submission of candidatures by 110 women for the forthcoming election is one such example.

The figure constitutes a little over four percent of the 2,582 candidates for the directly elected seats. Although the number of women contestants increased compared to the 12th parliamentary election—when 92 women out of 1,891 total candidates vied for 300 seats—the percentage remains low. The entrenched gender gap is glaringly obvious, notwithstanding the fact

The vacuum and the consequent marginalisation of female candidates in the next election remind us how much women's political representation has relied on exceptional individuals rather than systemic inclusion.

that the Election Commission has yet to declare the number of valid candidates. Many of these candidates are running independently without the blessings of mainstream parties. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has more women on their list, but the number may drop following the recent death of its chairperson Khaleda Zia and internal shuffling. While the left-leaning parties seem more inclusive, Jamaat-e-Islami decided not to field any women for general seats. Such an arrangement is a tell-tale sign of a gender wall that exists within major political parties.

The provision of 50 reserved parliamentary seats allows the parties to claim formal representation of women, but they are never given the equivalence of direct electoral wins to serve the constituencies. While, the country has already achieved gender parity in primary and secondary education, political leadership roles do not reflect the value of female capital. Women also remain under-represented in executive positions. Most women are employed in low-paid, informal, or precarious jobs. For over three decades, we took pride in the fact that two powerful women



VISUAL: ALIZA RAHMAN

shared the political sceptres, but their struggles reflect the wider political realities of South Asia. They achieved power through dynastic politics and political crisis and emerged as unifying factors within their parties. Today, a void in the political field can be felt due to the absence of Sheikh Hasina, who fled the country after her ousting in 2024 and the demise of Khaleda Zia just ahead of the 2026 elections. The vacuum and the consequent marginalisation of female candidates in the next election remind us how much women's political representation has relied on exceptional individuals rather than systemic inclusion.

The vigorous presence of women in the past pro-democracy movements proved that many of the women leaders are parliament-ready. From anti-dictatorship struggles in the 1980s to the 2024 Monsoon Uprising, women participated in the politics as activists, media influencers, and organisers. Why the political parties do not capitalise on their

street capital remains a mystery.

We have seen female members resign from the National Citizen Party (NCP), protesting the party's alliances with Islamist parties. Yet, these were literally avant-garde women (advanced guards in infantry terms) facing the first round of attacks during the uprising. Some of them returned from abroad to join the movement, leaving behind their prospective careers. Not only that, but the decision by the NCP to merge with a Jamaat-led alliance came so late that most of the women leaders did not have enough response time to float as independent candidates. This incident is another instance of the electoral glass ceiling. Women are staged where politics is messy and unmediated by elite gatekeepers, but they are forced to take a backseat where nominations are controlled by party hierarchies.

To further exacerbate the situation, some parties are advocating for reduced work hours for women. This

patronisation exemplifies benevolent patriarchy, which is supposedly intended to alleviate the dual burdens of home and employment for women. Instead of pursuing gender equality, we are once again thinking of women as a category of fragility, rather than as political equals and economic agents. Such attitudes solidify stereotypes instead of dismantling them. Once again, we discover ourselves relegating the powerful rule of two of our former prime ministers to mere tokenism.

Despite their contribution to female education and female participation in the economy and politics to some extent, Bangladeshi women are under-represented in direct electoral politics. They are not allowed to look past platitudes and into the political culture and structural obstacles that perpetuate exclusion.

The gatekeeper within the party and their patronage networks ensure that the political structure remains male-dominated. Candidate lists are chosen through internal elite bargaining, keeping familial ties in mind. Even

when women are made MPs, the party does not expect an intellectual contribution from their reserved MP. They demand loyalty to forward party policies. If somehow women leaders step forward with credentials equal to or surpassing men's, their competitiveness is often trimmed through character assassination or slandering. Social norms impose pressure on these candidates to conform to societal expectations. Political parties' unwillingness to invest in women candidates further confirms this phenomenon.

Virginia Woolf has long warned that a woman can only create a room of her own when she has a financial support base. Female space is not a male gift. Running a political campaign requires financial capital. Women, due to their lack of access to capital or financial networks, seldom have the solvency to vie for a public post.

Last week, millions showed up at the funeral of Khaleda Zia. The respect that she garnered was extraordinary in the context of broader female political exclusion. Her rise to prominence stemmed from unique circumstances. The absence of a gradual institutional path for women in politics further underscores this uniqueness. It is a shame that in the past 55 years, we have failed to create a healthy democratic ecosystem that routinely produces and places women leaders.

The next government should recognise this void as an opportunity and undertake true structural reforms in this area. Otherwise, the next generation of women leaders will continue to face the same barriers. We need to go beyond the same routine of rhetorical affirmations of gender equality and the well-rehearsed practice of shrinking the female role in public offices.

Also, the parties participating in the election must clarify women's representation in their electoral manifestos. We are tired of cosmetic solutions that either glorify women as angels or portray them as monsters. It's time we implement affirmative actions for institutional quotas in general seats. There have to be public or party-level financing provisions to reduce economic barriers for women candidates. Women's wings within the party need to be nurtured to create leadership pipelines and decision-making authority. And above all, there have to be educational campaigns that reshape public perceptions of political leadership and normalise women's participation in formal politics. Women are instrumental in creating our social fabric. It's high time we acknowledge their significant role in not only telling but also creating stories.

The long wait for elections has been an illuminating interlude



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Views expressed in this article are the author's own.

MD FIROJ ALAM

The delayed election, rather than being merely a period of political stagnation, has paradoxically served as a crucial and illuminating interlude for Bangladesh. Had the interim government, formed on August 8, 2024, acted as a caretaker, conducted elections within 90 days, and then departed, people would have imagined—perhaps unrealistically—that the interim administration could have solved many of the country's problems. Instead, this extended timeframe has allowed for a deeper, more sobering examination of the nation's political landscape, resulting in unexpected clarity. The delay provided the necessary time for several pervasive national myths to be confronted by the hard light of reality.

For instance, many believed that Nobel Peace Prize-winning economist Dr Muhammad Yunus's leadership would usher in an era of unparalleled peace, explosive economic growth, and abundant foreign investment. This past year and a half allowed that idealised

image to be scrutinised leading to a more nuanced and realistic public assessment, dispelling the notion of a singular, messianic alternative. Similarly, the public's once-fervent enthusiasm for certain student leaders, seen as pure-hearted and symbolising hope, has been tempered. Their direct and indirect involvement in power dynamics during this period revealed that they, too, are not immune to the corrupting influence of authority or the temptation of authoritarian behaviour, often displaying a surprising lack of deep political wisdom. The delay granted the nation time for this necessary disillusionment.

Furthermore, the extended period acted as a relentless unmasking agent for Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami. The actions of some of its leaders—targeting cultural institutions and independent media outlets—over these months clarified its fundamental opposition to progressive ideals, indigenous culture, and women's freedom for the

educated and conscious class, cutting through previous ambiguities. For the BNP, this was not a swift return to power but a gruelling “time test,” oscillating between proximity to and distance from authority. This protracted process may have instilled a necessary moment of reckoning, a forced contemplation of public accountability that might shape any

Advisers who hailed from prominent NGO backgrounds, once prolific critics of state incapacity and lack of transparency from the outside, found their grand, idealistic rhetoric colliding with the immense complexities of actually running a country. Their once-loud proclamations were inevitably moderated by the weight of executive responsibility.

future governance. It also gave the public an invaluable, prolonged study of the incumbent administration and the state machinery.

Within the government itself, the delay humbled certain narratives. Advisers who hailed from prominent NGO backgrounds, once prolific

critics of state incapacity and lack of transparency from the outside, found their grand, idealistic rhetoric colliding with the immense complexities of actually running a country. Their once-loud proclamations were inevitably moderated by the weight of executive responsibility. Moreover, the widespread hope that, if enough time were given to this administration, it would implement transformative structural reforms to make Bangladesh a model of accountability remains far-fetched. The public can now move beyond the illusion that this administration held a unique key to systemic perfection. Finally, the very functionality of the state over this contentious period challenged the persistent narrative of great dependence on a single foreign ally, proving the nation's operational resilience.

While the political waiting has been arduous, it has functioned as an unscheduled but intense national tutorial. It has stripped away layers of political fantasy, forcing a clearer, if more demanding, view of the actors and dynamics at play. There is undoubtedly more to observe as the story unfolds. But this interval has provided a sobering education, ensuring that the next chapter begins not with wistful illusions, but with eyes more open to the intricate and often unforgiving realities of power and governance.

