



“We are living in a world of great powers with a real temptation to divide up the world.”
French President **Macron** accuses US of turning away from allies

YOUR RIGHT TO KNOW

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Most brick kilns in Chattogram's Satkania upazila continue to use fertile topsoil from agricultural land, violating the Brick Manufacturing and Brick Kiln Establishment (Control) Act. The kilns also worsen air quality by emitting toxic black smoke during brick production. Chattogram Department of Environment officials said regular drives and fines are carried out, but illegal practices persist, stressing the need for sustainable alternatives such as cement blocks. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

BRICK KILNS ravage land, waterbodies

SIFAYET ULLAH, Ctg

A decade ago, travellers on the Dhaka-Chattogram highway could see lush hill forests and fertile fields while passing through Satkania. Today, the landscape is dominated by rows of brick kilns belching smoke and scarring the land.

Government data shows at least 70 brick kilns operate in Satkania upazila, 41 of them illegally. Both licensed and illegal kilns are stripping fertile topsoil from farmlands and hills to produce bricks, raising concerns over food security and environmental degradation.

Similar expansion of brick kilns has also been reported along the

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Young voters poised to shape next election

5.56cr out of 12.76cr voters are under 37 years

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR and AHMED DEEPTO

They grew up hearing that voting was their right, only to watch how easily that right could be snatched away in elections widely criticised as “sham polls”.

Unlike the last three elections, the conditions are different now.

Bangladesh's young voters are stepping into an election shaped by uprising, reforms, and the promise that their ballots will finally carry weight.

Nearly half of the electorate is now eligible to cast ballots, emerging as what experts describe is a decisive force in the country's democratic transition.

Aysha Tofail, a final-year student of mass communication and journalism at Dhaka University, feels that the upcoming election has made her reflect on her role as a citizen. In her words, “Voting is often described as a civic duty, but for young people like me, the decision to vote or not is shaped by hope, and lived reality.”

“On one hand, I want to vote

because it is one of the direct ways I can participate in shaping my country's future. As a student, I worry about employment opportunities, education quality,

if the system is imperfect, choosing not to participate only weakens the influence of young voices further.”

Her sentiments resonate far beyond campus walls as crores of

NUMBER OF VOTERS AGED 18-37 YEARS

AGE RANGE	MALE	FEMALE	HIJRA	TOTAL
18-21	47.97 lakh	37.34 lakh	96	85.32 lakh
22-25	65.27 lakh	54.35 lakh	283	1.20cr
26-29	62.38 lakh	59.28 lakh	277	1.22cr
30-33	53.59 lakh	53.27 lakh	217	1.07cr
34-37	59.74 lakh	63.33 lakh	146	1.23cr
TOTAL	2.89cr	2.67cr	1,019	5.56cr

and the rising cost of living.

“Casting a vote makes me feel that my voice, however small, matters. We signal that we care about governance, accountability, and the direction Bangladesh is heading,” she said.

“I believe voting has value. Even

young voters are preparing to go to the polls, say election experts, including Electoral Reform Commission Chair Badiul Alam Majumdar.

Besides the national election scheduled for February 12, 2026,

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Tarique now BNP chairman

Postpones visit to the north at EC's request

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Tarique Rahman has formally assumed the post of BNP chairman in line with the party's constitution, marking a historic generational shift in its leadership.

Nearly five decades after its founding by former president Ziaur Rahman, the BNP is now led by his eldest son.

For 41 years, the party's helm was held by Ziaur Rahman's wife, former prime minister Khaleida Zia. Following

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80 health facilities lie idle in 18 districts

Thousands deprived of healthcare as manpower shortage, lack of equipment and bureaucratic delays stall operations

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

It was nearly impossible to figure out that the two-storey building was in fact a 20-bed hospital.

The main entrance to the structure in Gazipur's Talia village was locked from the outside. Overgrown shrubs surrounded the boundary wall. Some windows were open, but no one was around, a recent visit to the facility revealed.

The building was constructed at a cost of around Tk 20 crore in 2020, but the health authorities have not yet been able to launch medical services.

At least 80 medical facilities, including the Talia hospital, across 18 districts have remained non-operational for years – some for over a decade – due to shortages of manpower and equipment as well as administrative red tape, depriving thousands of healthcare close to their homes.

Of the facilities, 17 are hospitals, including four for children, 14 community clinics, and 12 extensions to existing hospitals, while the rest comprise other facilities such as quarters

- The facilities include 17 hospitals, 14 community clinics
- Some of them were built more than a decade ago
- Efforts underway to make several facilities functional

for health workers.

In most cases, the facilities remain unused due to a lack of manpower, equipment and medicines, according to health ministry documents obtained by The Daily Star.

Some buildings were constructed to be used as quarters for doctors and nurses. But those have remained unused, as the hospitals they were meant to serve are operating on a limited scale.

The construction of 41 facilities was completed by 2024, while the rest were built earlier – some more than a decade ago, the documents show.

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Iran ‘won’t back down’ in face of ‘saboteurs’

Says defiant Khamenei as anti-govt protests spread nationwide, warns ‘arrogant’ Trump to be ‘overthrown’

AGENCIES

Iran was largely cut off from the outside world yesterday after authorities blacked out the internet to curb growing unrest, as video showed buildings and vehicles ablaze in anti-government protests raging through the streets of several cities.

In a televised address, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei vowed not to back down, accusing demonstrators of acting on behalf of émigré opposition groups and the United States, as rights groups reported police firing on protesters in the south.

The unrest has not mobilised as many layers of society as other bouts of political, economic or human rights protest in the past decade and a half, but dozens are reported dead and the authorities look more vulnerable because of a dire economic situation

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Death toll rises to 45 in 12 days of protests

Trump vows harsh response if Iran ‘started killing people’

Internet, phone lines blocked, flights cancelled



Foy's Lake: from railway reservoir to city retreat

WR1



Russia fires Oreshnik missile at Ukraine

P5



How NCP-Jamaat coalition benefits Jamaat, BNP more

P7

Bangabandhu's Homecoming Day today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Today is the historic Homecoming Day of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, a key architect of the country's independence.

Bangabandhu returned to a liberated Bangladesh via London and New Delhi on this day in 1972, after 290 days of confinement in Pakistan jail.

On March 25 night in 1971, Pakistan army

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

ABUL KHAIR GROUP

36th Death Anniversary

On 10 January 1990, we deeply mourn the death of our beloved mother Late **Masuda Begum** wife of Late Mr. Abul Khair founder of Abul Khair Group (Abul Company).

Today with due respect, we remember her works, ideals and memories and pray to Almighty for His divine blessings. We request all our relatives and well-wishers to pray for her eternal peace.

BELOVED SONS & DAUGHTERS

US federal agents shoot two in Portland

AFP, Los Angeles

US federal agents shot and wounded two people in the western city of Portland, Oregon on Thursday, local police said.

The shooting came the day after a masked Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent shot and killed a woman in Minneapolis, sparking widespread anger over the increasingly militarized presence of federal agents on US streets.

"Two people are in the hospital following a shooting involving federal agents," a statement from Portland Police said.

The local police force -- which stressed its officers were not involved in the shooting -- said they had received calls for help mid-afternoon.

"Officers responded and found a male and female with apparent gunshot wounds. Officers applied a tourniquet and summoned emergency medical personnel," the statement said.

"The patients were transported to the hospital. Their conditions are unknown. Officers have determined the two people were injured in the shooting involving federal agents."



Firefighters extinguish flames from a bus that overturned after colliding with a battery-run autorickshaw and a motorcycle on the Dhaka-Chattogram highway in Cumilla's Baniapara area yesterday afternoon. The blaze claimed the lives of four people, including two children, and injured at least 30 others.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Young voters poised to shape next election

FROM PAGE 1

their choice could also shape the outcome of a referendum on constitutional matters under the July charter, born of the recent mass uprising.

The numbers tell a story of scale. In the 2008 election, Bangladesh had 8,10,87,003 registered voters. By November 18, 2025, that figure had grown to 12,76,95,183, including 6,28,79,042 women -- an increase of 4,66,08,180 voters over 17 years.

Election Commission data show that as of January 5, 2026, some 5,56,53,176 voters are aged between 18 and 37, accounting for 43.56 percent of the electorate. While definitions of "youth" vary internationally, Bangladesh's National Youth Policy 2017 classifies those aged 18-35 as young.

"And this huge percentage is a major factor. Because in Bangladesh, whenever you see a truly competitive election between two parties, with fierce rivalry, you'll notice that sometimes a candidate wins by just a few hundred votes, sometimes even fewer," said election analyst Abdul Alim.

"Whichever side the majority of these young voters support, that candidate's chances of winning will be significantly higher," he added.

Both Alim and Majumdar noted that many new voters were effectively denied ballots in the past three disputed elections. "Many tried to vote but were unable to," Majumdar said.

"They are a decisive factor in the national election to be held on February 12. For a referendum, they would be an even greater deciding factor," said Majumdar, who is also secretary of Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik.

The political backdrop has sharpened these stakes. In July 2024, a youth-led uprising culminated in regime change the following month and the installation of an interim government. Although elections are typically held every five years, the upcoming polls came just two years after the January 2024 vote, following the ouster of the Sheikh Hasina government.

Most of these young voters, Majumdar said, were not mere observers. "Many of them witnessed their friends and

acquaintances sacrifice their lives or suffer injuries. So it is a very sensitive issue for them."

"They took to the streets for the vision of creating a new Bangladesh. This movement is captured by three priorities: one is election, another is reform, and the third is justice."

EAGERLY WAITING

That urgency is reflected in surveys. The Bangladesh Youth Leadership Centre's Youth Matters Survey 2025, released in mid-December and based on responses from 2,545 people aged

parties after their demand for a nonpartisan caretaker government was rejected. As a result, 153 MPs were elected unopposed, and turnout stood at 40.04 percent.

The opposition returned to the fray in December 2018, but the vote was marred by allegations of overnight ballot-box stuffing. Opposition parties claimed that 30 to 60 percent of votes had been cast before polling day. A study by Transparency International Bangladesh found evidence of such practices in 33 of the 50 constituencies it surveyed. Official turnout was reported at 80 percent.

In the January 7, 2024 election, turnout fell to 41.80 percent as opposition parties again stayed away, refusing to contest polls held under Hasina's leadership. The ruling Awami League fielded independents -- widely labelled "dummy candidates" -- to maintain the appearance of competition.

For many young voters, these episodes remain fresh in memory. Some were prevented outright from voting; others faced intimidation at polling centres. Many ultimately chose not to cast a ballot.

Adnan Ahmed, a private service holder who first became a voter in 2018, recalls his experience clearly. After verification, he was given a voter serial number, beneath which an instruction was written: "Vote for Boat".

"When I proceeded to the voting booth, I found the so-called 'secret chamber' wasn't that secret. The booth was completely open, with several Chhatra League goons standing around it," he said.

"They were watching everyone cast their votes and instructing them to 'stamp on the Boat.' Intimidated, many were complying."

Adnan objected. "I asked, 'Who are you? This is supposed to be a secret booth with screens around it. Why are you breaching our privacy?'"

The confrontation escalated, and the men were on the verge of attacking him before a colleague of his father, serving as a polling officer, stepped in. Disillusioned, Adnan stayed away from the January 2024 polls.

In all three elections, the Awami League-led alliance went on to secure two-thirds majorities.

Tarique now BNP chairman

FROM PAGE 1

her death, the succession was considered inevitable under party rules.

Tarique thus becomes the fourth chairman of the BNP. The decision was unanimously endorsed at a meeting of the BNP Standing Committee held last night at the party chairperson's Gulshan office.

Briefing journalists after the meeting, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said the transition had been completed in accordance with the party constitution.

"The Standing Committee meeting was held. Under the party constitution, the acting chairman, Tarique Rahman, has assumed the role of chairman. We ask everyone to pray for his success in leading the party," he said.

After Khaleda's death, the issue was discussed within the party, but its constitution left little room for ambiguity. As senior vice chairman, Tarique automatically moved into the top position.

Tarique returned to the country on December 25 last year after 17 years in exile in London. Khaleda passed away on December 30, leaving the post vacant until Tarique formally took charge 10 days later.

Article 7 (Ga), sub-clause 3 of the BNP constitution stipulates that if the chairmanship falls vacant for any reason, the senior vice-chairman shall assume the post for the remainder of the term and continue until a new chairman is elected. Under sub-clause 2, Tarique had already been serving as

acting chairman since February 8, 2018 after Khaleda was imprisoned.

The party's leadership lineage traces back to September 1, 1978, when Ziaur Rahman founded the BNP and became its first chairman. He was later succeeded by then president Justice Abdus Sattar. Khaleda was elected vice-chairman in March 1983 and assumed the chairmanship in August 1984.

Tarique's political journey began early. At 22, he joined the Gabtali upazila BNP in Bogura in 1988, having been politically active even before formal membership. He rose steadily through the ranks, becoming senior joint secretary general in 2002, senior vice chairman at the party's fifth national council in 2009, and re-elected to the post at the sixth council in 2016.

Since Khaleda's imprisonment in the Zia Orphanage Trust corruption case in 2018, he has effectively led the party as acting chairman.

VISIT POSTPONED

Meanwhile, the new party chief has postponed a planned visit to northern districts following a request from the Election Commission.

Fakhrul announced the decision after the Standing Committee meeting. Tarique had been scheduled to begin a four-day tour tomorrow, with stops in Bogura, Dinajpur, Thakurgaon, Panchagarh, Nilphamari and Lalmonirhat.

Questions had arisen over whether the visit, planned ahead of the election campaign, might breach the election code of conduct.

Party leaders said the decision was taken to avoid controversy and to ensure the BNP is not accused of violating the code of conduct.

Fakhrul told reporters that the tour had been intended to pay respects to Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani and the martyrs of the July uprising, including Abu Sayed, and to attend to family matters.

"Following the Election Commission's request, the BNP chairman's trip has been postponed," he said.

CONCERNS OVER KILLINGS

Fakhrul also warned that continuing violence could undermine the election environment.

"The election is scheduled for February 12, but certain groups are plotting in various ways to cast doubt on the polls and sabotage the process," he said.

Referring to recent incidents, he added, "Osman Hadi was shot dead. Several political leaders, particularly from the BNP, have been shot. Swechchhasebak Dal leader Musabbir was also killed. We have demanded the immediate arrest of those responsible and their prosecution under the law."

Addressing the interim government and the Election Commission, Fakhrul cautioned that if such killings continue, the country's electoral atmosphere would be gravely affected.

"We once again urge the government and the Election Commission to take all necessary measures so that the election environment is preserved and not allowed to deteriorate," he said.

80 health facilities lie idle

FROM PAGE 1

NON-FUNCTIONAL HOSPITALS

Residents of Talia and four nearby villages in Gazipur's Kaliganj upazila were supposed to receive healthcare at the Talia hospital from 2021 when the structure was handed over to the health authorities.

Muktar Hossain, whose family donated two acres of land for the hospital, said, "What was the point of donating the land? The hospital has been built, but it has not been made operational. People are not getting any medical services."

When asked, Gazipur Civil Surgeon Mamunur Rahman said, "The authorities have neither assigned health workers nor made allocations for medicines."



The 20-bed hospital in Gazipur's Talia village.

PHOTO: STAR



PHOTO: STAR

The unused Bangladesh Institute of Health Management in Savar.

A 100-bed children's hospital on 1.65 acres of land in Rangpur city has also remained unused for around six years due to a lack of manpower and medical equipment, show documents.

The three-storey facility was built at a cost of Tk 31.08 crore in November 2019 and handed over to the Civil Surgeon's Office in March 2020.

When contacted, Rangpur Civil Surgeon Shahin Sultana said several letters had been sent to the health ministry, requesting the recruitment of doctors and nurses as well as medical equipment for the hospital. But none of those yielded results.

Similar situations were found in other districts. Several structures at Sadar hospitals in seven districts -- Panchagarh, Netrakona, Lalmonirhat, Gaibandha, Sylhet, Meherpur and Narsingdi -- were completed by June 2024, seeking to upgrade the 100-bed facilities to 250-bed ones. But all of them remain unused.

In Madaripur, a trauma centre was built at a cost of Tk 12 crore in Shibchar Upazila in November 2022 to treat victims of road crashes following a rise in accidents on the Dhaka-Mawa-Bhanga Expressway.

But the three-storey facility has remained idle since then, as the authorities are yet to create posts for health workers to run the facility, said one of the officials.

A recent visit to the centre revealed that electrical sockets and equipment had been taken away from the control room.

When contacted, Madaripur Acting Civil Surgeon Sardar Mohammad Khaliluzzaman declined to comment.

In Savar, the government constructed four buildings, including a 12-storey one, for the Bangladesh Institute of Health Management (BIHM) in 2023, primarily to train doctors. But they remain unused as the authorities have yet to prepare an organogram for the institute.

Bangabandhu's Homecoming Day

FROM PAGE 1

arrested him from his Dhanmondi residence and sent him to a West Pakistani jail the following day.

In the jail, he had been counting days to the execution of the death sentence he was handed down in a farcical trial.