Khaleda Zia: Immovable force against oppression, bridge to democracy



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KAMAL AHMED

The unprecedented outpouring of grief and love for Khaleda Zia after her death powerfully affirms that the nation has lost someone deeply cherished. Witnessing the historic farewell to such a towering figure invites reflection on our political landscape. What made her so dignified and so revered in death—after enduring perhaps the harshest state persecution faced by any politician in independent Bangladesh?

She suffered the humiliation of forced eviction from the house granted by the state in recognition of her husband, Liberation War hero and former president Ziaur Rahman's contribution to the country. Later, while leading a democratic movement as leader of the opposition, she was forcibly isolated from her party, family, and followers when her party office was besieged—its gates blocked by sand-laden trucks. During this period of siege, she lost her youngest son, who died in exile in Malaysia.

Then came her conviction on a trumped-up charge of embezzling foreign donations intended for an orphanage that, in fact, remained intact in a separate official account. The cruelty deepened when the High Court doubled her sentence and placed her in solitary confinement until her health deteriorated so severely that authorities were compelled to move her to a hospital. She never fully recovered. Her condition was further worsened by the Hasina government's refusal to allow her access to advanced medical treatment abroad. Only after the fall of that regime did she receive the best medical care available to any Bangladeshi, involving multidisciplinary specialists from the United States, the United Kingdom, China, Australia, and Bangladesh. Had such care been made available earlier, the outcome might have been very different.

It is a shame that we failed to prevent such cruelty. Perhaps this shared guilt brought the country together in an unprecedented display of unity—one that sets a new benchmark of purpose: to follow her path and commit to building a democratic future. Asked what defines Khaleda Zia, many say she was



FILE PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Khaleda Zia's electoral success will remain a testament to her immense popularity among voters nationwide.

uncompromising. That is only half the truth. She was uncompromising against autocracy, yet more compromising than her peers when it came to build and strengthen democracy. The full truth is that she made historic compromises for democracy, constitutional rule, and institution-building—and she defended those achievements resolutely.

She assumed leadership of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) in 1984, when the party faced an existential crisis marked by factionalism and palace intrigues. She reorganised and revitalised it, launching an indomitable movement to restore democracy by freeing the country from General HM Ershad's military rule. Notably, she refused to legitimise any election under military

abandoning her party's preference and historical legacy of a presidential system. She embraced consensus and delivered a constitutional amendment—the first of its kind in Bangladesh's history, long marred by bitter discord. If any politician deserves to be given a funeral prayer (namaz-e-janaza) in front of the Jatiya Sangsad, it is Khaleda Zia because she established parliamentary democracy in the country.

She also deserves credit for introducing the 13th Amendment, establishing the caretaker government (CG) system to oversee elections, albeit under intense opposition pressure. Although, she initially rejected the idea of caretaker government, she later took

several initiatives to bring the opposition to the table to discuss a CG formula. However, the continuing boycott and the eventual en masse resignation of the opposition from the parliament in December 1994, led Khaleda Zia to hold the one-sided February 1996 election and the BNP, holding the majority seat, could finally amend the constitution for installing the CG. After the 13th amendment was enacted, Khaleda Zia resigned and called a

and direction of the BNP. Founded on the 19-point programme of Ziaur Rahman, the party was led by Khaleda Zia for 41 years, matched only by Sheikh Hasina's 45 years at the helm of the Awami League. While Hasina tarnished the legacy of a party that led our Liberation War by sliding into autocracy, Khaleda Zia anchored her party firmly in democratic belief.

She inspired a unity so resilient that

She assumed leadership of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) in 1984, when the party faced an existential crisis marked by factionalism and palace intrigues. She reorganised and revitalised it, launching an indomitable movement to restore democracy by freeing the country from General HM Ershad's military rule. Notably, she refused to legitimise any election under military rule, even when the Awami League and Jamaat-e-Islami abruptly abandoned street agitation and joined the 1986 parliamentary election. This steadfastness earned her the label “uncompromising,” a commitment she upheld throughout her life.

repeated attempts by the Awami League government to fracture the BNP—through inducements or intimidation—failed. The BNP's claim that 40 lakh of its activists were implicated in cases during the AL regime, testily to the unprecedented scale of repression, yet the party remained united. Khaleda Zia emerged as the enduring symbol of unity and democratic resolve.

Her electoral success is equally remarkable. She remains the only person in Bangladesh to have won elections 23 times (in terms of parliamentary seats), representing at least 12 constituencies across the country (excluding constituencies of her re-elections) from Rajshahi to Feni, a testament to her immense popularity among voters nationwide.

Do fireworks serve a purpose, or is it time to let them go?



MIND THE GAP
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NOSHIN NAWAL

Every year, Dhaka repeats the ritual of selective amnesia. We count fires, injuries, frightened animals, and hazardous air readings, then gently fold the conversation away until the next celebration rolls around. We are told fireworks and sky lanterns are traditional. They are joy. But do they serve a purpose that justifies their environmental, health, and safety costs, or are we clinging to a habit simply because it sparkles at midnight?

On December 31, 2024, fires broke out in the Dhanmondi and Mirpur areas, triggered by sky lanterns and firecrackers. On December 31, 2023, three teenagers suffered severe burns when a sky lantern they were releasing caught fire on a rooftop. Moreover, at least 40 sky lanterns were found stuck in the overhead electric wires of the Dhaka Metro Rail, forcing a suspension of services for several hours on New Year's morning. These are not isolated mishaps or unforeseeable tragedies. These are predictable collisions of sparks, dense housing, flammable materials,

largely emotional. They are associated with celebration, national milestones, religious festivals, and the visual language of joy. They look impressive. They create a sense of occasion. In some cases, they provide short-term income for people involved in manufacturing, transportation, and retail. That is the case in favour. It is not insignificant, but it is thin. What fireworks do not provide is any essential public service. They do not meet a basic need. They do not deliver a benefit that cannot be achieved through safer alternatives. No festival collapses without them. No cultural identity dissolves because the sky is not set on fire. Against this limited emotional return sits a catalogue of costs that are neither speculative nor minor.

Environmentally, fireworks are chemical events. Each burst releases fine particulate matter, including PM2.5, alongside heavy metals such as barium, strontium, and copper, as well as sulphur compounds and carbon residue. These particles do not disappear

Environmentally, fireworks are chemical events. Each burst releases fine particulate matter, including PM2.5, alongside heavy metals such as barium, strontium, and copper, as well as sulphur compounds and carbon residue. These particles do not disappear when the celebrations end. They settle into the air we breathe, the soil we grow food in, and the water bodies already struggling under pollution loads.

and lax enforcement. And still, by morning, the framing softens—an unfortunate turn of events. Never the obvious follow-up question of whether what caused these should continue to be freely sold, manufactured, and detonated in one of the most densely populated cities in the world.

The argument for fireworks remains

when the celebrations end. They settle into the air we breathe, the soil we grow food in, and the water bodies already struggling under pollution loads. In a city like Dhaka, where air quality routinely exceeds safe limits even on ordinary days, fireworks are not a marginal harm. They are compounding damage layered onto an already compromised system. Public

health impacts follow predictably. Medical literature consistently links fireworks-heavy events with spikes in asthma attacks, breathing difficulties, cardiovascular stress, sleep disruption, and emergency room visits.

Noise pollution adds another layer of harm, triggering stress responses and aggravating mental health conditions. The burden does not fall evenly. Children, the elderly, people with respiratory illness, and low-income

problem, not the ignition source.

Besides, animals experience the consequences in ways we rarely consider. Birds rely on stable light and sound cues to navigate. Explosions and flashes disorient them, sending them crashing into buildings or flying until exhaustion. Pets experience acute fear responses, trembling and hiding at night. Stray animals have no shelter, no warning, and no understanding of why the



Explosions and flashes disorient birds, sending them crashing into buildings or flying until exhaustion.

FILE PHOTO: STAR

communities living in dense neighbourhoods bear the brunt. Celebration, in practice, becomes a health risk disproportionately absorbed by those with the least capacity to avoid it.

Then there is safety, the part we insist on treating as a coincidence. Fires caused by fireworks are foreseeable outcomes in neighbourhoods where buildings sit close together, electrical wiring is often informal, and fire response capacity is stretched. When explosive devices are sold widely, used casually, and set off in confined urban spaces, fires are not anomalies. They are statistical likelihoods. Every year, we act surprised when buildings burn, as if sparks and flammable surroundings were an unexpected combination. We mourn damage without questioning design. We treat the fire as the

world has turned hostile.

Economically, the defence of fireworks as a livelihood generator does not survive serious scrutiny. Seasonal income is outweighed by long-term healthcare costs, fire damage, emergency response expenditure, environmental clean-up, and productivity losses. What looks like a celebratory industry often externalises its true costs onto the public, while the gains remain concentrated and temporary. So why does resistance to banning fireworks altogether remain so strong? Once something is labelled tradition, questioning it feels taboo. There is also fear of backlash, the idea that regulation will be read as moral policing rather than harm reduction. These concerns are real, but they are not insurmountable.

Policy does not mean erasure. It means

transition. Banning the manufacture and sale of fireworks does not mean banning celebration. It means redirecting how celebration happens. Many cities have already done this. Laser light shows, drone displays, quieter public spectacles, and community-based events offer visual impact without chemical fallout. Employment tied to fireworks can be redirected into lighting technology, event management, and regulated public displays that prioritise safety.

What is striking is how quickly we accept regulation in other areas once harm becomes undeniable. We no longer tolerate leaded petrol, indoor smoking, or unregulated industrial dumping, regardless of how normal they once were. Each of these practices was defended in the name of convenience, culture, or economic interest until evidence made denial impossible. Fireworks sit in that same category. The difference is aesthetic appeal. Pollution looks less offensive when it arrives wrapped in colour.

From a governance perspective, the status quo reflects a failure. Regulations often exist on paper, limiting timing, noise levels, or sales, but enforcement evaporates during festivals. Advisory notices replace action. Accountability reappears only after buildings burn or air quality rankings embarrass us.

The question is why continuing to allow a product that pollutes the air, endangers lives, traumatises animals, strains public health systems, and now very visibly sets neighbourhoods on fire is considered reasonable. If fireworks were introduced today as a new consumer product, there is little chance they would pass any serious environmental or safety assessment. They survive only because they are familiar.

Perhaps the most telling sign that this conversation is overdue is how defensive it makes people. Joy, we insist, must be loud. Celebration must explode. Anything quieter is framed as joyless. However, cities change. Practices evolve. Celebration, like everything else, must adapt to the realities it creates. At some point, we must ask whether clinging to fireworks is about honouring the past or refusing to grow up. Because if a product causes this much harm and our only defence is that it looks pretty in the sky for a few minutes, that is not a strong cultural argument. It is just a weak excuse, briefly illuminated, before the smoke settles again.

We don't need zoos, only safe places for wild animals

TAGABUN TAHARIM TITUN

At the beginning of December, a lioness named Daisy slipped out of her cage at Mirpur National Zoo for a few hours, sparking panic and a rushed evacuation. Soon, zoo staff sedated the frightened animal when they spotted her, using an anaesthetic gun. Finally, she was coaxed back into her cage within the night. The zoo director, Dr Rafiqul Islam, hinted at foul play and launched an investigation after finding both iron gates and locks of the cage mysteriously open. Addressing how unlocked gates could have precipitated a far worse disaster had more animals escaped, an investigation committee has been set up

more sorrowful story. Dr Mohammad Ali Reza Khan, an eminent wildlife conservationist, explains that these signs point not to a sudden crisis but to prolonged deprivation. Chronic malnutrition, lack of proper veterinary attention, hard concrete flooring, and the absence of natural ground surfaces can cause long-term pain, restricted movement, and deformities in captive big cats. Over time, such conditions strip animals of strength, mobility, and dignity.

This case has opened our eyes to a cruel mismatch between law and practice. Bangladesh's 2019 Animal Welfare Act mandates humane care and enrichment for captive creatures,



Lioness Daisy escaped her enclosure at Mirpur National Zoo on December 5 and roamed the grounds for over two and a half hours before being tranquillised—revealing not a predator on the loose, but a frail, exhausted animal struggling to survive.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

change. Dr Khan stresses that oversight cannot remain internal: “Zoos must be run and overseen by qualified zoological experts and relevant specialists, with transparent, verifiable records of every animal and clear institutional accountability; recurring irregularities at every step must be stopped.”

Regular independent audits and an external oversight commission should inspect procurement, transfers, and stalling to prevent the “step-by-step irregularities” he describes. Political or personal, project-driven appointments must be ended, training and clinical capacity expanded, and sanctioning mechanisms put in place so failures are not simply forgotten. These measures would create real accountability and halt recurring governance failures.

From sanctuaries in Africa to wildlife reserves in Singapore, animals long confined have thrived once freed from chains. After all, wild animals already have a voice: in their eyes and bodies, they speak of suffering, and owing them respect and freedom is the least we can do.

Seeing Daisy stumble from her enclosure and recalling Katabon's mass deaths forces a clear conclusion: captivity in any form—in market stalls, pet hubs, or national zoos—must end. We cannot justify keeping wild or domestic animals behind bars for spectacle, profit, or pastime. Authorities should phase out displays, stop new imports, and redirect resources into rehabilitation, reputable sanctuaries, and scientifically managed rewilding where possible. This is a matter of moral responsibility, not convenience. If we truly value life, we should change our policy to stop treating animals as entertainment and restore their welfare and dignity.

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Daisy's suffering is not an isolated lapse but a symptom of a deeply flawed system that treats wild animals as display objects rather than living beings.

FILE PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

to look into the breach. But the damage was long done. Daisy's escape has once again exposed decades of neglect behind those bars.

What the picture did not show

Even as early news swept over us, making many believe a rampaging predator was loose among the citizens, the truth remained largely unknown. Images of the emaciated lioness—ribs jutting, coat patchy, eyes dull—told a far

yet enforcement appears to be nearly nonexistent. Over several years, Mirpur Zoo's problems have been raised repeatedly by environmentalists and experts. Investigations have long catalogued the zoo's chronic neglect: underfunded feeding, inadequate veterinary care, tiny barren cages, and decaying facilities that reflect weak planning and reform efforts. Viewed this way, Daisy's escape looked less like rebellion and more like an animal's

desperate search for basic care.

The outdated model of animal captivity

Daisy's suffering is not an isolated lapse but a symptom of a deeply flawed system that treats wild animals as display objects rather than living beings. Zoos in Bangladesh evolved without a clear conservation mandate, gradually shifting towards revenue-driven exhibition while losing transparency and accountability. Animals were acquired, transferred, or replaced with little public record, and institutional memory itself became difficult to trace. As Dr Khan puts it, “There is no publicly verifiable inventory or historical record of animals in our zoos. Even their own institutional history cannot be found, leaving accountability virtually impossible.”

Rubaiya Ahmad, an animal advocate and founder of Obhoyaronno-Bangladesh Animal Welfare Foundation, warns that responsibility for captive animals in Bangladesh is fragmented—for example, Mirpur Zoo falls under the Livestock Department, while a safari park would be governed by wildlife authorities. Major welfare blind spots and legal contradictions result from this split. “Animals are not there for our entertainment,” she stresses, adding

that captivity can be justified only when it forms part of a genuine conservation effort to breed and reintroduce endangered species, not to satisfy a visitor economy.

Learning from a rescue revolution

Not all zoos are beyond reform. In Islamabad, public pressure and a court ruling closed Marghazar Zoo and transformed its grounds into the Margalla Wildlife Rescue Centre, which now treats injured bears, orphaned pangolins, and even a malnourished tiger cub, before relocating those that can be rewilded.

Elsewhere, high-profile failures have forced closures or legal action. The “Tiger King” exotic-cat park in the United States was ordered out of its current operators amid revelations of abuse and litigation. In Britain, the South Lakes Safari Zoo was branded by investigators as one of the worst examples of neglect. It closed after inspectors found animals missing, starving, or kept in wholly inadequate conditions.

These examples show two things: captivity can be reimagined as rescue and rehabilitation, and sustained public scrutiny can force institutions to choose care over display. For Bangladesh, reform must begin with structural

Who is robbing coastal communities of food sovereignty?

MD RAIHAN RAJU

The Ashtomashi Badh, or eight-month embankment, historically shaped the southwest coast of Bangladesh into an *ek fosholer desh*—a single-crop landscape—where peasants cultivated rice once a year using fresh water. Within these low-lying, embankment-protected deltaic areas, everyday life evolved around an integrated ecological system linking agriculture, fishing, and cattle rearing through shared grazing spaces. These grazing lands typically consisted of uncultivated *khas jomi*, *charland*, and fallow paddy fields. Situated alongside rice fields, this grazing landscape sustained a form of embedded food sovereignty, combining large-scale rice cultivation with household-level cow milk production, and supporting the ideal of a largely “self-sufficient” rural household.

Before the climate-resilience adaptation regime took hold in the 1980s, everyday survival in the delta rested on a diversified subsistence economy. Households relied on domestic milk production and consumption, the cultivation of vegetables and rice, and fishing in shared waterbodies to meet their basic needs. These practices were guided by an agricultural ethic of subsistence embedded within relatively egalitarian social relations across the deltaic landscape. Household formation itself was closely tied to agricultural food sovereignty, providing a stable foundation for domestic nutrition and livelihood security.