"I was a prisoner in the condemned cell awaiting hanging. Since the day I went to jail, I didn't know whether I would be alive or not. I was mentally ready to die, but I knew Bangladesh would be liberated," Mujib spoke emotionally about his ordeal in Pakistani prison at a news conference in London.

On arrival at Dhaka (Tejgaon) airport in the afternoon of January 10, Bangabandhu was greeted by tens of thousands of jubilant people who had been eagerly waiting to see their beloved leader since the victory on December 16.

From the airport, he was escorted to the Racecourse Maidan (now Suhrawardy Udyan) where he addressed a mammoth gathering.

Two days later, he took the oath of office as the country's prime minister on January 12.

Iran 'won't back down' in face of 'saboteurs'

FROM PAGE 1

and the aftermath of last year's war with Israel and the United States.

Khamenei yesterday insisted that the Islamic republic would "not back down" in the face of protesters who he called "vandals" and "saboteurs", in a speech broadcast on state TV.

Speaking to supporters in his first comments on the escalating protests since January 3, Khamenei said, US President Donald Trump's hands "are stained with the blood of more than a thousand Iranians" and predicted the "arrogant" US leader would be "overthrown" like the imperial dynasty that ruled Iran up to the 1979 revolution.

Iranian protesters on Thursday night stepped up their challenge to the clerical leadership with the biggest protests yet of nearly two weeks of rallies, as authorities cut internet access and the death toll from the crackdown mounted to 45.

The internet blackout has sharply reduced the amount of information getting out. Phone calls into Iran were not getting through. At least 17 flights between Dubai and Iran were cancelled, Dubai Airport's website showed.

Trump meanwhile threatened on Thursday to take severe action against Iran if its authorities "start killing people", warning Washington would "hit them very hard".

Reza Pahlavi, exiled son of the late shah, told Iranians in a social media post: "The eyes of the world are upon you. Take to the streets."

However, the extent of support inside Iran for the monarchy or for the MKO, the most vocal of émigré opposition groups, is disputed.

Trump said yesterday he would not meet Pahlavi and was "not sure that it would be appropriate" to support him.

On Thursday, the Norway-based NGO Iran Human Rights said Wednesday was the bloodiest day of demonstrations, with 13 protesters confirmed to have been killed.

Iranian media and official statements have reported at least 21 people, including security forces, killed since the unrest began, according to an AFP tally.

A former senior official from the establishment's reformist wing said the Islamic Republic's core ideological pillars -- from enforced dress codes to foreign policy choices - did not resonate with those under 30 - nearly half the population, reports Reuters. "The younger generation no longer believes in revolutionary slogans -- it wants to live freely," he said.

ATTACK ON PROTHOM ALO OFFICE

Eight sent to jail after remand

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday sent eight people to jail in a case filed over the vandalism and arson attack on the office of Prothom Alo in Dhaka's Kawran Bazar area on December 18 last year.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Raunak Jahan Taki passed the order after the Detective Branch (DB) of police produced the eight before the court on completion of remand in the case, said a sub-inspector at the court.

The eight include Naim Islam, 25; Saidur Rahman, 25; Abul Kashem, 33; Pranto Sikdar, 21; Raju Ahmed, 33; Sagar Islam, 37; Mohammad Jahangir, 28, and Mohammad Hasan, 22.

DB Sub-inspector Tridip Barua said they took the eight accused in custody for interrogation, several hours after the remand order. The accused were produced before the court after interrogation.

However, the investigator declined to speak in detail.

On December 22 last year, Prothom Alo authority filed a case with Tejgaon Police Station against 400-500 unidentified people over the attack at their office.

In the case, the complainant brought charges under the Penal Code, the Anti-Terrorism Act, the Special Powers Act and the Cyber Security Ordinance.

Besides, The Daily Star on December 22 last year filed a case with the same police station against 350-400 unidentified people under the Penal Code, the Anti-Terrorism Act, the Special Powers Act and the Cyber Security Ordinance over the attack at their head office in Dhaka.

Contacted, investigation officer Jahirul Islam, a DB Sub-inspector, said, "In connection with the attack on the Prothom Alo office, 26 accused are currently in jail. Among them, those involved in the attack on The Daily Star office will be shown arrested in the case filed by The Daily Star."

Political killings continue as govt action falls short

Alleges Fakhrul

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir has voiced dissatisfaction with the current law and order situation in Bangladesh, ahead of the national election.



Speaking to journalists at his Kalibari residence in Thakurgaon yesterday morning, Fakhrul said, "People are eager for election. I can't say that I'm satisfied with the law and order situation right now. The rate at which political leaders and activists are being killed, including several of our party members, is alarming."

"We have strongly condemned these acts and expressed our outrage, yet the government has taken no effective measures to tackle the situation. We hope the government will assume a more responsible role and take proactive steps to prevent such incidents from recurring," he added.

Fakhrul also described Tarique Rahman's upcoming visit as a personal

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Amid an acute household gas crisis in Dhaka, people get their kerosene-run stoves repaired at Karwan Bazar in Dhaka yesterday, as many families are forced to fall back on alternative cooking options due to near-zero pipeline gas supply in several areas.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Cold grips country, disrupts life in north

Panchagarh records lowest temperature at 6.8 degrees Celsius

STAR REPORT

The ongoing cold spell continues to sweep across the country, disrupting normal life, particularly in the northern region.

The lowest temperature was recorded at 6.8 degrees Celsius in the northernmost district of Panchagarh yesterday morning, according to the Tetulia Weather Observatory Centre.

The inactivity of monsoon winds is mainly responsible for the narrow gap between daytime and night-time temperatures, said Jitendranath Ray, assistant officer of the centre.

He added that the colder conditions are likely to persist throughout the month.

"Mild to moderate cold wave is sweeping over Rangpur and Rajshahi divisions and the districts of Narsingdi, Jashore, Chuadanga and Kushtia and it may continue," said a weather bulletin issued by the Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD). "Moderate to thick fog may occur over the river basins of the country and light to moderate fog may occur elsewhere during mid-night to morning," the bulletin released last evening for the next 24 hours said.

People are struggling to cope with the bone-chilling cold.

Rafiqul Islam, 60, of the Dokropara area in Panchagarh

town, said daily activities have become increasingly difficult as the cold intensifies.

Shariful Islam, 46, a rickshaw-van puller from the Sahapara area under Panchagarh's Boda upazila, said pulling his rickshaw was harder than the previous day due to unusually cold winds.

Habibur Rahman, 60, a rickshaw puller from Mandolpara of Thakurgaon Sadar, said his income drops during cold spells as people venture out only for essential activities.

Jomir Uddin, 55, of Yakubpur village in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila, who works in a potato field, said bone-chilling winds have made it difficult to continue farming.

Meanwhile, people in char areas are facing severe hardship during the freezing cold.

Nazrul Islam, 65, a farmer from the Char Korai Barishal area of Kurigram's Chilmari upazila, said, "Our house is on a river bank. Cold wind rushes inside with a whistling sound. It is almost impossible to go outside. We cannot sleep at night."

Shafiar Rahman, 60, a day labourer from Char Gobordhan in Lalmonirhat's Aditmari upazila, said, "We are suffering from different cold-related diseases. Children are more vulnerable."

Sirajul Islam, additional director of the Rangpur

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Pipeline leak cuts gas supply to near zero in parts of Dhaka

ASIFUR RAHMAN

Amid an ongoing shortage of household gas supply over the past couple of months, a leak in a pipeline under the Turag River has reduced supply to almost zero in parts of the capital.

Many households have shifted to induction cookers or bottled liquefied petroleum gas, but expressed frustration at having to pay for pipeline gas despite being unable to use it even for an hour.

Nur Jahan, a resident of the Indira Road area, said the gas crisis has persisted for several months.

"Until a few weeks ago, a small amount of gas used to be available after 10:00pm, which allowed us to cook. But since the severe winter set in around mid-December, there has been no gas at all," she said.

Due to the shortage, she bought an induction cooker and used the gas stove only occasionally. "Now it is not used at all. We are paying the gas bill for nothing," she added.

The Daily Star spoke to at least 10 residents in Mohammadpur, Dhanmondi, Indira Road, Agargaon, Mirpur, Banasree, Green Road and Puran Dhaka, and found a similar situation.

An Agargaon resident, Mohammed Ahsanul Kabir, shared a worse experience, saying he has been using LPG cylinders since November. He

said he was able to use only two cylinders before prices increased without notice.

"I needed to buy a 12kg cylinder two days ago at Tk 2,200, which was supposed to be sold at Tk 1,306. I had to pay more than the government-

Gas shortages persist in the area year-round but have worsened over the past week. There had been no gas at all until noon yesterday, even though it was a holiday.

JAHANGIR HOSSAIN BABU
A resident of Bakshibazar Lane

Until a few weeks ago, a small amount of gas used to be available after 10:00pm, which allowed us to cook. But since the severe winter set in around mid-December, there has been no gas at all.

NUR JAHAN

A resident of Indira Road

fixed rate and also pay for pipeline gas," he said. "The struggle has become a part of life for a long time," he added.

Aminul Islam, a resident of Mirpur-2, said he is a kidney patient and cannot manage without hot water, making the gas shortage particularly

distressing.

Jahangir Hossain Babu, a resident of Bakshibazar Lane, said gas shortages persist in the area year-round but have worsened over the past week. "There had been no gas at all until noon yesterday, even though it was a holiday," he said.

"We need to spend at least three to four hours cooking," he added.

The authorities have acknowledged the crisis, saying it may take a couple of days to ease the situation, although a significant improvement in supply is unlikely in the near term.

Contacted, Titas Gas Managing Director Shahnewaz Parvez said severe winter leads to hydrate formation inside gas pipelines. "It is somewhat like ice. As a result, gas pressure usually drops during winter," he said.

"You also know that gas supply to residential areas has already been reduced compared to industrial and commercial users for months."

He said the situation was further worsened by a leak in a pipeline under the Turag River.

"A cargo trawler punctured the pipeline while dropping anchor four days ago. We do not have our own equipment to repair such damage under a river. So, we had to fix the leak by installing clamps with the

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EC suspends polls activities in Pabna-1, 2

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission yesterday halted election activities in Pabna-1 and Pabna-2 constituencies due to boundary-related issues.

The decision was made following a Supreme Court order. Election Commissioner Abdur Rahmani Masud said yesterday, "According to the directive of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, election activities in Pabna-1 and Pabna-2 will be suspended until a further court order."

However, the EC dismissed media reports claiming that it has decided to "postpone election in the two seats", saying that the media has misattributed statements and the commission will make the final decision after receiving the court order.

Talking to The Daily Star, Ruhul Amin Mallik, EC director (public relations), asked the media to refrain from publishing such reports.

He added that a commissioner's remarks were misreported as an EC decision, noting that a court order has been issued.

When asked for clarification, Commissioner Masud said the suspension is valid but not indefinite. It will remain in place only until the court issues a further order.

He added that the EC will make the final decision after reviewing the court order.

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Man, son among 4 killed as bike, bus catch fire after collision

Six others die in other road accidents



PHOTO: FIRE SERVICE AND CIVIL DEFENCE

Firefighters in rescue operation after a bus rammed into the rear of a stationary truck on the Dhaka-Mawa Expressway in Sirajdikhan upazila of Munshiganj early yesterday.

STAR REPORT

Ten people, including a man and his son, were killed and at least 53 others injured in road accidents in three districts yesterday and the day before, according to reports from our correspondents.

At least four people were burnt to death after a bus and a motorcycle caught fire following a collision in Daudkandi upazila of Cumilla yesterday.

The accident occurred around 12:40pm on the Dhaka-Chattogram Highway in the Baniyapara area, said Daudkandi Highway Police Station Officer-in-Charge Iqbal Bahar Majumder.

Police identified three of the deceased as motorcycle rider Md Shamim, 41, his six-year-old son Nadim, both of Pennai Gouripur area of Daudkandi, and 18-month-old Hossain from Sonargaon upazila of Narayanganj.

The identity of another victim, a woman, could not be confirmed immediately.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 2

Winter chill boosts warm-clothes sales on Ctg footpaths

ARUN BIKASH DEY

With the winter chill biting hard, Chattogram's footpaths have transformed into bustling hubs for winter commerce.

People from low- and middle-income groups are increasingly seen gathering around street vendors to buy affordable attire to shield themselves from the cold.

According to Bashir Ahmed, deputy forecasting officer of Chattogram Met Office, the highest temperature in Chattogram was 25.6 degrees Celsius while the lowest temperature was 13.5 degrees Celsius yesterday.

Hawkers have strategically occupied key locations across the port city, including the New Market area, Jamal Khan, Chawkbazar Gulzar intersection, Sholoshahar Gate No 2, Kazir Dewri, Anderkilla, Laldighi, Station Road, Bahaddarhat, Muradpur, EPZ, and Agrabad.

Beyond these traditional hubs, isolated



makeshift shops have also mushroomed in residential areas like Dewan Bazar.

Driven by significantly lower prices compared to high-end shopping malls, sales at these makeshift stalls are gaining momentum.

Street vendors on Jamal Khan Road showcased a wide array of knitwear, attracting a large number of customers, primarily parents waiting for their children at the nearby Dr Khastagir Government Girls' High School.

Among them, Deepa Saha, who was selecting a sweater for her daughter, said, "The demand is high, and vendors are asking for steeper prices than usual."

At the Cinema Palace intersection, vendor Alamgir Hossain was busy folding blankets. He shared that his stock consists of blankets imported from China. "As the chill intensified, customers started asking for blankets, so I have stocked my stall accordingly," he said.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1



A man squeezes through a narrow strip of footpath in the capital's Tejgaon as parked trucks occupy the adjacent road and a major portion of the walkway, forcing pedestrians to navigate an unsafe and congested space. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Jubo Dal activist stabbed to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Thakurgaon*

A local Jubo Dal activist was stabbed to death in Joypurhat's Panchbibi upazila on Thursday night, allegedly over a dispute involving Tk 21,000 from a local mosque fund.

The deceased was identified as Yanur Hossain, 30, of Chalakhur village in the upazila.

Quoting the victim's family, Hafiz Md Raihan, officer-in-charge of Panchbibi Police Station, said Yanur and his friend Al Amin was staying in the Dhakarpara area of Shalapur Bazar that night.

"At onestage, Yanur's rivals swooped on them and stabbed both Yanur and Al Amin with sharp weapons around 10:30pm, leaving them critically injured," the OC said.

Police, with the help of locals, rushed the victims to Panchbibi Upazila Health Complex, where doctors declared Yanur dead.

Al Amin was later shifted to Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital in Bogura, where he is undergoing treatment.

Golam Rabbani Rabbi, former joint convener of district Jubo Dal, said there is currently no active Jubo Dal committee in Joypurhat, but Yanur had been a long-time active member of the organisation, according to UNB.

Family members alleged that two rivals of Yanur carried out the attack due to a dispute over Tk 21,000 belonging to a mosque. They said Yanur's brother, Abdul Momin, had filed a case with Panchbibi Police Station about a month ago over the dispute. The accused later secured bail.

Process is underway to file a murder case, the OC added.

Worker dies from electrocution

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Jamalpur*

A mason was electrocuted to death while working at a construction site in Madarganj upazila of Jamalpur yesterday morning.

The deceased was identified as Hridoy Mia, 24, of Balijuri village under Madarganj municipality.

The incident occurred while Hridoy was working on the roof of the under-construction gate of the Madarganj municipal building.

According to police and co-workers, he accidentally came into contact with a live electric wire and was critically injured.



After fishing, a family of the Manta community heads towards their destination by boat along the Tulatti River in Bakerganj upazila of Barishal yesterday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Number of voters increases by 1.28 lakh across Rangpur

S DILIP ROY

The number of voters registered for the 13th National Parliamentary Election in Rangpur district has increased significantly across its six parliamentary constituencies, with young voters emerging as a decisive force.

Compared to the 12th National Election, the district has added 1,28,639 new voters. A large share of them are youths who will be exercising their voting rights for the first time.

According to the Rangpur district election office, the total number of voters during the 12th National Election stood at 24,70,562 across the six constituencies. Of them, 12,37,310 were male, 12,33,229 female, and 23 third-gender voters.

For the 13th National Election, the total voter count has risen to 25,99,201. Among them are 12,92,841 male voters, 13,06,329 female voters, and 31 third-gender voters.

Among the six constituencies, Rangpur-1 (Gangachara and part of Rangpur City Corporation) recorded the highest increase in voters. Due to constituency boundary re-demarcation,

ward-9 of Rangpur City Corporation has been added to this seat, resulting in an increase of 42,853 voters.

Rangpur-2 (Badarganj and Taraganj) has also seen a notable rise. In Taraganj upazila, the number of male voters increased by 4,193 and female voters by 3,996. In Badarganj upazila, male voters rose by 7,635, while female voters increased by 7,323.

Election officials say a large portion of the increase comes from young, first-time voters, a shift that could significantly influence electoral outcomes in the district.

In contrast, Rangpur-3 (Rangpur Sadar and parts of city corporation) experienced a decline in voter numbers. During the 12th National Election, Rangpur-3 had a total of 5,29,328 voters, which has now declined to 5,08,223.

Rangpur-4 (Pirgachha-Kaunia) registered steady growth. In Pirgachha upazila, male voters increased by 8,016,

female voters by 8,173, and third gender voters by one. In Kaunia upazila, male voters rose by 6,375 and female voters by 6,919. The total number of voters in this constituency now stands at 5,09,906.

In Rangpur-5 (Mithapukur), the number of male voters increased by 13,640 and female voters by 14,898, bringing the total voter count to 4,69,189.

Rangpur-6 (Pirganj) also saw significant growth, with male voters increasing by 11,404 and female voters by 14,316. The total number of voters in this constituency now stands at 3,55,735.

Rangpur district senior election officer Abdur Rahim said the rise in voter numbers is largely due to an updated voter registration process that included door-to-door data collection as well as online registration opportunities.

Shafikul Islam, 19, a college student and first-time voter from Munshipara in Rangpur city, said, "Those elected in the past did not work sincerely for the overall development of Rangpur. I will vote for a candidate who can free Rangpur from the curse of development disparity."

Anowara park reopens after 7yrs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

After remaining closed for seven years due to metro rail construction, Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) has reopened Shaheed Anowara Udyan at Farmgate to the public.

DNCC Administrator Mohammad Azaz announced at a programme yesterday that Anowara Udyan in Farmgate has been opened for public use starting yesterday. After a long closure, city residents can once again freely use the park.

He also informed that a walkway will be constructed around the park. "We will start work very soon. We will sit and decide on keeping the field open at least until 10:00pm," he said.

Speaking at the event, Dhaka Metro Rail Managing Director Faruk Ahmed said metro rail project work in the Anowara Udyan area has been completed. He added that by the 15th of next month, all remaining structures on the field will be removed and the area will be fully cleaned.

Five injured in Jamaat-JCD clash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Patuakhali*

At least five people were injured in a clash between activists of Jamaat-e-Islami and Jatiyatabadi Chhaura Dal (JCD) in Bauphal upazila of Patuakhali on Thursday night.

The incident took place at Charwadel Government Primary School in Chandradwip union, a riverine area of the upazila. The injured were admitted to Bauphal Upazila Health Complex.

Those injured include Sujon Khan, 25, a leader of Jamaat-e-Islami's Bauphal upazila unit; Jamaat activists Rakib Hasan and Abdul Berek Majhi; and two JCD leaders - Saidul Islam, 23, and Jahirul Islam Sohan, 22.

According to locals, a Jamaat organisational programme was underway inside a classroom of the school when several JCD leaders and activists entered the premises.

The JCD activists reportedly questioned Jamaat leaders for holding a political programme inside an educational institution without prior permission.

An argument ensued, which later escalated into a scuffle and physical clash between the two sides.

Jamaat leaders alleged that 20-25 JCD activists carried out a premeditated attack on their programme using sticks, leaving at least five of their activists injured.

However, several JCD leaders, speaking on condition of anonymity, claimed that organising a political programme inside an educational institution without permission violates the election code of conduct.

They alleged that Jamaat activists suddenly attacked them when questioned, injuring two JCD leaders.

Officer-in-Charge of Bauphal Police Station Atikul Islam said police learned of the incident through various sources, but no written complaint was filed by either side.

Remembering Dr. Zahida Baqai



A Bangladeshi-born physician whose legacy reshaped medical education and women's healthcare in South Asia

Prof. Dr. Zahida Baqai—distinguished physician, educationist, institution builder, and philanthropist—passed away on 29 December 2025 at the age of 92, following complications related to old age. Her death marks the passing of a pioneering figure whose contributions left an enduring imprint on medical education and women's healthcare across South Asia.

Born in Faridpur in 1933, Dr. Baqai was the daughter of the late A.M. Salimullah Fahmi, a senior civil servant. She received her early education in what is now Bangladesh and earned her MBBS degree from Dhaka Medical College, belonging to one of the earliest generations of women physicians from the region. She was a contemporary of the late Dr. Suraiya Jabeen, another trailblazer in women's medical education.

Following her marriage to the renowned surgeon Prof. Dr. Fareeduddin Baqai, she relocated to Karachi, Pakistan. Although her professional life unfolded largely there, her formative years in Bangladesh shaped a lifelong commitment to public service, humility, and social responsibility.

Dr. Baqai pursued advanced postgraduate training in the United Kingdom, earning the prestigious MRCOG and later the FRCOG—testaments to her clinical excellence and leadership in obstetrics and gynaecology. She went on to establish the Baqai Institute of Reproductive and Developmental Sciences (BIRDS), introducing advanced women's healthcare and IVF services in Pakistan at a time when such facilities were virtually non-existent. Together with her late husband, she also co-founded the Baqai Foundation, Baqai Hospital, and subsequently Baqai Medical University—institutions that today stand among Pakistan's leading centres for ethical medical education and patient-centred care.

Her vision extended far beyond personal achievement to institution-building grounded in integrity, discipline, and compassion. Dr. Baqai firmly believed that healthcare must be guided by moral responsibility and that medical education should prioritise ethical practice and service over commercial considerations. She worked tirelessly to develop Baqai Medical University into a self-sustaining institution dedicated to learning, research, and community service.

Dr. Zahida Baqai came from a family distinguished by public service and leadership. Her elder sister, the late Khalida Fahmi, was the first female Deputy Director General of Bangladesh Television (BTV). Her younger sister, Sajida Humayun Kabir, is the patron of the SAJIDA Foundation, while her niece and nephew serve as the CEOs of the SAJIDA Foundation and Renata PLC respectively.

As one of the earliest practising gynaecologists in Karachi, Dr. Baqai broke professional and social barriers with quiet determination. At a time when women's presence in academic leadership was rare, she emerged as a role model for generations to come. Students, colleagues, and patients remember her not only for her achievements, but also for her humility, generosity, mentorship, and unwavering commitment to ethical medical practice.

Dr. Zahida Baqai's life exemplifies the global contributions of Bangladeshi women whose education and values enabled them to shape institutions beyond national borders. Her passing is a profound loss to the medical fraternity—particularly the gynaecological and academic communities of South Asia. Yet her legacy endures in the institutions she built, the professionals she trained, and the countless lives she touched with care and compassion.

Pipeline leak

FROM PAGE 3

help of divers from the Coast Guard and the Fire Service," he said.

Shahnewaz Parvez admitted that the supply situation is extremely poor in some areas. He said the damaged pipeline supplies gas to key localities, including Mohammadpur, Lalmatia, Aminbazar and Dhanmondi, leaving residents there without gas.

He also said many households in those areas have complained that water is entering their pipelines.

"After we remove the water from individual connections, gas supply resumes. That is why it may take another two to three days for the situation to improve," he said.

In addition, he said a maintenance operation was recently carried out in the Uttara area.

"Taken altogether, the overall situation has become very bad," he added.

Political killings

FROM PAGE 3

goodwill tour, noting that the BNP acting chairman would pay tribute to Shaheed Abu Sayed and other martyrs of the July uprising.

He said the visit would inspire BNP leaders and activists at the grassroots level.

Addressing the recent defeats of Jatiyatabadi Chhaura Dal in several university student body elections, Fakhrul said further analysis was needed.

He claimed that during the tenure of the previous government, Chhaura Dal and other student organisations were barred from campuses and treated as persona non grata, preventing them from carrying out organisational activities.

Drawing a parallel with national polls, he added, "University elections have never influenced national elections. I firmly believe it will not have any impact this

time either."

Responding to a question about holding the national election and referendum on the same day, Fakhrul said BNP itself had proposed the arrangement, which was eventually accepted.

He added that the proposed reforms under the referendum had earlier been outlined by the BNP through its 31-point agenda. "Reform is a continuous process. I see no reason to say no to it," he said.

Cold grips

FROM PAGE 3

Regional Agricultural Extension Department, said intermittent sunshine has allowed farmers and agricultural labourers to resume work in the fields.

Currently, maize, potatoes, Boro seedbeds, mustard and various winter vegetables are growing in the fields, and regular care and close monitoring of these crops are extremely important during this period, he said.

[Our correspondents from Thakurgaon and Lalmonirhat contributed to this report]

EC suspends polls



FROM PAGE 3

Meanwhile, on the last day of filing appeals against returning officers' decisions yesterday following the scrutiny of nomination papers, 141 applications were submitted to the EC, bringing the total to 610.

Hearings on the appeals

will be held from today to January 18.

On January 4, the scrutiny of nomination papers of candidates ended. Following the scrutiny, the EC declared 1,842 nomination papers valid and rejected 723 others across the country.

<p align="center">  ওয়েস্ট জোন পাওয়ার ডিস্ট্রিবিউশন কোম্পানি লিমিটেড (ওজোপাডিকো) West Zone Power Distribution Company Limited (An Enterprise of Bangladesh Power Development Board) নিবাহী প্রকৌশলীর দপ্তর, আঞ্চলিক মেরামত কারখানা, চাঁদা, যশোর-৭৪০০। www.wzpdcl.gov.bd, e-mail: wzpdcl.zrs@gmail.com mobile-01700709820 </p>				
Ref. No. 27.22.4147.507.55.001.2026.04			Date-08.01.2026	
e-Tender Notice (NCT)				
e-Tender are invited through the National e-GP System Portal (w.w.w.e-procure.gov.bd) by Executive Engineer, Zonal repair Shop WZPDCL, Jashore for the execution following works, Which is available at the National e-GP System Portal website (w.w.w.e-procure.gov.bd) 08 Jan.2026 14 PM				
SL. NO..	Tender ID	Invitation Reference	Name Of work	Last Selling and Closing Date & Time
01	1196808	27.22.4147.55.001.26.02 Date 08.01.26	Renovation work of office building of the Zonal repair Shop of the West Zone Power Distribution Com Ltd.	21/01/2026 14:00PM 22/01/2026, 12.00PM
This is the online tender ,where only e-Tender will be accepted in the national e-GP System portal and no of line/ Hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender Registration required in the National e-GP System portal (w.w.w.e-procure.gov.bd). The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the national e-GP System portal have to be deposited online through any registered bank. Further information and guidelines are available in the national e-GP System portal and e-GP help desk(helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd)				
<p align="right">  (Engr. Md. Rashedul Islam Chowdhury) Executive Engineer Zonal repair shop WZPDCL, Jashore </p>				

MADURO SEIZURE
‘I don’t need international law’: Trump

AGENCIES

US President Donald Trump said in an interview published Thursday that his “own morality” was the only constraint on his power to order military actions around the world.

Trump’s comments to The New York Times came days after he launched a lightning operation to topple Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro, and threatened a host of other countries. “Yeah, there is one thing. My own morality. My own mind. It’s the only thing that can stop me,” Trump told the newspaper when asked if there were any limits on his global powers.

“I don’t need international law,” he added. “I’m not looking to hurt people.” The Republican president then added that “I do” need to abide by international law, but said “it depends what your definition of international law is.”



Palestinians collect the bodies of relatives at Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis, southern Gaza, a day after Israeli shelling killed more than a dozen people, including children.

PHOTO: AFP

Take Trump seriously on Greenland

US VP Vance warns Europe

AFP, Washington

US Vice President JD Vance warned Europe on Thursday to take Donald Trump “seriously” on Greenland as the president ramps up threats against the Danish-ruled Arctic territory.

Vance accused fellow Nato member Denmark and the rest of Europe of failing to do enough to protect the strategically-located island from the designs of Russia and China.

European capitals have been scrambling to come up with a coordinated response after the White House said this week that Trump wanted to buy Greenland and refused to rule out military action.

“I guess my advice to European leaders and anybody else would be to take the president of the United States seriously,” Vance told a briefing at the White House when asked about Greenland.

Russia fires hypersonic missile at Ukraine

Oreshnik hits Lviv region, near EU, Nato border; 4 killed as barrage damages 20 Kyiv buildings, Qatar embassy

AGENCIES

Russia fired a powerful hypersonic missile at Ukraine near the EU border overnight, in what Kyiv called a new threat to European security that demanded a global response.

Moscow said it had fired the Oreshnik missile in response to what it has described as an attempted drone attack on one of President Vladimir Putin’s residences last month, which Ukraine has denied and the United States has said did not happen.

It was only the second time Russia has fired the Oreshnik at Ukraine, and came amid a night of air attacks that Ukrainian authorities said also killed four people in Kyiv, knocked out power in the capital and damaged the Qatari embassy there.

The Oreshnik, designed to project power across Europe and which Moscow says is impossible to intercept, is capable of carrying nuclear warheads although there was no suggestion it had done so.

“A clear reaction from the world is needed. Above all from the



United States, whose signals Russia truly pays attention to,” President Zelensky said on social media.

Russia fired a total of 242 drones and 36 missiles, including Oreshnik, to hit infrastructure in the western Lviv region and in and around the capital Kyiv, reports Reuters.

Authorities said at least four people were killed and more than 20 injured by the strikes on Kyiv, which knocked out electricity to

Oceans soaked up record heat levels in 2025

Say experts

AFP, Brest

The world’s oceans absorbed a record amount of heat in 2025, an international team of scientists said yesterday, further priming conditions for sea level rise, violent storms, and coral death.

The heat that has accumulated in the oceans last year increased by approximately 23 zettajoules — an amount equivalent to nearly four decades of global primary energy consumption.

This finding — published in the journal Advances in Atmospheric Sciences — was the highest reading of any year since modern record keeping began in the early 1950s, researchers said.

To derive these calculations, more than 50 scientists from 31 research institutions used multiple sources including a thousands-strong fleet of floating robots that track ocean changes to depths of 2,000 metres.

SYRIAN CITY OF ALEPPO
Kurdish fighters defy truce, refuse to leave the city

REUTERS, Aleppo

Kurdish groups in Syria’s Aleppo vowed to defend their neighbourhoods from government forces yesterday, rejecting ceasefire terms declared by Damascus that demand Kurdish fighters withdraw from the Syrian city where clashes have raged this week.

The violence in Aleppo has exposed a deep faultline between President Ahmed al-Sharaa’s Islamist-led government and Kurdish forces, which have resisted its efforts to bring their fighters under centralised authority.

At least nine civilians have been killed and more than 140,000 have fled their homes. Neither the government nor the Kurdish forces have announced a toll of casualties among their fighters.

The ceasefire announced by the defense ministry overnight demanded the withdrawal of Kurdish forces to the Kurdish-held northeast. That would effectively end Kurdish control over pockets of Aleppo held by Kurdish forces since the early days of the Syrian conflict which began in 2011.

But in a statement, Kurdish councils that run the Sheikh Maksoud and Ashrafiyah districts of Aleppo said calls to leave were “a call to surrender” and that Kurdish forces would instead “defend their neighbourhoods”, accusing government forces of intensive shelling.

US to provide \$45m to help implement Cambodia-Thailand truce

AFP, Washington

The United States yesterday announced some \$45 million in aid as it tries to bolster a fragile truce between Thailand and Cambodia.

Michael DeSombre, the top State Department official for East Asia, was visiting Thailand and Cambodia to discuss ways to strengthen the ceasefire, which President Donald Trump has sought to highlight as an achievement.

DeSombre said the United States would offer \$20 million to help both countries combat drug trafficking and cyber scams, which have become a major concern in Cambodia.

He also said the United States would give \$15 million to help support people displaced by the recent fighting as well as \$10 million for demining.

“The United States will continue to support the Cambodian and Thai governments as they implement the Kuala Lumpur Peace Accords and pave the way for a return to peace, prosperity and stability for their people and the region,” DeSombre said in a statement.

He was referring to an agreement signed between the two countries in the presence of Trump during an October visit to Malaysia, then head of the Asean regional bloc.



Snow storms pummel Europe

Hundreds of thousands without power

AFP, Cherbourg

Fierce winds battered France and Britain yesterday as storms barrelled through northern Europe, snarling train travel, shutting schools and cutting power to hundreds of thousands of homes in plunging winter temperatures.

Forecasters from Britain to Germany urged people to stay inside as they issued weather warnings, including the rare, highest-level red wind alert for the British Isles of

Scilly and Cornwall in southwestern England.

In France, Storm Goretti cut power to some 380,000 homes, most of them in the northern Normandy region, the Enedis power provider said, while Britain’s National Grid said 42,000 homes lost electricity in southwest England and thousands more elsewhere.


Overnight, gusts of up to 216 kilometres per hour (134 miles per hour) were registered in France’s northwestern Manche region,

authorities said.

The winds felled trees in several regions, with at least one crashing on residential buildings in France’s Seine-Maritime region, without injuries, authorities said.

Gusts of up to 160 kph lashed England and Wales with the Met Office forecasting agency warning “very large waves will bring dangerous conditions to coastal areas”.

It also issued an amber snow warning in Wales.



Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh
Office of the Superintending Engineer
E/M Circle, Kurmitola, Dhaka-1229

Ref. No: 30.31.0000.411.02.159.26/1245

Date: 08/01/2026

e-Tender Notice

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>). Package information is available in tender notice under e-GP system portal. This is online tender where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted.