From the 1970s and 1980s onwards, however, state and non-state actors increasingly framed the future of the delta through scientific and technical narratives that forecast widespread submergence under saline water. Over time, Bangladesh's southwest coast came to be designated as the country's “most vulnerable” region and a climate “hotspot”, a dystopian framing that justified the introduction of large-scale sustainable development programmes. As this narrative gained traction, governing the climate hotspot in ways that could ensure long-term sustenance and survival emerged as a pressing political and policy challenge.

Within climate-resilience development frameworks, development brokers increasingly argued that saline-water intrusion into embankment-protected areas was inevitable, driven by recurring sea-level rise and embankment erosion. On this basis, they promoted a shift away from freshwater rice cultivation towards the expanded use of brackish-water species. During the 1980s and 1990s, major international donors actively prescribed and supported tiger-prawn aquaculture through a series of development projects in designated climate hotspots and highly vulnerable regions.



After saline-water intrusion, common grazing lands disappeared, leaving cattle without adequate pasture.

PHOTO: MD RAHAMATULLAH

These interventions particularly targeted low-lying deltaic communities portrayed as facing unavoidable saline intrusion due to climate change.

Consequently, from the late 1970s onwards, shrimp cultivation began to replace existing paddy fields across coastal Bangladesh. This transition was largely driven by local and external elites who possessed the financial capacity to invest in capital-intensive aquaculture operations. Under donor guidance, the Bangladesh government not only endorsed this shift but also provided administrative and institutional support to those establishing brackish-water aquaculture, promoting it as a sustainable and climate-resilient development pathway.

Yet the expansion of shrimp cultivation was neither smooth nor consensual. A substantial body of scholarship documents how land acquisition for shrimp farming frequently involved coercion and violence. Local villagers often resisted attempts by powerful actors to convert freshwater paddy lands into saline aquaculture zones, leading

to prolonged conflicts and bloodshed. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, violence became a defining feature of land grabbing for shrimp cultivation in the Bengal Delta.

Scholars have commonly identified the primary agents behind these forceful land appropriations as the so-called “shrimp mafia”. This raises a critical question: what legitimised the violent transformation of fertile agricultural land into saline aquaculture ponds? The answer lies in the climate-adaptive regimes and climate-resilient livelihood models imposed during this period. A class of shrimp cultivators consolidated power in the delta under the justification of climate adaptation, aided by donor-backed development programmes and direct state support.

Since the 1970s and 1980s, deltaic communities have found themselves caught within what is widely described as a climate-adaptive regime—one that structurally reorganises land and livelihoods around export-oriented brackish-water aquaculture, primarily shellfish. Development brokers frame this “blue revolution” as a rational

response to climate change, arguing that saline intrusion into embankment-protected habitats, paddy fields, and grazing lands is unavoidable. In practice, this process has de-peasantised the area, concentrating land ownership, displacing subsistence-based livelihoods, and preparing coastal territories for integration into global supply chains.

Saline intrusion, promoted as a climate-resilience strategy, has had devastating consequences for both local agriculture and common grazing lands. As the commons disappeared, domestic cattle rearing and household-level cow milk production for local consumption sharply declined.

In saline-affected areas such as Munshiganj Union, weekly markets continue to operate, yet networks of local producers and consumers trading domestically produced cow's milk have virtually vanished. The limited domestic milk that is still produced often reflects declining quality, a visible indicator of the wider impacts of salinity on livestock and fodder.

Similarly, in village markets near forest-adjacent zones, most vegetables are now

transported from the mature delta. Local vegetable-growing lands, paddy fields, and grazing areas have been degraded by saline intrusion, leaving households without kitchen gardens or the capacity for large-scale cultivation. Soil degradation—driven by climate-adaptation pressures and routinely justified as an unavoidable response to climate change—has pushed food production out of local control. As a result, vegetable prices in the southwest coast are significantly higher than in the mature delta.

Across coastal Bangladesh, brackish-water aquaculture is steadily dismantling agro-based household economies and eroding food sovereignty. Communities are losing access to grazing lands, domestic milk production, and the social practices that once sustained household-making. What is presented as climate resilience has, in reality, transformed everyday survival into a struggle against dispossession.

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FROM HYDRO-COERCION TO WATER JUSTICE

Why the Ganges Treaty and shared rivers demand a new imagination

FARHANA SULTANA

“There once was a river here.” Across the Bengal Delta, this lament has become a hauntingly common refrain, signalling a transformation that is as much political as it is environmental. For Bangladesh, water is far more than a resource; it is the vital pulse of our ecological resilience and the primary determinant of our human vulnerability. Yet, in the high-stakes geopolitical landscape of South Asia, our rivers are increasingly being reconfigured from lifelines into instruments of hydro-coercion. As we stand at a historic junction, marked by the aftermath of the July 2024 revolution and the looming 2026 expiration of the Ganges Water Sharing Treaty, it is time to address the big picture of our water security. We must move beyond a legacy of downstream capitulation towards a future of water justice grounded in the recognition of our rivers as ecological commons.

The July 2024 uprising in Bangladesh did more than just overthrow a regime; it fundamentally altered the political foundations that had, for sixteen years, enabled India’s hydro-coercive practices. Under the previous India backed administration, Bangladesh often adopted a subservient posture in which domestic

infrastructure to reconfigure deltaic hydro-social territories. The Farakka Barrage is the most potent and enduring symbol of this material dominance. Commissioned in 1975 without meaningful consultation or consent from Bangladesh, the barrage unilaterally diverts dry-season flows. This infrastructure is not merely a technical solution for navigability but an enduring instrument of control that embeds hydro-insecurity into our national consciousness. By physically altering the flow of the Ganges, India uses its geographical advantage to impose a reality of scarcity upon the downstream delta, effectively redrawing the social and ecological map of the region to suit its own interests.

The second dimension is institutional hydro-coercion, which operates through procedural manipulation, bargaining power, and what can be described as institutional stalling. The prolonged stalemate over the Teesta River is a clear instance of this strategy. Although an agreement was nearly finalised in 2011, it has been blocked for over a decade by the state government of West Bengal. This subnational veto allows the Indian federal government to avoid accountability for diplomatic failure while implicitly using the unresolved issue as leverage. This



The transboundary journey of the Ganges, flowing from the Himalayan foothills through Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and West Bengal before entering Bangladesh.



Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna (GBM) Basin

political legitimacy was essentially traded for Indian diplomatic patronage. This political accommodation created a dangerous feedback loop where our leadership avoided confronting treaty violations or upstream unilateralism in order to preserve broader bilateral ties. The revolution represented a conceivable rupture in this pattern of downstream capitulation. The popular uprising was fuelled by a deep-seated resentment against what many perceived as imperial control over domestic sovereignty, with water often serving as the primary tool of that control. Today, there is a burgeoning demand from the youth movement and civil society to decolonise our water governance and to challenge the colonial logics that have long normalised the advantage of upstream riparians at the expense of our survival.

To navigate this new era, we must understand what I have described as hydro-coercion, a strategic evolution of hydro-hegemony. While hydro-hegemony describes a general state of dominance in which a riparian state uses power to secure water objectives, hydro-coercion is the active weaponisation of water control for immediate and long-term political objectives. It functions as a mechanism of escalating spatial and geopolitical domination, where the upstream state exerts direct or indirect pressure on downstream states to force compliance. In the India-Bangladesh context, this power is deployed through three distinct but overlapping strategies that amount to a form of political colonisation.

The first of these is material hydro-coercion, which involves the physical control of water resources through large-scale

manufactured scarcity is a deliberate strategic delay in which non-decision and silence are weaponised as forms of structural power. By keeping Bangladesh in a state of perpetual negotiation and vulnerability, India maintains an advantageous position that pressures our nation into broader strategic alignment.

The third pillar is ideational hydro-coercion, which utilises water nationalism and diplomatic signalling to shape narratives of sovereignty and development. Water is imbued with powerful nationalistic meanings, transforming it from a natural resource into a symbol of national identity that justifies unilateral extraction. India frames its upstream schemes as essential to its national progress, often characterising downstream claims as impediments to its sovereign prerogatives. This ideational control extends to overt diplomatic pressure; for example, recent reports indicate that Indian politicians have suggested the 1996 Ganges Treaty could be reconsidered if Bangladesh’s foreign policy diverges from Indian interests. Such statements explicitly link vital water access to foreign policy compliance, using water as a tool of deterrence to prevent Bangladesh from pursuing strategic autonomy or closer ties with other regional powers.