To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered bank's branches. Detailed of the Works listed below:

SI No	Name of works	Tender ID	Last Selling Date and Time	Closing Date and Time
1	Providing, Installation, Testing & Commissioning of Fire Detection and Alarm System including related works in Old Import Cargo at HSIA.	1209834	25-01-2026 16:30	26-01-2026 12:00

Further information and guidelines are available in the e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

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তারিখ: ০৮/০১/২০২৬ খ্রিঃ


(Shahriar Morshed Siddiqui)
Superintending Engineer (E/M)(C.C)
E/M Circle, CAAB, Dhaka

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Office of the Executive Engineer
Education Engineering Department
Bagerhat
email: ee_bag@eedmoe.gov.bd

Memo No: EE/EED/BAG/38


Date: 08/01/2026

e-Tender Notice No: 14/SHED-7016-04-TMED-01/2025-2026

e-Tender is Invited to the e-GP Web Portal (www.eprocure.gov.bd) for the procurement of the following Works. Details are given below:

SL No	ID No	Description of Works	Procurement Method	Last Selling Date & Time	Closing & Opening Date & Time
1	1209838	Construction of Single Storey Academic Building with 4-Storeyed Pre-cast Pile Foundation including Sanitary, Water Supply & Electrification Works at Khontakata Mofidia Mohila Dakhil Madrasa, Sarankhola, Bagerhat. (FY: 2024-25)	OTM (NCT)	25-Jan-2026 17:00:00	26-Jan-2026 12:30:00
2	1187148	Construction of Single Storey Academic Building with 4-Storeyed Pre-cast Pile Foundation Including Sanitary, Water Supply & Electrification Works at Kamargram Secondary School, Mollahat, Bagerhat. (FY: 2019-20)	OTM (NCT)	25-Jan-2026 17:00:00	26-Jan-2026 12:30:00
3	1187147	Construction of Single Storey Academic Building with 4-Storeyed Pre-cast Pile Foundation Including Sanitary, Water Supply & Electrification Works at Naldha M.L. Secondary School, Fakirhat, Bagerhat. (FY: 2018-19)	OTM (NCT)	25-Jan-2026 17:00:00	26-Jan-2026 12:30:00
4	1187146	Construction of Single Storey Academic Building with 4-Storeyed Pre-cast Pile Foundation Including Sanitary, Water Supply & Electrification Works at Sundarban Secondary School, Sarankhola, Bagerhat. (FY: 2018-19)	OTM (NCT)	25-Jan-2026 17:00:00	26-Jan-2026 12:30:00
5	1187145	Construction of Single Storey Academic Building with 4-Storeyed Pre-cast Pile Foundation Including Sanitary, Water Supply & Electrification Works at Rasulpur Secondary School, Sarankhola, Bagerhat. (FY: 2019-20)	OTM (NCT)	25-Jan-2026 17:00:00	26-Jan-2026 12:30:00

This is an online tender where only e-Tender will be accepted in the national e-GP portal, and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit an e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP Web Portal (www.eedmoe.gov.bd) is required. The fees for downloading the e-Tender Documents from the National e-GP Web portal have to be deposited online through any registered bank or any branch up to the above-mentioned date. Further information and guidelines are available in the national e-GP Web portal & e-GP help desk and also from e-mail: ee_bag@eedmoe.gov.bd


(Md. Nafiz Akter)
Executive Engineer
Education Engineering Department
Bagerhat.

GD-67

Time for a decisive role

Election Commission must act as political violence rises

The unexpected spike in targeted killings and political violence since the announcement of the election schedule—amid a deteriorating law and order situation—must be taken seriously by the Election Commission (EC) and the interim government. As the election process gets underway, the EC must assert effective control over law-enforcing agencies and direct them, along with the interim administration, to strengthen security using all necessary measures. It is regrettable that the ongoing Operation Devil Hunt, i.e., the joint forces operation, the issuance of gun licenses to candidates and the provision of armed guards to leaders of the July uprising and a few others following the fatal attack on Inqilab Moncho leader Sharif Osman Hadi, appear to have had little impact on improving overall law and order.

According to data from the Human Rights Support Society, 60 incidents of political violence were recorded in December alone, leaving four people dead and 528 injured. At least 10 attacks on political leaders and activists resulted in 10 deaths, including three members of the Awami League, four from the BNP, and one from Jamaat-e-Islami. Meanwhile, Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), citing its own records and media reports, has documented at least eight political killings since the unveiling of the poll schedule on December 11.

The EC and the authorities must review why the measures taken so far have failed to adequately address rising crime and political violence. They should take note of emerging trends highlighted by human rights defender Noor Khan Liton, particularly the targeting of political activists and members of minority communities. Moreover, the misguided reluctance to confront mob culture and the lack of preventive action have allowed lynching to spread, creating a pervasive climate of fear in society. If these trends persist, they will severely undermine voter confidence and discourage turnout at polling stations. The Election Commission must take decisive steps to remove uncertainties surrounding the election and ensure that citizens feel safe to exercise their right to vote without fear.

Greater visibility of law enforcement patrols, intensified intelligence-led operations to prevent crimes, and swift legal action against perpetrators can help restore public confidence in policing. To ensure a participatory election, the government must create a secure and festive polling environment. However, its current approach to guaranteeing a safe political atmosphere appears to be faltering.

Political parties also bear responsibility. They must proactively defuse internal factional conflicts, confront the alarming spread of hate on social media, and educate their members about the dangers of violence while equipping them with basic safety guidance. At the same time, researchers and policymakers should examine the root causes of growing intolerance and the increasing tendency to resort to violence to settle disputes—trends that are fundamentally incompatible with democracy and corrosive to the social fabric.

Finally, the Ministry of Home Affairs' decision to deploy law enforcement agencies nationwide only for seven days around the election is unlikely to be effective if authorities cannot maintain law and order now. An immediate security review and a revised strategy are essential to facilitate a free, fair, impartial, peaceful, and genuinely festive election.

Resume rail-freight between Ctg–Dhaka

Sustained investment is required for smooth freight services

A recent report in this paper highlights an operational lapse within Bangladesh Railway (BR) that has far-reaching implications for the country's economy. The prolonged shortage of locomotives on the Chattogram–Dhaka route has severely disrupted rail-based container transport, creating congestion at our principal seaport and consequently driving up costs for businesses.

According to port officials, at least four pairs of container trains per day, meaning around 240 trains per month, are needed to keep cargo flowing smoothly. But for months, container transport between Chattogram port and the Kamalapur Inland Container Depot (ICD) in Dhaka has fallen far short of the demand. While more than 112 container trains on average ran monthly between January and September last year, operations dropped sharply from October onwards, hitting a low of just 74 trains in December. This disruption has had knock-on effects across the board. Overflow containers have been pushed into export yards and distant storage areas, which is complicating operations, slowing retrieval, and raising handling costs. Importers are paying the price through mounting overstay charges, delayed deliveries, and increased uncertainty. In a trading economy, already grappling with high costs of doing business, such inefficiencies are further eroding competitiveness.

Although BR now says freight operations have resumed and the backlog may clear within days, policymakers and authority figures should still take note of the underlying challenges. Rail is meant to be a cost-effective alternative to road transport, especially for containerised cargo moving between the port and the capital. But the chronic underinvestment, poor asset management, and reactive decision-making are leaving freight services increasingly vulnerable. The problem had persisted for nearly a year, worsening gradually before reaching a crisis point.

What is needed now is more than temporary relief and band-aid fixes. We urge BR to develop a framework to ensure that container trains, which are critical to trade and revenue, are not sidelined. Accelerating locomotive procurement, reducing repair backlogs, and improving maintenance are essential. At a broader level, the government must recognise rail freight as strategic economic infrastructure. Without sustained investment, management and accountability, similar disruptions will recur, adding further burden and costs on businesses and, ultimately, the wider economy.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

First UN assembly held

On this day in 1946, the first United Nations General Assembly met in London. Delegates representing 51 nations attended the first session.

The day cricket needed a therapist



BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

Dr Shamsad Mortuza
is professor of English at Dhaka University.

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

Fizz is a case study. When Mustafizur Rahman, a.k.a. Fizz, the unassuming fast bowler with deceptive slow cutters, was auctioned for Rs 9.2 crore, Bangladeshi media once again started paying attention to the Indian Premier League. It was a smart move for the Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR), the franchise that bottled “Fizz”, to keep Bangladeshi audiences emotionally and financially invested in their city. In pure market terms, getting Mustafiz made perfect sense: he brings Bangla-speaking viewers, advertising revenue, and cross border traction.

Then comes the news of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) fudging the Fizz issue. They cited instances of “atrocities against the Hindus” in Bangladesh to ask KKR to release their prize catch. Fizz was released, not because of form, fitness, or franchise strategy, but because of “security.” Cricket shifted pitch. Bangladesh's response was immediate and bold. If security cannot be guaranteed for one Bangladeshi player, how can it be guaranteed for an entire national team that is expected to participate in the upcoming T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka? Such diagnostic reasoning placed the hosts in a difficult situation. If the “security” concern is valid, then the three matches that Bangladesh is scheduled to play in India in February should be moved to Sri Lanka.

The International Cricket Council seems unconvinced. Changing the schedule with only a few days remaining presents a logistical challenge, along with issues of ticketing, viewership, ad revenues, hotel bookings, air travel, broadcast grids, and match sequencing and so on. Therefore, it is no surprise that ICC reacted with a language of power, threatening exclusion and loss of merit points. Although there are precedents of venue changes in cricket history, ICC is a bit taken aback by the unusual resistance posted by Bangladesh. Then again, they need to understand that this demand is not the tantrums of a small team but an attempt to protect the national dignity of a country of 18 crore.

Fizz is no longer the focal point; cricket has taken that role. Let us imagine the rectangular cricket pitch as a psychoanalytic couch and allow Cricket to speak. Let us locate ourselves beyond the border, outside the ring, to psychoanalyse the game incarnate. The patient cricket has presented Mustafiz as a symptom that will reveal deeper anxieties. Cricket will tell us how the manufactured hype over the shorter version of the game is driven by the logic of money and haunted by the

spectres of neocapitalism. Cricket is the new religion that provides “opium for the masses.” It stages a spectacle in a modern-day arena where players are like gladiators brought in from across the globe. They are bought and sold like slaves, and every action is translated as data points. Audiences are data, monetised by entrepreneurial franchise owners.

As we move from the manifest content to the latent content of cricket, we will become aware of the national and, by extension, international ecosystem where commerce is tied to geopolitics. When capital collides with ideology, even capital is reminded of its limits. The Mustafiz episode serves as an example. KKR belongs to the microstructure of



In the Fizz episode, unlike the commonsensical diplomacy of Jaishankar, Jay Shah pitched cricket as an arena of security paranoia and punitive discipline.

VISUAL: MONOROM POLOK

viewers and revenue, while the state owns the macrostructure. KKR wanted “the fizz” to keep bubbling; the state declared the imported carbonation to be dangerous.

This selective reasoning denotes an asymmetrical power system where a big nation identifies itself as the Self and views the rest as the Other. The timing of “othering” Bangladesh could not have been worse. Just last month, the participation of the Indian minister of external affairs, S Jaishankar, in the funeral of Begum Khaleda Zia was seen as an attempt to thaw a frozen relationship between neighbours. The decree by the ICC boss and former BCCI honorary secretary, Jay Shah, dented the attempt. The “commonsensical” diplomacy of Jaishankar met the “crowd-pleasing” powerful cricket diplomacy of Jay Shah.

From its couch, Cricket will tell us of its colonial past when displays of power were common. The memory of domination leaves behind a

once controlled by others. The alleged attempt to exclude a Bangladeshi player under the rhetoric of “security,” therefore, revives the familiar grammar of colonisation, resulting in an assertion of power that is not merely offensive but retraumatising. Already, the Bangladesh team is threatened with loss of points, future scheduling disadvantages, and institutional penalties.

Sigmund Freud claimed that civilisation survives by repressing aggression and channelling it into sanctioned outlets through a process called sublimation. Sport is one of humanity's most effective sublimatory inventions. It allows hostility, domination, rivalry, and loss within a sanctioned package. Sports, particularly between neighbouring states with unresolved histories, can divert tensions away from borders and into scoreboards and convert geopolitical anxiety into sporting rivalry.

The Fizz episode has done the opposite. Instead of hiding the

allows them to enjoy the enacted aggression.

Cricket acts like the carnival of mediaeval times, when ordinary people were allowed to invert rules and mock authority. Mikhail Bakhtin claimed that carnivals protected society by letting aggression laugh at power instead of attacking it. Stadiums permit shouting, humiliation, emotional excess, and symbolic violence so that real violence remains unnecessary.

Realpolitik, the commonsensical diplomacy of Jaishankar, would have allowed this sporting licence. But Jay Shaha had pitched cricket as an arena of security paranoia and punitive discipline. Instead of letting aggression burn itself out under lights and rules, they are forcing it back into politics, where it becomes volatile. If cricket could speak from the psychoanalyst's couch (i.e., the pitch), it would say, “I was created to control your aggression, not to incite fear. I am not the border. I am the cushion.”

Our children, the unseen casualties of chaos



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

FARZANA MISHA

I recently started encouraging my children to read the newspaper every morning, hoping it would nurture awareness and civic curiosity. After a few days, they asked to stop. The news, they said, made them anxious. The constant stories of violence and injustice left them feeling unsettled, “as if the world has gone bonkers,” they said. Their response was not dramatic; it was honest. And it forced me to confront a difficult reality: what once served as civic education may now function as an unfiltered source of distress for young minds. While public attention understandably focuses on political consequences and security concerns, far less attention is paid to those who quietly absorb these events every day: our children.

Much has been written about

the political awakening of Gen Z. Yet, an even younger generation is coming of age in a climate shaped by violence-filled headlines, social media saturation, and contested truths. As a parent and an academic, my concern is not primarily about political mobilisation. It is about the social, emotional, ethical, and civic environment we are creating for the inheritors of this country.

This raises an uncomfortable question: are we informing the next generation or overwhelming them? When violence becomes a daily headline, when stories of children burned alive, communities attacked over identity, or media institutions set on fire dominate public discourse, it is difficult to argue whether such exposure builds resilience or

democratic responsibility. Instead, it risks normalising brutality and eroding empathy before it has fully formed in the young minds.

Children are not passive observers. They listen closely, absorb language, tone, and moral cues. The cumulative psychological cost of growing up amid constant narratives of fear, injustice, and impunity cannot be dismissed as incidental. A society must ask itself what it considers acceptable collateral damage during periods of unrest, and whether children are being treated as invisible casualties of public disorder. The problem is not only political instability, but a deeper moral disorientation.

As the country stands on the verge of electing a new political leadership, these questions become even more urgent. How aware are those seeking power of the social and psychological realities with which children are growing up today? How invested are they in shaping a future that goes beyond seeing children merely as beneficiaries of nutrition programmes, stipends, or enrolment statistics?

Children deserve a holistic understanding of the world around

them. They need help making sense of complexities: injustice and accountability, environmental change and climate risk, shared responsibility and coexistence. Ignoring reality does not shield them from it.

This is not a call for censorship or silence. It is a call for responsibility in media, politics, and public life. Reporting matters. Language matters. It also matters that we recognise children as part of the audience, forming their earliest understanding of justice, humanity, and belonging.

In several European countries, children and future generations are treated not as abstract beneficiaries of development, but as stakeholders whose well being, mental health, and rights must be actively considered in policymaking. Political decisions are increasingly assessed not only for their immediate outcomes, but for the world they leave behind.

Periods of unrest will pass; history suggests they always do. The deeper concern is what kind of citizens are shaped during these moments, and what moral landscape they will inherit once the noise subsides. That responsibility cannot be deferred. Our children are listening.

How an NCP-Jamaat coalition benefits the Jamaat and BNP more



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

MD ASHIKUR RAHMAN

The formation of an electoral coalition between the National Citizen Party (NCP) and Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami ahead of the upcoming national election signals a decisive shift in Bangladesh's political landscape. Rather than three major blocs competing for parliament, the country is now heading towards a contest between two large coalitions. Given the NCP's organisational limitations at the grassroots level, this outcome was perhaps inevitable.

Although the NCP has run high-profile campaigns in the past, most notably the July Podojatra (the July march), its reach beyond urban district centres has remained limited. The party, born out of the July uprising, derives much of its legitimacy from the visible role its leaders played in that movement. Figures such as Nahid Islam, Hasnat Abdullah, and Sarjis Alam are widely known even in rural Bangladesh, and expectations surrounding them are high. Yet, popularity alone does not translate into votes.

During fieldwork across Rangpur and Panchagarh, I repeatedly heard the same sentiment from potential NCP supporters: they want direct, personal engagement. Voters expect party activists to visit their homes, speak with them face-to-face, and ask for their support. This absence of sustained man-to-man communication, driven largely by NCP's lack of manpower, has been the key obstacle preventing the party from becoming a formidable contender at the ballot box.

This is where Jamaat-e-Islami's organisational strength becomes crucial.

Jamaat's coordinated grassroots network and disciplined cadre can bridge the gap between NCP's popular appeal and actual voter mobilisation. Unlike alliances with larger parties such as the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which often fail to deliver unified electoral support, Jamaat's reputation for internal discipline ensures that coalition decisions are followed almost unanimously by its supporters. For NCP, this offers a reliable mechanism to convert sympathy into votes.

However, this alliance is not without serious risks for the NCP. Jamaat may attempt to reposition itself as a key architect of the July uprising, gradually appropriating the very legitimacy that sustains the NCP. If Jamaat succeeds in redefining the public memory of July, NCP risks losing its foundational political capital. We are already seeing the effort through Jamaat-Shibir's rebranding of their politics, agendas, and slogans based on the July uprising, which is quite similar to NCP. This narrative is already being amplified by online propaganda networks associated with both the fallen Awami League and Jamaat-aligned actors.

There is also the danger of ideological drift. By joining a coalition dominated by Islamist parties, NCP risks being perceived as a right-wing force rather than a centrist one. Comparisons with past Jamaat alliances involving BNP or the Awami League are misleading. Those parties had already established their ideological identities before entering such coalitions. NCP, by contrast, is still in the process of defining

its political character. Entering an alliance too early may result in its absorption into a larger ideological framework, rather than the emergence of an independent political force. The most visible setback for the NCP would be losing representation in the upper house of the national assembly. Rather than contesting all 300 constituencies, the party is reportedly competing in fewer than 30, although they hope to secure more. Such

now managed to reduce doctrinal tensions in favour of a broader Islamist political front. Recent victories by its student wing, Islami Chhatra Shibir, in student council elections nationwide have further energised the party. Jamaat today is highly organised, digitally savvy, and tightly disciplined at the grassroots level.

Yet, history offers a cautionary note. Bangladeshi voters have consistently favoured

voters, which was also missing from the coalition.

The final piece of the puzzle is the BNP. How does this coalition benefit them?

BNP should take lessons from the failures of its student wing, Bangladesh Jatiotabadi Chatra Dal, which suffered significant defeats in recent university student council elections. Bangladesh Islami Chhatra Shibir's electoral tactics—particularly the use of “dummy” candidates—played a decisive role. In elections such as the Dhaka University Central Students' Union (DUCSU), Shibir fielded both official candidates and seemingly independent, non-affiliated candidates with strong personal appeal. These dummy candidates fragmented the anti-Shibir, centrist and leftist votes, while Shibir's own candidates consolidated both loyal and swing voters. A Jamaat-NCP coalition would largely neutralise the risk of a similar tactic being deployed against the BNP in national elections, since there would be no third major bloc capable of splitting the broader centrist vote bank. BNP's main remaining challenge, instead, would be containing internal rebel candidates in certain constituencies.

Had the NCP instead formed a third coalition with parties such as the AB Party and Gono Odhikar Parishad (GOP), BNP would have faced a greater threat. Such a bloc could have drawn substantial support from centrist voters. By entering a right-leaning coalition instead, NCP effectively clears the middle ground for the BNP. Historically a centre-right party, and with Tarique Rahman showing no intention of shifting that position, the BNP now stands to consolidate leftist, centre-left, and centre-right voters all alone in the absence of the Awami League.

In that sense, the NCP-Jamaat coalition does more than reshape the opposition; it simplifies the electoral battlefield. For NCP itself, however, while it hopes to bank on coalition strength for electoral advantage, the arrangement ultimately risks compromising its long-term potential and leverage.



VISUAL: ALIZA RAHMAN

limited participation will almost certainly reduce its overall vote share and could, in turn, weaken its influence over policymaking in the next five years.

For Jamaat, however, the timing could not be better. This is arguably the most favourable political moment the party has experienced in Bangladesh's 54-year history. Historically opposed by Deobandi and Sunni Islamist parties such as Islami Andolon Bangladesh, Khelafat-e-Majlish, and clerical networks like Hefajat-e-Islam, Jamaat has

centrist politics, and no Islamist party-led coalition has won national power since independence in 1971. NCP's inclusion may help soften the coalition's general ideological image. Unlike other partners, NCP planned but faltered in fielding female candidates, an important symbolic distinction in a coalition where parties like Jamaat and Islami Andolon Bangladesh have nominated none. Moreover, NCP brings nationally recognised young leaders whose prominence during the July 2024 uprising resonates strongly with young

Bridging the gap between classrooms and workplaces



Hasibul Islam Rafi
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HASIBUL ISLAM RAFI

Bangladesh today is producing more graduates than ever before, yet employers continue to struggle to find workers with the right skills. This contradiction is reflected sharply in global benchmarks: Bangladesh ranks 106th out of 139 economies in the Global Innovation Index (GII) 2025, with an especially low placement of 133rd in the human capital and research indicators. The numbers tell a clear story, but so does real life. Picture a young graduate in Mymensingh clutching his degree with quiet hope. He excelled in university, yet months and years pass without a job. His frustration is shared by countless students nationwide for whom a degree is not a passport to opportunity but a waiting room of uncertainty.

The scale of the crisis is undeniable. Nearly 13.5 percent of university graduates remain unemployed, the highest among all education levels. One in every three unemployed Bangladeshis today is a university graduate. Each year, around 700,000 new graduates enter the job market, but only 300,000 jobs are created. Employers regularly say that many graduates lack the technical, practical or communication skills required for modern workplaces. At the same time, many industries hire foreign professionals for mid- and higher-skilled roles.

Several structural issues underpin this mismatch. Much of our education system still relies on theory-heavy, lecture-based teaching with limited practical exposure. Many public universities and National University colleges

face resource constraints, outdated curricula, weak faculty development and limited engagement with industry. As a result, students graduate with strong memorisation skills but relatively weak problem-solving, teamwork or digital competencies. Meanwhile, the global labour market is moving rapidly towards automation, artificial intelligence, renewable energy, digital services and advanced manufacturing, fields where our classrooms have barely begun to adapt.

Another persistent gap lies in the weak collaboration between academia and industry. In many countries, universities associate with companies to design curricula, offer internships and conduct joint research. In Bangladesh, such partnerships remain sporadic. A Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) survey found nearly 28 percent of National University graduates unemployed, despite the simultaneous presence of thousands of foreign workers filling skilled roles that local graduates could have occupied with the right training.

Yet this crisis, while serious, is entirely solvable. The government can play a transformative role by adopting a set of forward-looking, pragmatic strategies. First, Bangladesh should expand international exposure for students through global exchange programmes, overseas internships and funded participation in international competitions, conferences and workshops. Even virtual internships with multinational



FILE PHOTO: STAR

Many public universities and National University colleges face resource constraints, outdated curricula, weak faculty development and limited engagement with industry.

programmes can encourage companies to set up labs, research centres, apprenticeships or innovation studios inside universities. Early examples, from telecom and banking sectors partnering with universities to offer industry-linked master's programmes, should be replicated widely. Curriculum modernisation, with active input from employers, is essential if universities are to keep pace with evolving market demands.

Third, Bangladesh needs a curriculum overhaul that embeds technical skills, soft

skills and digital literacy from school to university. Making vocational and technical education compulsory at the secondary level, as floated in several political proposals, would be a decisive move. Alongside this, the country should adopt multilingual education. English remains essential, but introducing other global languages in schools and colleges would open vast international employment avenues. However, reforms must extend beyond slogans. Teacher training, modern materials and assessment reforms are crucial to make real change.

Fourth, the government should normalise part-time work, apprenticeships, freelancing and remote jobs for students. Bangladesh is already one of the world's largest suppliers of online freelancers, yet millions more could join with minimal support. Local government bodies and private companies could offer structured part-time roles or micro-internships, allowing students to

gain experience while studying. This shift in culture, from “study first, work later” to “learn while working,” would significantly reduce the transition gap between education and employment.

Fifth, Bangladesh must fully activate its growing ecosystem of innovation hubs, incubators and ICT parks. These centres should become dynamic spaces where young people can experiment, build prototypes, gain mentorship and launch startups. Stronger government and private-sector collaboration here could help convert frustrated job seekers into job creators, turning the much-feared “brain drain” into a powerful “brain gain.”

Amid these long-term solutions, political discourse often gravitates towards quicker, more populist promises such as unemployment allowances. While the idea may offer temporary relief, it is financially unsustainable and does little to address the underlying problem. With nearly a million jobless graduates, cash stipends are not a substitute for structural reforms. On the other hand, proposals such as BNP's plan to introduce three-language learning and strengthen skill-based education reflect a more constructive direction, if implemented with sincerity, resources and accountability.

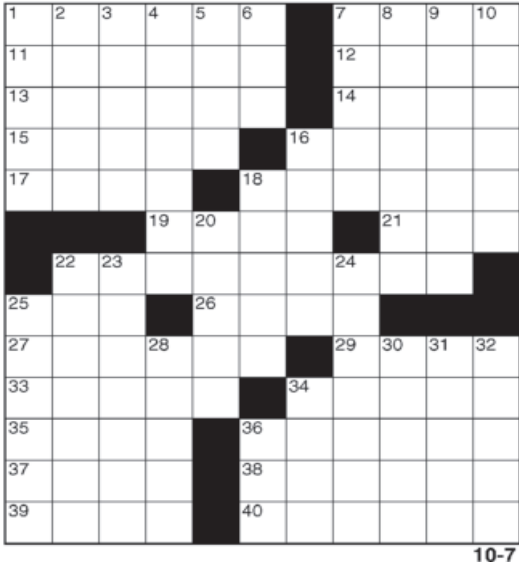
Our youth are talented, ambitious and ready to contribute. What they need is an ecosystem that prepares them for the world they are stepping into. If the government can catalyse reforms, from global internships to curriculum modernisation, from innovation hubs to industry partnerships, our graduates will not only find jobs at home but also compete successfully abroad. Over time, Bangladesh could shift from a country struggling with educated unemployment to a nation powering its growth through skilled, confident and globally competitive youth. The opportunity is immense, but so is the urgency. The time to act is now, before another generation of degrees leads to another generation of dead ends.

CROSSWORD
BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
1 Twisty course
7 Coop group
11 Asian temple
12 Balm ingredient
13 Prolific inventor
14 Andean capital
15 “Oklahoma!” aunt
16 Implied
17 Ruby and Sandra
18 Secant's reciprocal
19 Qom's country
21 Poet Hughes
22 Virtual world
25 Jazz horn
26 Goose egg
27 Copy fixer

- 29 Choir member
33 Pan of fiction
34 Humorous
35 Makeshift swing
36 Full grown
37 Pressing need
38 No longer in bed
39 Field cries
40 New
DOWN
1 Keanu Reeves film
2 Soup server
3 Nimble
4 Wigs out
5 Dump output
6 Chess piece
7 NFL pioneer George

- 8 Calls forth
9 Oscar hopeful
10 On the sofa
16 Copier need
18 Spelunker
20 Barber's need
22 Dessert wine
23 Preferred seating, for some
24 Stiffly awkward
25 Bacteria-ridden
28 Prom crowd
30 Entertain
31 Temptress of myth
32 Perfume
34 Maintenance
36 Ruin



DECEMBER 31ST'S ANSWERS

A	R	E	N	A		P	I	E	C	E
C	O	D	A	S		A	R	D	O	R
C	A	M	P	S		G	A	M	M	A
E	D	U		I	D	A	U	P	S	
S	I	N	G	I	N		N	E	E	
S	E	D	O	N	A		A	D	D	S
	H	A	S	T	E	N	S			
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S	I	R	E	N		A	R	E	S	T
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Violence, perserverence, transformation: SIAM AHMED DISSECTS ‘RAKKHOSH’

RAKSHANDA RAHMAN MISHA

On the very first day of the new year, Siam Ahmed sent a clear message to audiences: ‘hold on tight to your cinema seats’. With a daring new slate of characters lined up, the actor is ready to set the silver screen ablaze in 2026.

A recent glimpse into one of his most extreme transformations came through the first look of Mehedi Hassan Hridoy’s upcoming film *Rakkhosh*. In the teaser, Siam appears almost unrecognisable—dressed in a stark white suit and boots, a rose stem clenched between his lips, a Chinese axe in one hand and a pistol in the other. The look is unapologetically violent, deeply unsettling, yet impossible to ignore. It doesn’t just scream brutality; it teases mystery, drawing viewers into the unsettling psyche of his character.

Naturally, the question arises: what turns this man into a ‘Rakkhosh’ (the Monster)? Addressing the curiosity, Siam revealed that this is the most violent character he has ever portrayed on screen. He believes audiences will be stunned to see him in such an unfamiliar avatar. “This film explores how violent a person can become because of love. The audience won’t feel disturbed—they will feel completely engaged,” he said.

While fans have been raving about his intense new look, some viewers have drawn comparisons between the teaser and violent aesthetics seen in Bollywood and South Indian cinema. When asked about these comparisons, Siam responded candidly, placing his trust firmly in the filmmaker’s vision. “I don’t respond to these comments because this is a vision, and that vision belongs to the director. As a team member and the lead artiste, it’s my responsibility to enact it in a way that is entertaining and gripping for the audience. I believe in doing my job.”

He further dismissed claims of imitation, stressing that *Rakkhosh* is rooted in originality.

“There is no sense in

saying it has been copied. We have never intentionally done that. As audiences, when we see violence or certain visuals, we tend to associate them with films we’ve already watched. But in terms of originality and performance, I believe *Rakkhosh* will be something never seen before in the Bangladeshi film industry.”

The makers have already completed a major portion of the shoot in Dhaka and are now preparing to begin filming in Sri Lanka.

“The Sri Lanka shooting is about to begin, so I will be able to share more

about that soon. So far, we have shot a major portion in Bangladesh, and the entire team is very excited,” Siam shared.

For a long time, audiences were accustomed to seeing Siam Ahmed in romantic roles, often tagging him with a “chocolate boy” image. When asked whether he fears being stereotyped again—this time with a series of violent characters—the actor was clear in his response.

“I don’t think I will be stereotyped. I have done a lot of romantic and drama-based work, and at one point I was worried the audience might get bored seeing me in similar roles. That’s why I look for characters with an X factor, something entertaining and different.”

He explained that his recent choices stem from a

desire to experiment rather than abandon romance altogether.

“If I had continued doing only romantic roles, that would have been stereotyping. I was experimenting with characters and demeanours. *Taandob’s* Armaan Mansoor and *Jongli’s* Jony connected with audiences because they were honest portrayals. It’s not that I’ve played many violent characters. Honestly, my most violent and stylised action film so far is *Rakkhosh*. However, I definitely want to work in romantic films again, but I want to return with something beautiful and unique for the audience.”

Siam Ahmed is also known for speaking out fearlessly against social injustice on social media, often without concern for potential backlash. On this, he quoted a line from the Spider-Man films.

“I think everybody has heard this quote: ‘With great power comes great responsibility.’ As an artiste, we should have the courage to speak out against any injustice in society. My audience is my biggest strength, and I can go to any lengths to ensure their voice is heard. Their love and support give me protection against anything and everything.”

When asked whether audiences might see him on OTT platforms soon, Siam made it clear that his focus remains on the big screen.

“Right now, I’m very busy with cinema, and I don’t think I’ll be seen on OTT anytime soon. My main focus is the big-screen audience, and I’m deeply committed to them. I have wonderful scripts and projects with talented directors, and InshaAllah, some beautiful films are being made. With all the feedback and love I get from my audience, I’m forever indebted to them. The people who have been cheering for me since day one I just want to make them proud.”



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

TRENDY STREAMS

Netflix

Agatha Christie’s Seven Dials



Prime Video
The Night Manager



HBO Max
The Pitt



Hulu
A Thousand Blows



Chorki
Aatka



OUT AND ABOUT IN DHAKA



Pulsiraat

Jan 12 | 6:30pm- 8pm

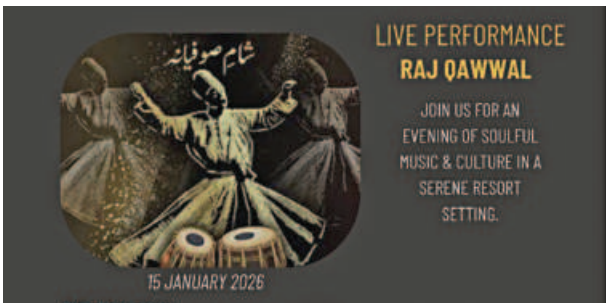
National Theatre Hall, BSA



Unplugged Vibe Session

Jan 14 | 4pm onwards

Yamaha Flagship Centre,
Tejgaon



Qawwali Night

Jan 15 | 6pm onwards

Bathuli Bus Stand, Dhamrai

STYLE STATEMENT

Ana de Armas

At the Golden Globe Awards, Ana de Armas embraced graphic elegance in a striking strapless Louis Vuitton gown that balanced structure with fluidity. The monochrome dress featured an intricate white geometric motif running through the centre, set against a black base that created a bold, architectural contrast. Soft pleated panels on either side added movement, lending the look a quiet sense of drama without overwhelming its clean lines. Styled with minimal jewellery and a sleek, centre-parted hairstyle, de Armas let the craftsmanship of the gown take centre stage. Her fresh makeup and understated accessories reinforced the look’s modern restraint.