The consequences of these coercive practices are not abstract theories but lived realities of pervasive precarity for millions of Bangladeshis. The diversion of the Ganges has led to severe salinity intrusion in our coastal regions, devastating agricultural lands and compromising potable water sources. This ecological degradation directly threatens the Sundarbans,

which is the world’s largest mangrove forest and our primary defence against climate-induced cyclones. In the north, the lack of predictable flow from the Teesta has led to the collapse of traditional livelihoods in fishing and agriculture. These disruptions drive internal migration and displacement, as rural communities are forced to abandon their ancestral lands for the precarious life of urban slums. This displacement is a form of structural violence, where hegemonic control over water fuels the redrafting of the social fabric of our nation.

This structural inequality is reaching a breaking point due to the threat multiplier of climate change. We are entering an era of unprecedented hydro-variability, where Himalayan glaciers are projected to decline by up to 40 percent by 2100. For Bangladesh, this means a future of catastrophic monsoon floods followed by acute dry-season scarcity. Our existing agreements, particularly the 1996 Ganges Treaty, are tragically ill-equipped for this volatility. The treaty treats water as a divisible commodity to be quantified and allocated based on historical data rather than as a shared, interconnected ecological system. It lacks flexible mechanisms for climate adaptation, enforceable environmental flow regimes, or joint data-sharing platforms. As the treaty approaches its 2026 expiration, we must realise that a static agreement is no longer a tool of cooperation; in a climate-stressed world, it becomes another mechanism of control.

It is a mistake to view water justice as a zero-sum game, because from a strategic perspective, hydro-coercion is self-defeating for India. A water-stressed, ecologically fragile Bangladesh is a source of regional instability. The cascading effects of environmental degradation, including mass migration, state fragility, and economic shocks, do not respect national borders. Furthermore, the regional power dynamic is shifting, as China’s aggressive dam-building on the upper Brahmaputra creates a cascading hierarchy in which India itself is vulnerable to upstream control. If India continues to adopt a coercive posture towards its downstream neighbour, it weakens its own moral and legal standing when challenging Chinese unilateralism. True regional stability requires cooperative precedents rather than coercive ones.

Beyond the immediate concerns of water flow, the health of the India-Bangladesh relationship is foundational to broader regional prosperity across the energy, trade, and

transportation sectors. Bangladesh provides critical transit and transshipment facilities that connect India’s northeastern states to its mainland, while India is a major source of the electricity and consumer goods that fuel our economy. These sectors are deeply interdependent, yet this interdependence is poisoned by the mistrust generated by hydro-coercion. When water is used as a diplomatic lever, it creates a climate of uncertainty that hinders long-term investment in regional connectivity and energy grids. For instance, the vision of a seamless South Asian power pool, where hydroelectricity from Nepal and Bhutan flows through India to Bangladesh, cannot be realised if the participating nations remain locked in hydro-political disputes. Stable, neighbourly relations are not a luxury but a prerequisite for the economic integration that could lift millions out of poverty across the entire basin.

The path forward requires a fundamental structural transformation in how we govern our transboundary waters. We must move beyond narrow, secretive bilateral negotiations towards comprehensive basin-wide governance. This means involving all riparian states, including Nepal, Bhutan, India, and China, in holistic planning for our shared river systems. Bangladesh’s June 2025 entry into the UNECE Water Convention is a critical first step in this strategic pivot, anchoring our claims in international legal norms of equitable and reasonable utilisation. This multilateral shift provides a normative basis to challenge unilateral actions and assert our downstream rights in a way that bilateralism never could.

Transformative governance also necessitates the establishment of enforceable ecological safeguards. Future treaties must recognise the intrinsic value of water and include legally binding minimum environmental flow regimes to protect the health of our rivers and the biodiversity of the delta. Alongside these safeguards, we must demand drastic data transparency. The current information asymmetry is a tool of coercion, and we must insist on the mandatory, real-time sharing of hydrological and climate data. This is foundational for building trust, creating early warning systems, and ensuring collaborative management in an era of climate uncertainty. Most importantly, we must shift the

discourse from water as a diplomatic concession to water as a fundamental human right. Access to water for basic needs, livelihoods, and ecological sustenance must be non-negotiable.

The upcoming expiration of the Ganges Treaty in 2026 is our most significant strategic inflection point. We cannot afford to passively await upstream goodwill while our rivers dwindle. We must use this moment to demand an epistemic rupture, which is a break from the colonial-era logic of extraction and control. The rivers of the Bengal Delta are an ecological commons and a shared heritage that demands collective stewardship rather than competitive exploitation. By centring the voices of downstream communities and grounding our governance in ecological justice and the principles of the ecological commons, we can turn our shared rivers into sources of regional strength.

For a deltaic nation like Bangladesh, achieving water justice is not merely a goal of foreign policy; it is the absolute prerequisite for our survival. Sustainable water governance cannot rest upon the political subordination of downstream populations. If we are to ensure a stable and prosperous South Asia, we must move towards a future where shared rivers foster genuine cooperation and resilience rather than remaining potent symbols of power imbalance and perennial conflict. Only by radically changing our approach to water and embracing the principles of joint basin stewardship can we hope to preserve the lifeblood of our delta for generations to come. An equitable water future is the only path towards the regional peace and human security that our people so urgently deserve.

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The Farakka Barrage in West Bengal stands as the primary site of upstream water control on the Ganges.





Parsha Mahjabeen Purnee



Ankan Kumar



Nawba Tahiya



Shibu

Young stars who broke out IN 2025



Saad Salmi Naovi



Puja Agnes Cruze



Rakib Hossain Evon



Sadnima Binte Noman

SHARMIN JOYA

This year introduced a promising wave of new faces who brought renewed optimism for the years ahead. Through confident performances and remarkable screen presence, they not only showcased their potential but also won genuine appreciation from audiences. As the year draws to a close, let us look back at the artistes who stood out, earned applause, and signalled a vibrant future for the industry.

Rakib Hossain Evon

2025 proved to be a defining year for Evon. His performance in Raihan Rafi's *Taandob*, one of the year's biggest commercial successes, brought him wider recognition, particularly for his subtle yet impactful screen presence alongside Shakib Khan.

He followed this with a measured performance in Amitabh Reza Chowdhury's web series *Bohemian Ghora*, sharing the frame with Mosharraf Karim and showing growing confidence as an actor.

With Raihan Khan's *Tribunal* lined up for next year, Evon ends the year not as a newcomer, but as a talent steadily finding his place.

Saad Salmi Naovi

Naovi emerged as one of this year's most promising talents. He won praise for his role as Maruf in Chorki's *Little Miss*

Chaos and charmed viewers with his nuanced performance in the TV drama *Roop* alongside Nishi and Monira Mithu.

They say a little appearance can make a big difference, which proved true for Naovi. He captured attention for his brief yet memorable scenes with Jaya Ahsan in *Taandob*. This is just the beginning of his journey in shaping a remarkable career.

Puja Agnes Cruze

Puja had a breakthrough year in 2025, turning long-nurtured dreams into reality with her silver screen debut in *Esha Murder*, where she played the titular character—a role that marked a significant milestone in her acting journey and showcased her acting potential to wider audiences.

After years of honing her craft since placing in the top 10 of Lux Super Star in 2018, Puja's performance this year established her as an emerging talent in Bangla cinema, drawing attention for both her commitment and screen presence.

Nawba Tahiya

Nawba Tahiya had a busy and meaningful 2025, returning to acting after a study break and immediately appearing in several well-received dramas, including *Deyal*, *Shesh Chithi* and *Protiksha* with Partho Sheikh and Prantor Dastidar. She also delivered a strong performance in the web-film *Noya Note*, where her bubbly yet

resilient character added emotional depth to the story. Balancing education with her craft, Nawba continued to connect with viewers through natural, authentic portrayals and growing screen presence.

Ankan Kumar

Ankan Kumar's soothing voice first won many hearts with his song *Upo* from Hatirpool Sessions, where his calm, melodic delivery made a lasting impression. This year brought him even greater visibility as his track *Long Distance Love*—a duet featured on Coke Studio Bangla Season 3—became a hit, topping Spotify's Top Viral Songs chart in India and resonating deeply with listeners for its heartfelt portrayal of love across miles. His blend of emotion, melody and vulnerability continues to win audiences and chart attention.

Parsha Mahjabeen Purnee

Parsha Mahjabeen Purnee had a standout year, both as a singer and actor. She won hearts with her socially resonant original song *Cholo Bhule Jai*, last year, which became a voice of youthful sentiment during the July Movement. She made her acting debut in Jahid Preetom's *Ghumpori*, earning praise for her portrayal of Usha in the Chorki film's poignant love story.

Parsha also performed at major cultural events both at national and international stages, connecting with

audiences through both music and screen work, signalling a promising artistic journey ahead.