TV TALKIES

Haq

Haq is a thought-provoking movie that presents a powerful story of a woman’s fight for justice and dignity. Rooted in real social and legal realities, the film explores women’s rights, faith, and the struggle for fairness through an intense courtroom battle. Led by strong performances from Yami Gautam and Emraan Hashmi, *Haq* started streaming on Netflix on January 2, and is currently trending at the top in Bangladesh.



WHAT’S PLAYING

‘No One Noticed’ by The Marías

No One Noticed is The Marías at their most restrained and observant. Built on a languid rhythm and gauzy layers of synth and guitar, the song unfolds with deliberate slowness, allowing atmosphere to do most of the work. María Zardoya’s vocal sits low in the mix, almost conversational.

The song traces the quiet aftermath of a relationship that has ended not with drama, but with indifference. There are no grand revelations here – just the dull realisation of being overlooked, of disappearing without consequence.

No One Noticed has become one of The Marías’ most widely consumed releases to date, driven as much by algorithmic momentum as by word of mouth. Since its release, the track has amassed tens of millions of streams on Spotify, placing it among the band’s top-performing songs globally. It has also spent time on Spotify’s Viral 50, aided by sustained use across TikTok and short-form video platforms.



Winter chill

FROM PAGE 3

Abdul Mannan, a local hawker in the Laldighir Par area, explained that they are selling adult wear for Tk 200 and children's items for Tk 100. "These are fixed prices; we don't appreciate bargaining here," he said firmly.

However, for some, bargaining remains a necessity. Khaleda Akter, who came to Laldighi with her son, was seen negotiating hard with a vendor. "We cannot afford the glitzy shopping malls, so I've come here to find something cheaper for my son."

The winter season means a major investment for these small-scale traders. Kamal Uddin, a hawker at Laldighir Par, invested Tk 2 lakh this season. "I bought 20 bundles of warm clothes at Tk 10,000 each," he said. Each bundle typically contains around eight varieties of items, including woollen caps, scarves, gloves, and earmuffs.

"My daily sales hover between Tk 3,000 and Tk 4,000. Depending on the quality, I sell sweaters for anywhere between Tk 200 and Tk 500," he added.

Average

FROM PAGE 12

7,800 in October 2025 was priced at approximately Tk 28,500 by December, this reporter found.

Rising prices have begun to alter consumer behaviour. Many buyers are now turning to the second-hand market, while others are exploring technical workarounds such as using laptop RAM in desktop systems with adapters.

Nasim Rahman Zeem, a computer science graduate, said the scale of recent price hikes was difficult to justify. "RAM prices are expected to rise," he said. "But global manufacturers have not yet fully shifted production. The sharp increase in Bangladesh over the past few months does not seem entirely justified."

Market analysts say the effects of the price hike will be felt most sharply in the smartphone sector, which is highly sensitive to global supply-chain trends.

Counterpoint Research forecasts that average smartphone selling prices could rise by nearly 6.9% in 2026, as manufacturers either pass on higher component costs to consumers or scale back device specifications to protect margins. The firm also expects global smartphone shipments to fall by 2.1% that year, citing higher memory costs as a key factor.

Budget smartphones are likely to be hit hardest. These devices typically operate on thin profit margins and rely on lower-cost memory configurations, leaving manufacturers with limited room to absorb price increases.

Is BNP failing to connect

FROM PAGE 12

on key campuses, could also pose governance challenges even if the BNP wins the national election.

Prof Sabbir Ahmed of Dhaka University's political science department said the outcomes of student elections could shape the national polls, even if indirectly.

"The results are spreading across the country online and helping BNP's electoral rivals," he said, adding that grassroots campaigning by victorious student groups could influence public opinion.

Prof Mojibur Rahman of Dhaka University's Institute of Education and Research echoed the concern.

"When elected Shibir



A public transport worker clears tram tracks during snowfall in Vienna, Austria.

PHOTO: AFP

BRICK KILNS ravage land, waterbodies

FROM PAGE 1

highway in neighbouring Patiya, Chandanaish and Lohagara upazilas.

"Brick kilns are not only removing fertile topsoil from farmlands; smoke from the kilns is also polluting the air and reducing crop growth and productivity," said Md Moniruzzaman, Satkania upazila agriculture officer. He said farmers are failing to achieve expected yields due to kiln-related pollution.

Over the past five years, at least 75 acres of cultivable land have been damaged, according to the Satkania upazila agriculture office. As many as 20 brick kilns are operating in Kaliash union alone.

During a recent visit to the area, this correspondent saw large pits across most agricultural land within one to two kilometres of the kilns. Thick smoke has polluted the air throughout the locality. Farmers say their livelihoods are collapsing.

Abdul Kader, a farmer

from Ward 9 of Kaliash union, said he used to cultivate chilli and potato on about 100 decimals of land each year but has now switched to mustard and a local variety of beans.

"Smoke from the kilns is damaging our crops. Chilli plants shed their leaves, and potatoes do not grow properly since the brick kilns began operating in this area. We can no longer rely entirely on farming and are having to survive through alternative livelihoods," he said.

Another farmer, Abu Taher, said soot and ash from nearby kilns ruined his tomato crops for two consecutive seasons.

"Our farmland is gradually becoming fallow. To save agriculture, this must be stopped," he said.

According to locals and some officials, excessive coal and wood burning remains widespread during the brick-making season, despite restrictions, filling surrounding villages with thick smoke.

"During the season, we have to keep doors and windows shut. Even the fruit trees in our yards are no longer bearing fruit," said Abu Taher.

Delwar Hossain, assistant conservator of forests in the Chattogram South Forest Division, said authorities are maintaining surveillance and have stopped the transport and burning of firewood in kilns.

However, hills are still being excavated to supply soil for brick production, increasing the risk of landslides during the monsoon.

In Aeochia union, several hills are being cut to supply soil to kilns. "Hill cutting continues openly, with little fear of intervention, as enforcement remains weak," said Md Hasan, a local resident.

Ashraf Uddin, assistant director of the Department of Environment's Chattogram office, said action is taken whenever information on hill cutting is received. He said a case

was filed in the area last November.

Experts warn that the combined impact of air pollution, topsoil removal and hill cutting is alarming.

"Topsoil loss reduces agricultural productivity, hill excavation destabilises the land and increases landslide risks, while smoke emissions damage crops and public health," said Md Kamal Hossain, professor at the Institute of Forestry and Environmental Sciences at Chittagong University. "If this continues, the environmental and socio-economic consequences will be severe."

Local officials acknowledge the presence of illegal kilns, though enforcement remains limited.

Khondakar Mahmudul Hasan, upazila nirbahi officer of Satkania, said illegal kilns are still collecting soil through syndicates, although they are no longer burning firewood this season.

"We are conducting

regular operations. If illegal kilns can be shut down, environmental damage will be reduced. However, many owners have obtained stay orders from the courts," he said.

According to the upazila administration, at least 15 kilns have been fined about Tk 20 lakh this season for various violations.

Didarul Alam, owner of Payel Bricks, said hundreds of families depend on the sector. "We urge the government to simplify the brick kiln law to help sustain this industry," he said.

Jamir Uddin, director of the Department of Environment in Chattogram, said authorities plan to challenge court stay orders allowing illegal kilns to operate.

"We hope the courts will cancel the stay orders once the facts are presented, leading to the closure of illegal kilns and enforcement of environmental safeguards," he said.

Dhaka seeks relief

FROM PAGE 12

The issues were discussed during a meeting between National Security Adviser Khalilur Rahman and US Trade Representative (USTR) Ambassador Jamieson Greer in Washington, DC, on Thursday.

Khalilur, who is on a five-day visit to US, also met Assistant USTR Brendan Lynch.

The US recently included Bangladesh among countries whose nationals must deposit refundable bonds ranging from \$5,000 to \$15,000 for business and tourist visas, a move Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain described as "unfortunate."

Business leaders said the bond requirement would make necessary travel to the US difficult, potentially affecting trade ties.

Last year, Washington imposed a 20 percent reciprocal tariff on Bangladeshi goods and sought to narrow trade gaps. In 2024, the US imported \$8.37 billion worth of goods from Bangladesh, while exports to Bangladesh stood at \$2.21 billion.

Bangladesh has since increased imports of US products, including wheat, cotton and liquefied natural gas (LNG), and pledged to buy Boeing aircraft in the coming years.

In light of rising trade, Khalilur urged Greer to ease business travel and sought DFC access, citing progress in labour reforms, said the press release.

"Even before the formal execution of the reciprocal trade

agreement, Bangladesh has made major strides in reducing the trade gap by substantially increasing imports from the US," it quoted Khalilur as saying.

The USTR ambassador agreed to positively consider Dhaka's proposals, the press release said.

Greer also agreed to give serious consideration to Khalilur's proposal to lower or eliminate US reciprocal tariff on apparel using US content, it added.

Bangladesh Ambassador to the US Tareq Md Ariful Islam accompanied Khalilur in the meeting.

Khalilur is scheduled to meet US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Allison Hooker and US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Paul Kapoor today.

Cricketers rally

FROM PAGE 12

the T20 World Cup. Tamim also noted that, as a significant portion of the board's revenue comes from the ICC, any decision should prioritise what is best for the long-term future of Bangladesh cricket.

Sharing a clip of Tamim's comments on Facebook, Najmul wrote that the country had now "witnessed the emergence of another proven Indian agent".

The post sparked immediate backlash from within the cricketing community. Several cricketers, including former Test captain Mominul Haque and current Test skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto, expressed their displeasure on social media. Left-arm spinner Taijul Islam said he was "shocked" by the choice of words used by the BCB director.

Amid growing criticism, Najmul later issued another social media post, claiming that while the sports adviser had suggested dialogue with the ICC to move Bangladesh's World Cup fixtures from India to Sri Lanka, someone who had scored over 15,000 international runs for Bangladesh was now "batting for India". He added that the remarks reflected his personal opinion.

The Cricketers' Welfare Association of Bangladesh (CWAB) on Friday issued a statement demanding a public apology from the director, confirming that it had written to the BCB president and was seeking appropriate action.

"A comment made by BCB director M Najmul Islam regarding former national captain Tamim Iqbal has come to the attention of the Cricketers'

Welfare Association of Bangladesh (CWAB). We are stunned, shocked and outraged by it," the statement read.

"Such a remark by a board official about the most successful opener in Bangladesh's history, who represented the country for 16 years, is utterly condemnable. Not only because it concerns a player like Tamim, but because such comments about any cricketer are unacceptable and insulting to the entire cricketing community."

"When a responsible board director makes such remarks on a public platform, it raises serious questions about professionalism, ethics and the code of conduct of BCB officials," the statement added.

CWAB president Mohammad Mithun, along with several other cricketers, later addressed the issue at a press conference in Sylhet, where he strongly criticised the comments and stressed that Bangladesh should not miss out on participating in the World Cup.

"I want the Bangladesh team to play the World Cup. Why would players miss out on such a big event?" Mithun said. "The responsibility lies with the cricket board to negotiate and make arrangements so the players can participate, while ensuring their safety and security."

Mithun further remarked that cricket was increasingly being dragged into politics, something he felt should not happen.

Meanwhile, the BCB is awaiting a response from the ICC to a letter sent on Thursday, in which the board outlined its security concerns over sending the team to India.

Shooters yet to be

FROM PAGE 12

directly involved in the killing," he added.

Musabbir, ex-general secretary of the Swachhshasebak Dal's Dhaka north city unit, was accompanied by Abu Sufian Bepari Masud, general secretary of Tejgaon Van Workers' Union, who sustained bullet injuries in the attack. Masud was undergoing treatment at a hospital.

Meanwhile, protests demanding justice for Musabbir continued. Several hundred people, including local BNP leaders, activists, and residents, yesterday staged a demonstration in the Karwan Bazar area, issuing a 24-hour ultimatum for the arrest of those involved in the killing.

BNP Standing Committee member Salahuddin Ahmed visited Musabbir's house and expressed condolences to the bereaved family.

Speaking to journalists, he said they demanded the home ministry take proper action following a thorough probe. He added that the investigation should determine whether any force opposed to democracy and elections was behind the killing.

The BNP leader also urged vigilance to ensure no one obstructs the upcoming polls. "Even if attempts are made to derail the polls through such incidents, they will not succeed as the people will resist them. We urge the government to take advance preparations so that such incidents do not occur in the future."

Several Tejgaon BNP leaders said multiple possibilities should be looked into, including internal party conflict, personal enmity, or whether Musabbir was targeted due to the upcoming election. They called upon police to investigate all angles thoroughly.

Musabbir's wife Suraiya Begum told this newspaper that her husband had often said he was making many enemies and could be killed at any time. "But he said it casually. That's why we failed to realise that something like this could happen."

She also demanded that her husband's killers be arrested quickly and brought to justice.

In another development, this correspondent saw army personnel patrolling the Karwan Bazar area last night.

Trump halts 2nd wave of attacks

FROM PAGE 12

ceremony for the 100 Venezuelans that her government says were killed during the US assault.

"Nobody surrendered. There was fighting for the homeland" when the US forces attacked on January 3, she said.

Venezuela on Thursday began releasing a "large number" of political prisoners, including several foreigners, in an apparent concession to the United States, reports AFP.

Former Venezuelan opposition candidate Enrique Marquez — who opposed Nicolas Maduro in the contested 2024 presidential election — was among those released

Thursday.

"It's all over now," Marquez said in a video taken by a local journalist of him and his wife, accompanied by another released opposition member Biagio Pilieri.

The White House credited Trump with securing the prisoners' freedom.

"This is one example of how the president is using maximum leverage to do right by the American and Venezuelan people," Deputy Press Secretary Anna Kelly said in a statement to AFP.

Trump broadened his threat to drug traffickers in a Fox News interview that aired Thursday night, saying he would target cartels in land strikes — the US military

has already destroyed at least 31 vessels in maritime attacks in the Eastern Pacific and the Caribbean, killing at least 107 people.

"We are going to start now hitting land with regard to the cartels. The cartels are running Mexico," Trump told broadcaster Sean Hannity.

Interim leader Rodriguez's brother, Parliament Speaker Jorge Rodriguez, said "a large number of Venezuelan and foreign nationals" were being immediately freed for the sake of "peaceful coexistence."

He did not say which prisoners would be released, nor how many or from where.

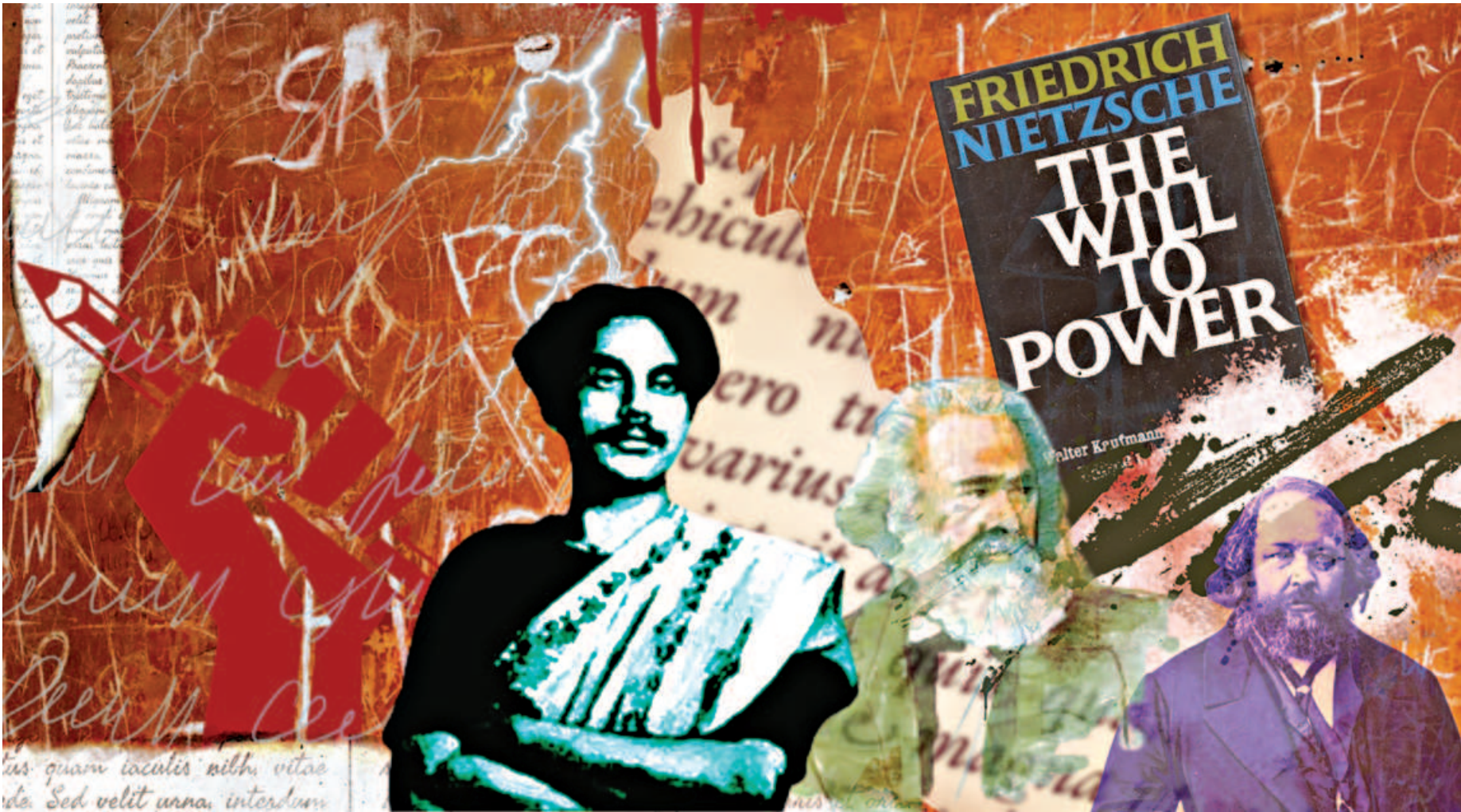


ILLUSTRATION: MAHMUDA EMDAD

ESSAY

Symphonic overtures of Nietzsche-Marx-Bakunin in Nazrul’s ‘Bidrohi’

MOSTOFA SARWAR

Kazi Nazrul Islam’s Bangla poem “Bidrohi” (first published in January 1922), in *Bijli* magazine during British colonial rule, is more than just anti-imperialist literature—it is a striking philosophical rendition. The poem’s protagonist—the pervasive “I”—directly confronts political, social, religious, metaphysical, and economic authority, calling for an egalitarian society.

“Bidrohi” stands out in world literature as a synthesis of three philosophical streams: Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*, Marx’s class consciousness, and Bakunin’s anarchist vision. It is noteworthy that during the time of its composition, Nietzsche and Bakunin were not widely discussed among Bengali intellectuals, as Bangla translations were rare. A few English translations were known to some western-educated Bengali intellectuals. On the other hand, Marx had an exceptional presence in India, as the Communist Party of Bengal was formed in the early 1920s under the leadership of Muzaffar Ahmed, with whom Nazrul was closely associated. Therefore, while Marxist influence in “Bidrohi” is understandable, the philosophies of Nietzsche and Bakunin appear in Nazrul’s work through his own spontaneous creativity. Thus, the philosophical fervour of “Bidrohi” is Nazrul’s own—his original contribution. In this essay, I will analyse how “Bidrohi” functions as a meeting point of these three philosophies and presents a holistic vision of liberation and freedom that remains equally relevant today.

In Nietzsche’s *The Will to Power* (1901), “will to power” is described as the fundamental element of life. At its core lies the desire for mastery and self-transcendence. The idea of “self creation” is emphasised in *The Gay Science* (1882) and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883). His call—“Become what you are”—is the process of reshaping oneself and

overcoming all constraints.

From Nietzsche’s *The Will to Power*, we have an idea of his philosophy, which explains “Self Creation” as its existential goal. Nazrul’s “Bidrohi” firmly declares the spirit of self-affirmation. The rebel denounces all laws, traditions, customs, or dogma. Like Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*, the protagonist of “Bidrohi” declares his inalienable right to do anything his mind directs him to do. The poem’s “I” isn’t an imitation mimesis of Nietzsche’s—its representation is a unique force majeure, which is unfathomable even by the Almighty. The tone of the poem is all-out rebellion against any authority, power, mandates, culture, or historical memory. The hero of the poem trashes modesty, humility, and submission, and it is an absolute self-assertion of the highest form. He declares:

“Say, Valiant,
Say: High is my head!”
Even the highest peak of the Himalayas is seen bowing before the poet’s uplifted head:

“Looking at my head
Is cast down the great Himalayan peak!”

The indomitable ‘I’ is cruel, cursed, and arrogant without responsibility whatsoever. He presents himself as an uncontrollable and destructive force of nature:

“I am irresponsible, cruel and arrogant,
I am the king of the great upheaval,
I am cyclone, I am destruction,
I am the great fear, the curse of the universe.”

In the following lines, we see an extreme rebellion against traditional religious authority, the Almighty, and a determination to place himself and his own power at the highest point:

“Say, Valiant,
Say: Ripping apart the wide sky of the universe,
Leaving behind the moon, the sun, the planets

and the stars
Piercing the earth and the heavens,
Pushing through Almighty’s sacred seat

Have I risen,
I, the perennial wonder of mother-earth!”

Nazrul’s “Bidrohi” is not merely a political insurgent but a philosophical self-declaration—where Nietzsche’s self-creation becomes a universal metaphor.

Although the Rebel’s temperament is Nietzschean, the purpose of his rebellion is Marxist. It appears that the protagonist of this poem is announcing his own greatness, but, allegorically, he represents suffering humanity, i.e., the world’s proletariat. As the vanguard for the struggle of the oppressed, this poem’s ‘I’ wants to break all the laws imposed by the ruling elites. In the realm of antagonistic contradictions, the emancipation of India against imperial Britain demands rebellion, breaking the chain, and destroying the oppressive norms. I found this vivid class consciousness in “Bidrohi”.

“Weary of struggles, I, the great rebel,
Shall rest in quiet only when I find
The sky and the air free of the piteous groans of the oppressed.

Only when the battle fields are cleared of jingling bloody sabers.”

It may be noted that a few years after “Bidrohi” was published, Nazrul’s poems such as “Bhanger Gaan”, “Samyabadi”, “Sarbahara”, “Jinjur”, “Praloy Shikha”, and “Kulimajur” express direct Marxist themes—class consciousness, proletarian unity, and anti-exploitation revolt.

Between Nietzsche’s self-affirmation and Marx’s revolutionary goal stands Mikhail Bakunin’s anarchist philosophy. Bakunin, a “mad lover of freedom,” argued that true human liberation is possible only through rebellion against all external authority and coercion—state, capitalism, private property, and religion. Nazrul might not be aware of Bakunin’s anarchist philosophy because there is no

Bangla translation. Still, his protagonist, Bidrohi, becomes an antagonist who issues a clarion call to destroy the socio-political structures, existing morality, and social constraints. It appears that the spectre of Bakunin possesses Nazrul. As Bakunin said, destruction is the precondition of creation.

“I have no mercy,
I grind all to pieces.
I am disorderly and lawless,
I trample under my feet all rules and discipline!”

As Bakunin said, destruction is the precondition of creation; Nazrul alludes to Durjati, the Hindu Lord Shiva, who destroys to create. We find that Nazrul independently reinvented anarchism as a philosophical tool for a noble dialectical process where destruction and creation complement each other. In fact, Nazrul elevated anarchism to a higher level of authenticity:

“I am Durjati, I am the sudden tempest of ultimate summer,
I am the rebel, the rebel-son of mother-earth!

Say, Valiant,
Ever high is my head!”

We can conclude that Nazrul’s poem “Bidrohi” is not only a breakthrough literary contribution in Bangla, but also that its philosophical underpinnings place the poet in the pantheon of the greatest creative geniuses of the world. The impact of this poem resonates in the rise of Gen Z’s rebellion across different countries.

All the quoted fragments of “Bidrohi” are from Professor Kabir Chowdhury’s translation that can be found on the Nazrul Institute website.

Dr Mostofa Sarwar is professor emeritus at the University of New Orleans, former visiting professor and adjunct faculty at the University of Pennsylvania, and former dean and former vice-chancellor of Delgado Community College. He can be reached at asarwar2001@yahoo.com.

POETRY

Violence bears no apostrophes

SNATA BASU

Spectral land—you are bleeding hollow;
flesh and bone
at the precipice
of ruin,
of cold erosion,
of televised despair: the lynching of a naked man,
there is no easier way to word this—
this is the breaking of our land.
Violence bears no apostrophes, we rot in dog years.
It is history, euthanised.
It is declarative
of what has been sold
through the slow death
of conscience—what does it inherit?
who would it rather be
in an alternate tomorrow
disintegrating
beyond this civilisational scar.
we build past these eulogies—mourning this
bleeding soil,
and if silence remembers the ways in which
it is haunted—if it remembers at all,
may it forever haunt
the death of the soul.
This haunting of a womb half-given



ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

and half-owed
must remember
the carrying. The invisibles
are the sacred of the earth.

Snata Basu is a writer based in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Her poetry has appeared on numerous literary platforms including The Opiate, Visual Verse: An Online Anthology of Art and Words, and Small World City.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

As a woman I have no country. As a woman my country is the whole world.

— Virginia Woolf

REFLECTIONS

Peeking into authors’ mailbox: My year of reading letters

IFTEHAZ YEASIR IFTEE

I never considered reading authors’ letters. “How can personal letters be considered literature?”—I thought. It felt like a cash grab by publishers, scraping the bottom of a dead author’s drawer to sell whatever was available. How could letters be anything more than small talk and errands?

But this year, mostly by accident, I ended up diving into the world of letters by some of my favourite authors. And I realised I was wrong. If reading novels is like watching a performance, reading letters is like sitting in the dressing room while the actor takes off their makeup. It is unpolished, vulnerable, and terrifyingly real.

It started with Rabindranath



ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

Tagore’s *Chinnopotro* (Visva Bharati, 1912) back in April. I picked it up expecting obscure philosophy,

but instead found a young man drifting on a houseboat by the Padma, totally enchanted by the

world. These were not lectures; they were snapshots. Tagore writes about the monsoon clouds and the Padma river with such intimacy that you feel like you are sitting next to him on the deck. It grounded me and helped me heal. In a year that felt fleeting and monotonous, *Chinnopotro* was a lesson in slowing down and actually *looking* at things.

Then I moved to the complete opposite end of the emotional spectrum with Franz Kafka’s *Letters to Milena* (S. Fischer Verlag, 1952). If Tagore was at peace, Kafka was in an unadulterated panic. Reading Kafka’s letters is like watching a friend self-sabotage in real time: desperate, anxious, deeply in love, and yet terrified of

that love. Oddly, it was comforting to see a literary giant so exposed on paper. It made my own anxieties feel valid, almost human.

Finally, I read *Humayun Ahmed-er Koyekti Chhithi O Ekti Diary* (Anyaprokash, 2013) by Sahana Kayes. This one felt closer to home. We grew up with Humayun Ahmed as a kind of mythical storyteller, the man who created Himu and Misir Ali. But seeing him through his letters, and through Kayes’s framing, stripped away the myth. It was raw and domestic. It reminded me that authors aren’t gods; they are just people who feel things intensely and write them down. Initially, I got to know about this book from a radio show, and couldn’t help buying a copy. I

would urge anyone who is a fan of Humayun Ahmed to give this book a very worthwhile read

This year of “eavesdropping” through authors’ mail changed how I read. I stopped looking for perfect plots and started looking for honest voices. Letters aren’t written for an audience; they are written for one person. Because of that, they hold a kind of truth that fiction can not touch. It turns out some of the most revealing things writers leave behind are not in their manuscripts, but in the notes they scribble to the people they loved.

Iftehzaz Yeasir Iftee, a student at IBA, University of Dhaka, is a featured poet in the global anthology Luminance under the pseudonym Brotibir Roy.

Confidence projected as uncertainty persists

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN from Sylhet

With less than a month to go before the ICC T20 World Cup begins on February 7, the national team players should be using the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) to iron out their flaws before the big dance. Instead, they are left in limbo, uncertain whether they will even take part in the tournament.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) wrote to the International Cricket Council (ICC) for the second time on Thursday, outlining security concerns over travelling to India, and is now awaiting a response from the world cricket's governing body, which is expected to arrive soon.

Amid such uncertainty, Bangladesh named a 15-member squad for the event on Sunday – with scope to make changes till January 31.

Preparing for the World Cup in such a scenario could take a mental a toll on the players. However, all-rounder Mahedi Hasan – captain of the Chattogram Royals and one of the 15 named for World Cup – played down the issue after leading his side to a two-wicket win over Rajshahi Warriors in Sylhet on Friday.

"Uncertainty is a management issue – something for the officials to deal with. The players' job is simply to play," Mahedi said after the match.

"Even if you send players to Mars, they will go and play. I don't think any player has any doubts about that," he added.

But not everyone shared Mahedi's confidence. His counterpart in the same match and the player who led Bangladesh in the previous T20 World Cup, Najmul Hossain Shanto, had a different take.

Shanto, who is not part of the World Cup for the upcoming edition, said from past experiences that such events do affect players, even though they often prefer not to speak about it publicly.

"You'll notice that before every World Cup, something or other happens with us. As a player who has played in a few World Cups, I can tell you that such things have an effect," he said after the match.

"We put on an act that nothing affects us, that we are highly professional cricketers. But even you all know that we are acting. It's not easy. "In my view, players still try to figure out how to put these things aside and perform for the team. But it would be better if these issues didn't exist. At the same time, I'd say this situation is beyond our [players'] control."



PING-PONG TO PERFECTION

Italy's Jannik Sinner (left) and Spain's Carlos Alcaraz fine-tune their reflexes with a friendly table tennis match at Hyundai Card headquarters in Seoul on Friday, using the fast-paced game as a warm-up for their lawn tennis duel. The two archrivals -- who have claimed nine of the last 10 Grand Slam titles between them -- meet in the Hyundai Card Super Match at Inspire Arena today, just eight days before the Australian Open begins at Melbourne Park. Both players also spoke of the possibility of one day joining forces as doubles partners.

PHOTO: AFP

Hockey's 'slap', shot put power make cricketer Juairiya

Juairiya Ferdous, who earned a maiden call-up to the national team for the upcoming ICC Women's T20 World Cup Qualifiers in Nepal starting January 18, has not only represented Bangladesh in multiple sports but also excelled in disciplines like hockey, kabaddi, and athletics. In an exclusive interview with **The Daily Star's Abdullah Al Mehdi**, the 20-year-old wicketkeeper-batter about her batting approach, childhood dreams, and how her multi-sport journey shaped her cricketing identity. The excerpts are as follows:

The Daily Star (DS): How do you feel about your maiden national team call-up?

Juairiya Ferdous (JF): The feeling is wonderful and honestly hard to put into words. Since childhood, I have dreamt of playing for the national team. Now that I have this opportunity, I will try to utilise it and give something good back to my country.

DS: The selectors emphasised your 'clean-hitting'. What is your Powerplay approach?

JF: I feel very confident batting in the Powerplay. With only two fielders outside the circle, I feel confident to play big shots.

DS: Do you think you will be assigned wicketkeeping duties in the qualifiers?

JF: Our captain and another opener are also wicketkeepers, but I am always prepared. I have been keeping wickets since inter-school level. My mother encouraged me to take it up to avoid the toll and injuries associated with pace bowling.

DS: You have played many sports and won three golds at the 2023 Bangladesh Youth

Games. Where did this fascination come from?

JF: My mother is a physical education teacher at a high school. I grew up watching her train girls in athletics, kabaddi, handball, volleyball, cricket, table tennis, and badminton. Naturally, I started participating in these events for my school.

DS: Are you still involved in these sports while studying?

JF: I don't play them regularly now, but I compete in university games. I am a third-year student at Dhaka University and have won championships in athletics, handball, volleyball, and swimming at university level.. Since I miss some classes due to practice, my teachers consider my attendance, and my friends help with notes.

DS: You were once part of the national hockey team. Why shift focus to cricket?

JF: Representing Bangladesh in hockey was the first best feeling of my life. But the future and facilities in cricket are better in our country. In 2020, while in Dhaka for a

hockey tournament, my mother suggested I attend the women's cricket camp at BKSP. I was selected from 200 girls for a six-month camp. The coaches said that I had the natural power to succeed in cricket.

DS: You won three gold medals in one day at the Bangladesh Youth Games. Tell us about that.

JF: I won gold in shot put in the morning and set a record. Immediately afterwards, I took my hockey gear and went to the field for the final, and won another gold. In the evening, we won the kabaddi match for the third gold. I have represented Bangladesh in both hockey and cricket and was called to national camps for hockey and kabaddi. But because contact sports carry risks, I decided to focus on cricket from the U-19 World Cup phase. Still, I am proud of my hockey journey, and I miss it.

DS: How have other sports influenced your cricket?

JF: My batting power comes from athletics, especially shot put. The 'slap' or hitting techniques from hockey significantly helped my bat swing and sweeps in cricket. Also, the intense fitness and footwork required for hockey helped me perform better in cricket.

Tempers flare as Real set up clasico final

STAR SPORTS DESK

Thursday saw Xabi Alonso's Real Madrid get revenge on city rivals Atletico Madrid with a 2-1 win in a tight Spanish Super Cup semifinal in Saudi Arabia, Federico Valverde breaking his goal duck for the season with a screamer of a free-kick, and Real setting up a Clasico Super Cup final clash against rivals Barcelona – but even amid all these intriguing highlights, the post-match discussion was dominated by Atletico coach Diego Simeone's clash with Vinicius Junior.

The victory also served as payback for Madrid after Atletico had humiliated them 5-2 in a LaLiga derby in September last year.

Simeone was first seen debating Vinicius in the first half. The confrontation continued later, with



Simeone repeatedly telling the forward that Real "were going to get rid of him." Both were eventually shown yellow cards as Vinicius was substituted late in the game.

After the match, Simeone refused to elaborate on the exchange. "I have nothing to say. What happens on the pitch," he told Movistar, before adding in his news conference: "I don't remember, my memory is complicated."

Alonso, however, criticised the Atletico coach's behaviour. "I didn't like it. Those things cross a line in terms of respect for a colleague... There's a limit," he said.