Sadnima Binte Noman

Sadnima Binte Noman made a notable impression in 2025 with her breakthrough role as Ira in the Chorki web film *Little Miss Chaos*, where her natural and unfiltered performance captured audience attention and marked her rise in the OTT scene. She also expanded her screen presence by starring opposite Khairul Basar in *Gold Fish*, showcasing her range from drama to light-hearted roles. With steady work in television and web films, Sadnima's year highlighted both growth and versatility.

Shibu

Shibu, the emerging Bangla pop sensation, made waves in 2025 with his viral track *10 e 10*, which quickly became a social media phenomenon, trending on Instagram and TikTok and striking a chord with audiences both locally and internationally.

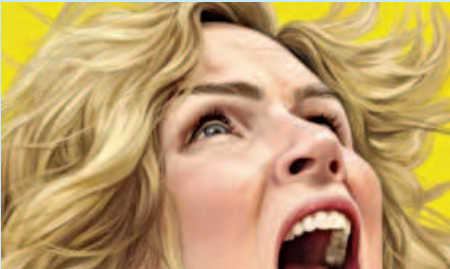
Released in April, the song steadily gained popularity, expanding his fanbase, particularly on Spotify. His follow-up single, *Tauba*, also garnered attention, while Shibu prepares for upcoming live performances and new releases, exploring a growing folk-fusion style that highlights his versatility and promise in the Bangla music scene.

TRENDY STREAMS

Netflix Cashero



Apple TV+ Pluribus



Prime Video Fakes (Farzi)



Hoichoi Feludar Goyendagiri



HBO Max Peacemaker



OUT AND ABOUT IN DHAKA



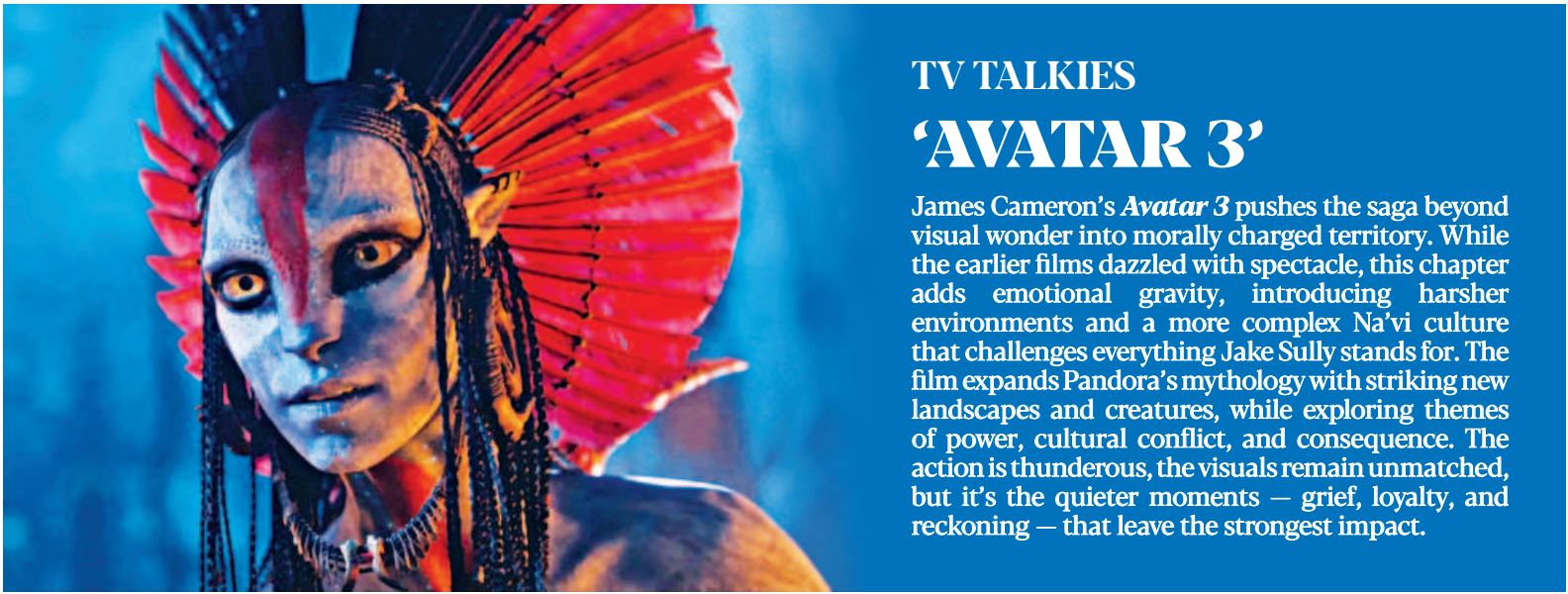
Shunyo Abhirup (When Emptiness becomes Creation)

Jan 9-17 | 5 pm
Bangladesh Military Museum



Unplugged Vibe Session

Jan 8 | 4 pm
Yamaha Flagship Center



TV TALKIES

‘AVATAR 3’

James Cameron's *Avatar 3* pushes the saga beyond visual wonder into morally charged territory. While the earlier films dazzled with spectacle, this chapter adds emotional gravity, introducing harsher environments and a more complex Na'vi culture that challenges everything Jake Sully stands for. The film expands Pandora's mythology with striking new landscapes and creatures, while exploring themes of power, cultural conflict, and consequence. The action is thunderous, the visuals remain unmatched, but it's the quieter moments — grief, loyalty, and reckoning — that leave the strongest impact.

WHAT'S PLAYING

‘Let Down’ by Radiohead

Let Down is one of Radiohead's most precise studies of modern alienation. Built on overlapping guitar figures and a steady, almost mechanical pulse, the song captures the quiet erosion of feeling that comes with routine, crowds, and unexamined expectations. Thom Yorke's vocal never strains for drama; instead, it circles the melody, conveying exhaustion and longing in equal measure.

First released on *OK Computer* in 1997, *Let Down* was overshadowed at the time by the album's more confrontational tracks. Over the years, however, it has gained stature as listeners have returned to its subtler emotional register. Its renewed popularity across streaming platforms speaks less to nostalgia than to relevance: the song's portrait of disconnection feels increasingly familiar.

What gives *Let Down* its lasting power is its refusal to offer easy release. The brief lift of the chorus suggests hope, but never quite delivers it. In that tension lies the song's enduring clarity; an unflinching reflection of life lived slightly out of sync with itself.



A career that opened doors

AGENCIES

Australia will bid farewell to Usman Khawaja at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Sunday, with the veteran left-hander confirming that the fifth and final Ashes Test against England will be his last appearance in international cricket.

The 39-year-old will end his career at the same venue and against the same opponents as his Test debut in 2011. Australia already hold an unassailable 3-1 lead in the five-match contest, with their only defeat coming in Melbourne, where England carved out their first Test victory in Australia in 15 years. But Khawaja's announcement has shifted the focus of the finale to his personal journey.

"I'm very happy that I get to leave on my own terms at the SCG," said an emotional Khawaja, who was seen hugging his kids after the press conference. "It's nostalgic. It's special. As I walk off for the last time, I do so with gratitude and peace, or, as we say, salaam."

Born in Islamabad, Khawaja immigrated to Australia as a child and went on to become the country's first Pakistan-born and first Muslim Test cricketer. At one stage, he was the only Asian first-class player in Australia, a path that he said was shaped by persistent stereotyping.

"I'm a proud Muslim coloured boy from Pakistan who was told that he would never play for the Australian cricket team. Look at me now, and you can do the same," he said, adding that he was subjected to "racial stereotypes" during his career.

This will be Khawaja's 88th Test, having



already scored 6,206 runs at an average of 43.39 with 16 centuries, including a career-best 232 against Sri Lanka last year. He also represented Australia in 40 one-day internationals and nine T20Is.

The current Ashes series proved turbulent for the veteran. He injured his back in the opening Test in Perth and was replaced by Travis Head in the second innings. He missed the Brisbane Test, was initially omitted for Adelaide before being recalled when Steve Smith fell ill, and then made 82 and 40 at number four. In the fourth Test in Melbourne, he scored 29 and 0.

Khawaja said the criticism he received after his injury was particularly confronting. He described being labelled 'lazy' and 'selfish' over his preparation, remarks he said reflected lingering racial stereotyping.

Despite the upheaval, he said that being left out in Adelaide signalled it was time to move on. The fifth Test at Sydney will now serve as the final chapter of a 15-year international career that began, and will end, at the SCG.

Sudan seek more than a win

AGENCIES

When Sudan face Senegal in the Africa Cup of Nations last-16 clash on Saturday, the team will be carrying a hope that goes far beyond football – that a win might bring a moment of calm, or even a path toward peace, in a country devastated by war.

Coach Kwesi Appiah said on Friday that Sudan are clinging to the belief that success on the pitch can help ease the suffering at home, where fighting has raged since April 2023 between the Sudanese army and a paramilitary group that evolved from the Janjaweed militia once mobilised to suppress unrest in Darfur.

The conflict has killed tens of thousands, displaced millions and pushed large parts of the country into famine. Yet Sudan's players have continued to compete in exile, reaching the knockout stage of the Africa Cup of Nations for only the second time since their lone triumph in 1970.

Asked about the impact of the war on his squad, Appiah struggled to contain his emotions.

"Most of the time I try to run away from these questions because the emotions are terrible," he said. "It is not something that we want to talk about, but we are hoping that if we win, it will let



the war calm down or even cease."

The Ghanaian-born coach recalled a moment from a recent World Cup qualifier that showed football's power.

"There was a game we won when the armies put their guns down, and everyone was celebrating. Football can change things in this world," he said.

Sudan have not been able to play a home match for the past three years, with much of their football infrastructure damaged by the fighting. The country's top two clubs have relocated to Rwanda, competing as guests in the local league, while Khartoum's Al Hilal have also reached the group stage of this season's Champions League.

Captain Bakht Khamis said the toll of exile has been immense, yet he stressed that the players have remained united in their purpose.

"It's very hard on us to live away from our families, from our homes. Everything we are doing on the pitch is an attempt to make things better for our people," Khamis said.

As Sudan prepare to meet heavily favoured Senegal in Tangier, the match represents not just a chance to extend their Cup of Nations run, but a rare opportunity to offer their nation a moment of hope in the midst of turmoil.

Fizz fastest pacer to 400 T20 wickets

Bangladesh's Mustafizur Rahman became the fastest pacer to reach 400 T20 wickets during a Bangladesh Premier League fixture at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday. Playing for Rangpur Riders, the left-arm pacer, who began his 315th T20 match on 399 wickets, claimed his 400th scalp by dismissing Sylhet Titans captain Mehidy Hasan Miraz. In the process, he surpassed Pakistan pacer Wahab Riaz, who needed 335 matches to reach the landmark. Mustafizur also became the second-fastest overall to enter the 400-wicket club, with only Afghanistan spin king Rashid Khan getting there quicker in 289 games. The cutter master is now the 11th player to take 400 T20 wickets and the second from Bangladesh after Shakib Al Hasan, who required 353 matches to reach the milestone.

PHOTO: BCB

- Fizz for Bangladesh: 158 wickets in 128 matches
- Fizz in franchise cricket: 244 wickets in 187 matches



BPL form not enough for T20 World Cup nod?

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has reportedly already submitted the preliminary squad for the ICC T20 World Cup to the ICC and according to sources, is expected to make it public today.

As per rumours, the preliminary squad doesn't have many surprises. Jaker Ali, who has been struggling for form for a while, has reportedly been axed while Test skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto and young pacer Ripon Mondol, despite impressing in the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), have not been included.

Shanto is the top-scorer in the BPL this season after four games, amassing 203 runs at an average of 67.66 and strike-rate of just over 147. He is also the only batter to have hit a ton this BPL, a 60-ball unbeaten 101 against Sylhet Titans for Rajshahi Warriors.

Shanto's inclusion was pondered, according to BCB sources, but it was decided not to add him as his usual No.3 position is locked up for T20 skipper Litton Das and the management is grooming Parvez Hossain Emon, who is in second position in the BPL run-getter's list, for No.4.

This leaves only the opening slots for Shanto, which are earmarked for Tanzid Hasan Tamim and vice-captain



Saif Hassan.

Even though Shanto has outshone both of them so far in the BPL, with Tanzid making 61 in four innings and Saif managing three single-digit scores till date, the selectors perhaps felt their knocks for the Tigers in T20Is last year are a better indicator of their calibre than BPL performances.

A BCB source also said that the team management was reluctant to name Shanto in the squad only to bench him.

The BCB, however, have till January 20 to make changes to the squad, and if the openers don't start performing in the BPL and Shanto keeps scoring big runs, there remains a slight chance of him making a last-minute comeback, as per sources.

Meanwhile, for Rajshahi pacer Ripon,

who was named the player-of-the-match in both matches he has played so far, the World Cup perhaps comes too fast for his selection as the team management appears to be depending on the tried and tested.

The 22-year-old picked up 4-13 against Noakhali Express, took the game against Rangpur Riders into the Super Over while defending only seven in the 20th over and then bowled a six-run Super Over to set up a tremendous win. However, with a settled pace attack in place, the selectors chose not to add him as a surprise inclusion.

There is a gaping hole in the rumoured squad in terms of batting options, with the management looking at all-rounder Mohammad Saifuddin to fill the gap at No.7 left vacant by Jaker's exclusion while also making an impact with his death-over bowling skills in Kolkata, where the Tigers will play three of their four group matches.

Despite the wafer-thin middle-order and no genuine batter as a back-up, the management is reluctant to add a new face. "This team has been groomed for the last one year. Given it is a World Cup, when you introduce someone new, it is difficult to manage in terms of team combinations. Apart from [Mahidul Islam] Ankon and Shanto, there are not too many options either [for inclusions]," an official informed.

Tigers' 2026 home fixtures

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) revealed its full home fixtures for the year for the first time, doing so for the 2026 season on Friday.

Pakistan ODI series 1st ODI: March 12 2nd ODI: March 14 3rd ODI: March 16	3rd ODI: June 11 1st T20I: June 15 2nd T20I: June 18 3rd T20I: June 20
New Zealand ODI & T20I series 1st ODI: April 17 2nd ODI: April 20 3rd ODI: April 23 1st T20I: April 27 2nd T20I: April 29 3rd T20I: May 2	India ODI & T20I series 1st ODI: September 1 2nd ODI: September 3 3rd ODI: September 6 1st T20I: September 9 2nd T20I: September 12 3rd T20I: September 13
Pakistan Test series (WTC) 1st Test: May 8-12 2nd Test: May 16-20	West Indies Tests (WTC) 3-day warm-up: October 22-24 1st Test: October 28-1 November 2nd Test: November 5-9
Australia ODI & T20I series 1st ODI: June 5 2nd ODI: June 8	



“It allows all related parties to plan their programmes accordingly. By knowing the international schedule, local cricket can be scheduled to prepare players for upcoming international matches. It also helps manage logistical issues. However, there is still a little possibility of changes if an absolute necessity arises.

BCB cricket operations chairman
Nazmul Abedeen Fahim

Bangladesh name U-19 WC squad

SPORTS REPORTER

Pacer Al Fahad returned to the fold as the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) on Friday announced a 15-member squad for the upcoming ICC Under-19 World Cup, to be held in Zimbabwe and Namibia from January 15.

Fahad, who missed the recent ACC U-19 Asia Cup in the UAE due to injury, is the only change from the Asia Cup squad, replacing fellow pacer Md Sobuj, who has been named among the seven standbys.

Azizul Hakim Tamim will lead the Junior Tigers in the global event, with Zawad Abrar appointed vice-captain.

Bangladesh squad: Azizul Hakim Tamim (c), Zawad Abrar (vc), Samiun Basir Ratul, Sheikh Parvez Jibon, Rizan Hossan, Shaharia Al Amin, Shadin Islam, Md Abdullah, Farid Hasan Faysal, Kalam Siddiki Aleen, Rifat Beg, Saad Islam Razin, Al Fahad, Shahriar Ahmed and Iqbal Hossain Emon.



Border Guard Bangladesh players catch a Bangladesh Navy raider during the first semifinal of the of National Kabaddi Championship (men's event) at the Shaheed Captain M Mansur Ali National Handball Stadium in Dhaka on Friday. BGB edged Navy 40-37 in a keenly contested affair to set up Saturday's final against Bangladesh Army, who beat Bangladesh Air Force 33-30 in the other semifinal. Meanwhile, the women's final, also scheduled for today, will be between Bangladesh Police and Bangladesh Ansar &VDP.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



‘We will govern expansively, audaciously’

Says NY Mayor Mamdani in his inaugural speech

AFP, New York

Zohran Mamdani promised Thursday to show left-wing politics can succeed as he took over as New York mayor for a term sure to see him cross swords with US President Donald Trump.

Thousands of people gathered in freezing conditions in the United States’ largest city to celebrate the 34-year-old Democrat’s inauguration after his impressive political rise from relative anonymity just a year ago.

“They want to know if the left can govern. They want to know if the struggles that afflict them can be solved,” Mamdani said outside City Hall. “We will do something that New Yorkers do better than anyone else: we will set an example for the world.”

In the 24-minute speech, he added: “Beginning today, we will govern expansively and audaciously.”

SEE PAGE 5 COL 3



For quite some time, Northbrook Hall Road near Victoria Park in Old Dhaka has remained dug up for the renovation of the sewage system. Locals complain that the slow pace of work by Dhaka South City Corporation is disrupting daily life. Iron rods and mud piled on the road restrict movement, while open trenches pose risks of injuries, and the stagnant water raises fears of a dengue outbreak. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Dense fog disrupts flights, triggers road accidents

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dense fog returned to Dhaka and elsewhere across the country yesterday morning after two days of clearer weather, disrupting flight schedules and causing multiple road accidents.

According to the Bangladesh Meteorological Department, seven districts were under a cold wave yesterday, compared to 16 districts the previous day.

The fog spread over nearly two-thirds of the country, including Dhaka and most other areas, except parts of the Rajshahi, Rangpur and Khulna divisions, reducing visibility and creating unsafe conditions on roads and at airports.

The BMD also said the country may experience two to three mild to moderate cold waves and one to two moderate to severe cold waves in January.

In some areas mercury may go down to as low as 4°C, as per the month’s climate outlook that was issued following an expert committee meeting on Thursday.

Earlier, sunlight returned on Wednesday after four consecutive days of fog. Light fog remained on Thursday morning, but dense fog returned early yesterday.

Asked about the cold spell, Tariful Newaz Kabir, a meteorologist at the BMD, said the weather may remain the same for the next few days.

The daytime temperature may rise slightly tomorrow [Sunday], but the mercury will drop again from the following day, he said.

“As there will be a thick fog blanket over most of the

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

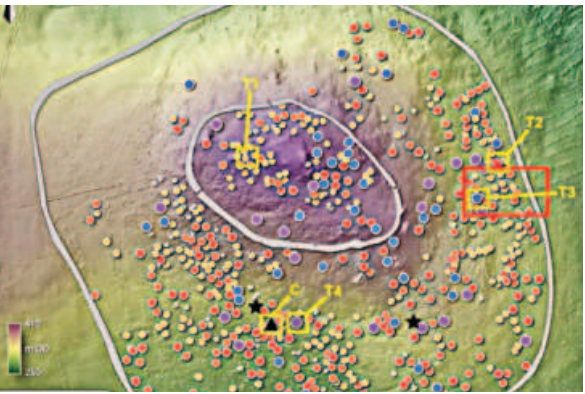
Prehistoric village discovered in Britain, Ireland

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Archaeologists have uncovered what could be the largest cluster of houses ever discovered in the entirety of prehistoric Britain and Ireland.

Until now, the largest cluster of ancient settlements known in Ireland was Mullaghfarna, an archaeological site in County Sligo.

The mound is thought to have contained over 150 houses during the middle Stone Age period of 3300–2900 BC, and also in the later Bronze Age period between 1200–900 BC.



Now, researchers have found evidence of an even larger settlement containing over 600 houses existing in prehistoric Ireland during the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age periods between 3700–800 BC.

The prehistoric house remains were unearthed in County Wicklow, Ireland. This region, called the Baltinglass hillfort cluster, has up to 13 large hilltop enclosures spread across a “necklace” of hills at the south-western edge of the Wicklow Mountains, with at least seven major hillforts and several additional enclosures.

SAINT MARTIN’S 20-BED HOSPITAL

When the sea stands between life and death

Most patients sent to Teknaf as lone hospital fails 10,000

TANGILA TASMIN

Forty-five-year-old fisherman Roton Mollah has been raising his young daughter alone for the past year after losing his wife and unborn child while trying to reach medical care from Saint Martin’s Island.

“When she went into labour, I hired an auto-rickshaw and rushed her to the only hospital on the island. There were no doctors, only a few technicians. They told me to take her to Teknaf if I wanted proper treatment.”

He set off again, hoping to reach the mainland in time. But before they could board a trawler, his wife collapsed from pain and died on the jetty. Their unborn child also died.

“People in Saint Martin’s Island continue to die from otherwise easily treatable conditions. Just a few months ago, a man died from a heart attack because the hospital had no doctors or equipment,” he said.

Saint Martin’s Island, the smallest administrative unit (union) in Bangladesh, is home to thousands but lacks adequate education and healthcare facilities. Water transport remains the primary mode of travel.

- Staff shortages persist despite projects
- Only basic care available
- Home births linked to maternal, neonatal deaths
- Referral hospitals across the Bay
- Transport delays proving fatal



According to the 2022 census, the union had a population of 8,492 – about 4,491 males and 4,001 females. The Health Services Division now estimates the number of permanent residents at around 10,000.

Yet the entire population, along with tourists, relies on a single facility – Saint Martin’s 20-Bed

Hospital. Established in 2002, it initially had 10 beds before being expanded to 20.

Though it initially had a workforce of around 30, including doctors, nurses, technicians and support staff, locals said most left soon after joining and the vacancies were never properly filled.

They added that medical teams arrive only temporarily through short-term projects or agreements.

Earlier media reports said that 16 NGO officials and employees were appointed at the hospital in March 2020 under a Health and Gender Support Project, but the posts lapsed after the project ended on June 30 last year due to a lack of funding.

A 2025 study titled “Community-based Environmental Management: The Case of St Martin’s Island, Bangladesh”, published by the Association for International Agricultural and Extension Education, found that the hospital offers only basic care – treating fever, diarrhoea, minor injuries and normal births.

The lack of proper medical services is further compounded by geographic isolation, irregular transport and the absence of

SEE PAGE 5 COL 4

Labour shortages, fog push up some veggie prices

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Winter vegetables are now abundantly available across Dhaka’s kitchen markets, but shoppers continue to face mixed price trends as labour shortages and fog-related disruptions keep several items costlier than expected.

Traders say dense fog in producing regions disrupted harvesting, while a shortage of farm labour pushed up procurement costs. “Workers were unwilling to work unless paid more. As a result, prices for some veggies rose by Tk 10–20 per kilogramme compared to last week,” one trader said.

Onion prices, however, have eased by Tk 10–20 per kg within a week, selling at Tk 50–60 in retail markets. Imported onions were priced at Tk 60–70.

At Karwan Bazar, wholesale potato trader Md Sabuj of Bikrampur Bhandar said old potatoes from cold storage are now available at nominal prices, selling at Tk 9–11 per kg wholesale.

New potatoes are costlier, with wholesale prices rising by Tk 2 per kg over the past week to Tk 15–20, while retail prices stood at Tk 25–30.

Supplies are currently arriving from Thakurgaon and Nilphamari, mostly hybrid varieties, with Bogura expected to begin shipments in two weeks and Munshiganj in about a month.

Mosharraf Hossain, a trader with decades in the business, said prices of coriander leaves, green chillies, beans, cauliflower and cabbage are comparatively cheaper, but tomatoes, eggplant, ridge gourd, bottle gourd, long beans and radish have all seen hikes of Tk 10–20 per kg.

Ripe tomatoes, which sold for Tk 60–70 last week, were

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US ‘locked and loaded’ to respond

Trump warns to intervene if Iran suppresses peaceful protests; Tehran vows response

AFP, Washington

President Donald Trump said yesterday that the United States is “locked and loaded” to respond if Iran kills protesters, after cost-of-living demonstrations in the country turned deadly.

Protesters and security forces clashed in several Iranian cities Thursday with six reported killed in the first deaths since the unrest escalated.

Shopkeepers in the capital Tehran went on strike Sunday over high prices and economic stagnation, actions that have since spread to other parts of the country.

Trump said on his Truth Social platform that “if Iran shots and violently kills peaceful protesters, which is their custom, the United States of America will come to their rescue.”

“We are locked and loaded and ready to go,” the Republican leader added.

Meanwhile, Iran yesterday warned against any US intervention in the country, vowing a response. “Any interventionist hand that attacks Iran’s security under any pretext whatsoever will be exposed to a response,” Ali Shamkhani, an adviser to the supreme leader, wrote on X. “Iran’s security is a red line.”

Iran’s Fars news agency reported Thursday that two people were killed in clashes between security forces and protesters in the city of Lordegan, in the province of Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, and three in Azna, in neighbouring Lorestan province.



PHOTO: REUTERS

A mourner lights candles outside the “Le Constellation” bar yesterday after a New Year’s Eve fire and explosion in Crans-Montana, Switzerland, that killed at least 40 and injured more than 100. Investigators have begun the painful task of identifying the victims.



Rhymester Sukumar Barua dies

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ekushey Padak winning esteemed rhymester Sukumar Barua is no more. He died at 6:55am yesterday at a hospital in Chattogram. He was 87.

His daughter, Anjana Barua, confirmed the news to The Daily Star, saying he had been admitted for the past week with multiple health complications. Fluid had accumulated in his lungs, and he passed away while undergoing treatment.

Family sources said Sukumar suffered a stroke in 2006 that paralysed his right leg. Since then, he had battled heart disease, high

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