Vinicius later taunted Simeone on social media, commenting "you've lost another knockout tie" on an Instagram reel posted by journalist Fabrizio Romano featuring the touchline incident.

Madrid will now face Barcelona in Sunday's final at the King Abdullah Sports City stadium, and Alonso confirmed that French superstar Kylian Mbappe, who missed the semifinal with a knee sprain, is fit to play and will join the squad ahead of the showdown.



Having closed out 2025 in stellar fashion by winning as many as six trophies, PSG got their hands on the first trophy of the 2026 season on Thursday. Saving efforts from Olympique de Marseille's Matt O'Riley and Hamed Traore, PSG goalkeeper Lucas Chevalier emerged as the hero for the French champions, who claimed their fourth consecutive French Super Cup by beating their rivals 4-1 in a penalty shootout after a dramatic 2-2 draw in Kuwait.

PHOTO: AFP

Transfer bans threaten Kings, Abahani's AFC hopes

SPORTS REPORTER

Bashundhara Kings and Abahani Limited could miss out on the 2026-27 AFC Challenge League after running into difficulties in securing AFC club licences due to FIFA-imposed transfer bans.

Last season, despite finishing second and third in the Bangladesh Football League (BFL), Abahani and Kings represented the country in the AFC Challenge League because champions Mohammedan failed to meet the mandatory licensing requirement.

This time, however, the scenario has changed. Both Kings and Abahani are currently under FIFA transfer bans, casting doubt over their eligibility for continental competition.

Following a letter from the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF), eight clubs -- including Kings and Abahani -- expressed interest in obtaining AFC club licences by the December 28 deadline, with Fakirerpool Young Men's Club and Arambagh KS opting out. The BFF began the licensing process on January 1, setting March 31 as the deadline for document submission.

Under AFC rules, BFL champions are nominated for the AFC Challenge League only if they hold an

AFC club licence. If not, the opportunity passes to the next-placed teams, again subject to licensing approval.

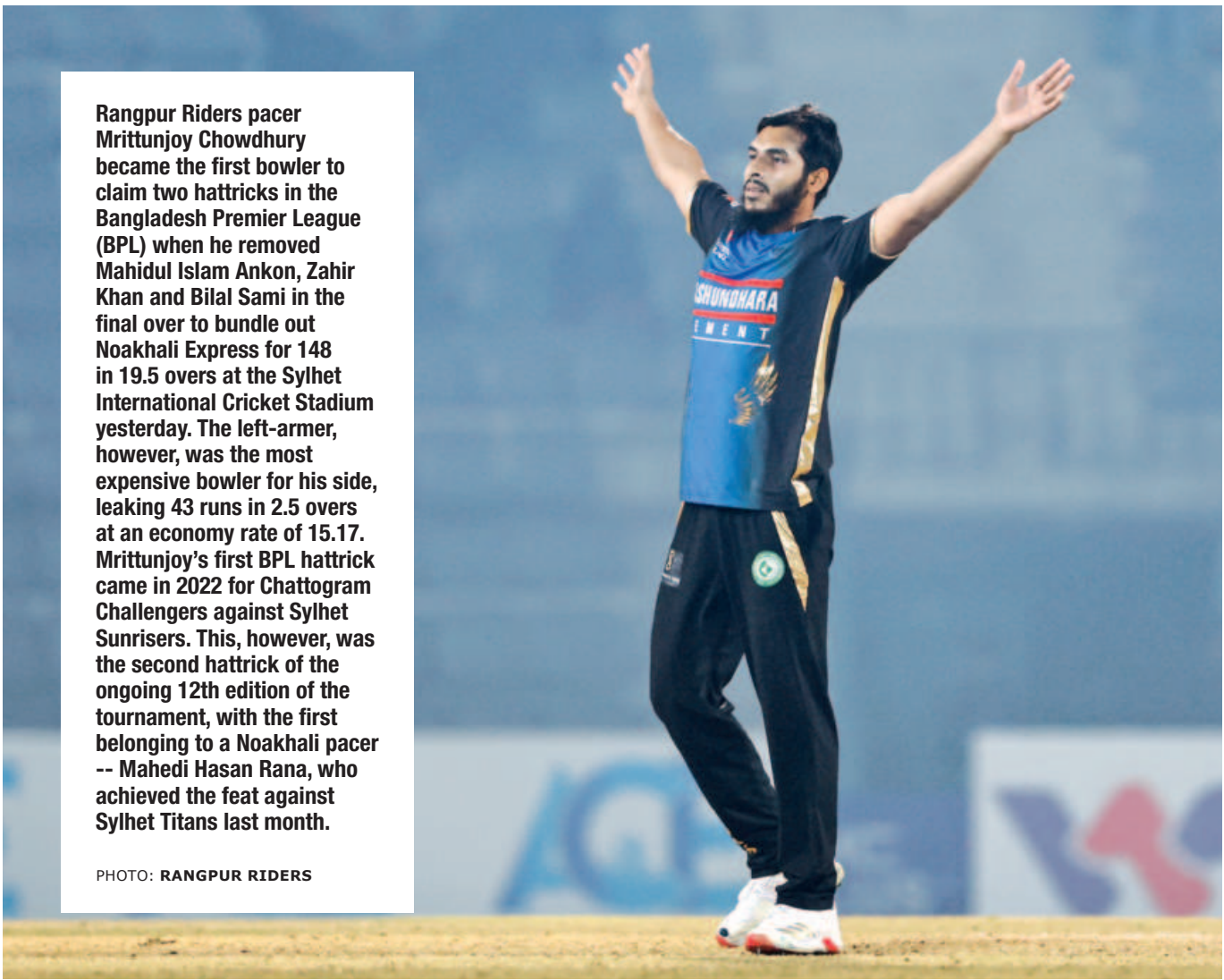
With Bangladesh's three leading clubs -- Kings, Abahani and Mohammedan -- all under transfer bans, the door could open for newer clubs to feature in Asia's third-tier competition, provided they secure AFC licences.

However, there remains a narrow window for the banned clubs.

"Clubs under FIFA transfer bans can take part in the licensing process, but must clear their overdue payables before March 31," said BFF competition manager Zaber Bin Taher Ansary. "If the bans are lifted before that date, they will become eligible."

At present, uncertainty persists. Kings were handed bans for three registration windows following eight cases, with the latest imposed on November 12, 2025, while Abahani received theirs on November 24. Mohammedan were banned earlier on October 29 due to a single unresolved payment issue.

On the field, Bashundhara Kings are joint leaders with Fortis FC after the first phase of the BFL, followed by Rahmatganj, Bangladesh Police, Abahani and Mohammedan.



Rangpur Riders pacer Mrittunjoy Chowdhury became the first bowler to claim two hattricks in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) when he removed Mahidul Islam Ankon, Zahir Khan and Bilal Sami in the final over to bundle out Noakhali Express for 148 in 19.5 overs at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday. The left-arm, however, was the most expensive bowler for his side, leaking 43 runs in 2.5 overs at an economy rate of 15.17. Mrittunjoy's first BPL hatrick came in 2022 for Chattogram Challengers against Sylhet Sunrisers. This, however, was the second hatrick of the ongoing 12th edition of the tournament, with the first belonging to a Noakhali pacer -- Mahedi Hasan Rana, who achieved the feat against Sylhet Titans last month.

PHOTO: RANGPUR RIDERS



Cricketers rally behind Tamim after BCB director’s remarks

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) finance committee chairman M Najmul Islam has come under heavy criticism after labelling former captain Tamim Iqbal an “Indian agent” in a social media post.

The remark followed Tamim’s appearance at an event a day earlier, where he suggested that the BCB should consider all aspects before deciding not to send the national team to India for

SEE PAGE 9 COL 7



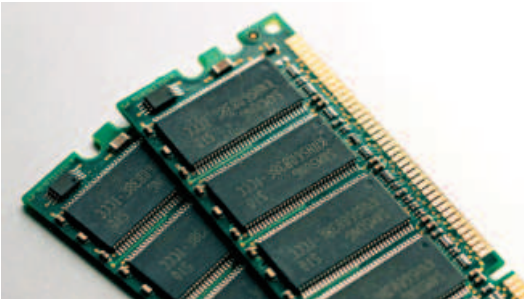
PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Avg smartphone prices could rise by 6.9% in 2026

MD ZAHIDUR RABBI

The global technology industry is bracing for a sustained rise in random-access memory (RAM) prices through 2026, a shift expected to ripple across consumer electronics markets, particularly desktops and smartphones. After a period of relative stability following the volatility of the pandemic years, memory prices are climbing again as demand from artificial intelligence (AI) infrastructure and data centres begins to outstrip supply.

Major chipmakers including Samsung Electronics, Micron and SK hynix have redirected large portions of their production capacity towards high-bandwidth memory (HBM), a specialised form of RAM used in AI accelerators and data



centres. This strategic pivot has tightened supplies of conventional dynamic RAM (DRAM), which remains essential for personal computers and mobile devices, pushing prices to levels not seen in recent years.

In Bangladesh, the impact of the global memory squeeze is already visible. Retailers and distributors in Dhaka report sharp increases in the cost of RAM modules and memory-dependent hardware over recent months. Prices for standard laptop and desktop RAM have risen by more than 200%, according to local sellers. A 16GB DDR5 6000MHz RAM module that sold for around Tk

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

US VISA BOND Dhaka seeks relief on tariff, business travel

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka has requested Washington to ease business travel for Bangladeshis following the United States’ decision to add the country to its visa bond list.

Bangladesh also sought a reduction of the 20 percent US reciprocal tariff on its goods, particularly apparel made with US inputs, and requested access to financing from the US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) for the private sector, according to the Chief Adviser’s Press Wing.

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Trump halts 2nd wave of attacks on Venezuela

Cites co-operation from Caracas; many political prisoners freed

AGENCIES

US President Donald Trump said he had canceled a second wave of attacks on Venezuela following cooperation from the South American nation.

The president said yesterday that Venezuela was releasing a large number of political prisoners as a sign of “seeking peace”, following last week’s dramatic US military operation that resulted in the capture of President Nicolas Maduro, reports Reuters.

- Venezuela not ‘subjugated’ by US, says interim president
 - Former opposition candidate Marquez is among those released
 - US oil pledged \$100bn for Venezuela: Trump
- SEE PAGE 9 COL 6

Trump also said that the world’s biggest oil companies pledged to invest \$100 billion to revive Venezuela’s oil sector as he prepared for a meeting with top industry executives later yesterday.

Venezuela’s interim president Delcy Rodriguez insisted Thursday her country was not “subjugated,” despite Trump’s claim to be in charge there after removing her predecessor Nicolas Maduro.

“We are not subordinate or subjugated,” Rodriguez said during a

SEE PAGE 9 COL 6



PHOTO: AFP

People march in Caracas, Venezuela, on Thursday demanding the release of deposed president Nicolás Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores, who were taken to New York on January 3 to face trial on drug and weapons charges.

MUSABBIR MURDER Shooters yet to be identified despite CCTV footage

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police are yet to identify the shooters of former Swachchhasebak Dal leader Azizur Rahman Musabbir, despite having CCTV footage of them.

Musabbir was shot shortly after 8:00pm on Wednesday in an alley near Hotel Superstar on Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue.

CCTV footage analysis revealed two shooters, along with suspicious movements of several others.

“Two individuals are seen in the footage as alleged shooters. Besides, police have also obtained footage showing suspicious movements of several others. Efforts are underway to identify them,” Ibne Mizan, deputy commissioner of Tejgaon division, told The Daily Star yesterday.

“Our first priority is to identify the two individuals whose images show them

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LOSSES IN STUDENT POLLS Is BNP failing to connect with the youth?

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal’s defeats in five major student union elections point to deeper challenges for the BNP, analysts say, warning that the party cannot afford to ignore the setbacks ahead of the national polls.

The losses suffered by its student wing at public universities have raised questions about the BNP’s ability to connect with young voters, a crucial bloc in the upcoming general election.

According to Election Commission data, about 44 percent of the country’s 12.77 crore voters are aged between 18 and 37. Among them, nearly 4 million are undergraduate and postgraduate students.

With just over a month to go before the national election, Chhatra Dal suffered its latest defeat on Wednesday, losing the Jagannath University Central Students’ Union (JnUCSU) polls to a panel led by Islami Chhatra Shibir, the student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami, BNP’s main electoral rival.

Earlier, it lost student union elections at Dhaka University, Rajshahi University, Chittagong University and Jahangirnagar University between September and October last year. The combined electorate at these institutions exceeded 100,000.

Political analysts say student organisations play an active role in election campaigning and can influence broader voter perceptions, potentially affecting the BNP’s electoral prospects. They warn that repeated defeats, coupled with the party’s failure to retain influence

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FOY'S LAKE

from railway reservoir to city retreat

Century-old manmade lake continues to supply water while serving as Chattogram's ecological, recreational hub

Situated in the Khulshi area of the port city, Foy's Lake is now recognised as one of the largest manmade lakes in Bangladesh. According to railway data, it covers a total area of 336 acres, of which 48 acres are water and 282 acres comprise the surrounding hills.

SIFAYET ULLAH

Long before Foy's Lake became a popular destination for leisure and tourism, it was created for a practical purpose.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, as railway infrastructure expanded in Chattogram, the need for a reliable water source for railway employees became urgent. Between 1924 and 1925, the Assam-Bengal Railway addressed this need by creating a large reservoir through the damming of natural streams in the Pahartali-Khulshi hill range.

The project was planned and supervised by Mr Foy, an engineer with the railway, and the water body was initially known as Pahartali Lake. Over time, it came to be identified by the name of the engineer behind its creation – Foy's Lake.

Situated in the Khulshi area of the port city, Foy's Lake is now recognised as one of the largest manmade lakes in Bangladesh. According to railway data, it covers a total area of 336 acres, of which 48 acres are water and 282 acres comprise the surrounding hills.

The lake spans nine hills and eight water bodies, each with its own name, adding to the charm of the landscape.

While the city around it grew and



PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN



changed, the lake continued to serve its original function. Even today, through a water treatment plant operated by Bangladesh Railway's Chattogram division, water from Foy's Lake is supplied daily to railway

employees living in ten colonies.

"For us, this lake is not just a place to visit," said Anwar Shahin, a member of the Railway Nirapatta Bahini and resident of the South Ambaghan Railway Colony.

"My father worked for the railway and this water has always been part of our daily life – from cooking to the first glass of water in the morning. We were taught not to waste it because it comes from the hills, sweet and clean," said the 45-year-old, who was born and raised in the colony.

Over the decades, the lake's role expanded beyond water supply. Surrounded by dense forests and rolling hills, it gradually emerged as a vital ecological space within the city. The surrounding vegetation – including chapalish, jarul, rain trees, teak, krishnachura, amla and bahera – helped create a natural buffer against

urban expansion, while supporting diverse wildlife.

Though no official biodiversity survey exists, the area is known to host monitor lizards, deer, monkeys, civets and fishing cats, alongside birds such as kingfishers, woodpeckers, hill mynas and hornbills.

"The biodiversity of Foy's Lake significantly contributes to oxygen supply in the port city," said Mohammed Kamal Hossain, supernumerary professor at the Institute of Forestry and Environmental Sciences, Chittagong University.

"This green zone plays an important role in keeping a big portion of the port city's environment healthy."

Aquatic life also thrives in the lake's waters, supported by its depth and relatively undisturbed ecosystem. Railway data shows its water depth

ranges between 78 and 80 feet at its deepest points, with the shallowest areas measuring 38 to 40 feet.

By the 1990s, as Chattogram's population grew and open spaces became scarce, attention turned to Foy's Lake as a potential recreational site. To develop visitor-oriented facilities, the railway authorities began leasing parts of the lake area to the private sector, marking a turning point – from a primarily functional and ecological asset to a space shaped by tourism and entertainment.

Hossain Mohammad Tarek, now a head assistant with railway, recalls visiting the lake in 1996 as a seventh grader at a railway school. "I remember riding boats on the lake," he said. "The surroundings were calm and cool. You could hear birds everywhere. Swans were often seen floating on the water, and we even heard stories from friends and neighbours of monitor lizards near the lake."

Between 2003 and 2005, the railway signed a tripartite agreement with Concord Group, supported by Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, to develop Foy's Lake into a modern recreational destination. Following the agreement, infrastructure appeared around the lake, including boating services, restaurants, cottages, trekking trails, concert venues and camping facilities.

Visitor numbers increased, and Foy's Lake gradually established itself as one of Chattogram's most popular leisure destinations.

However, the lake's transformation brought new challenges. Tourists generate single-use plastic waste, and engine-powered boats disturb aquatic life. Currently, five to six such boats operate on the lake.

Today, Tarek occasionally visits Foy's Lake with his son, using the free entry facility available to railway employees. "The natural environment has gradually diminished. What we see now is far more artificial than what we grew up with," he said.

Railway employees have also reported occasional oily smells in the water supplied from the lake, raising questions about water quality and compliance with lease conditions.

"We sometimes find oily, foul-smelling water in our supply lines," said Arif Shahriar, a railway worker and resident of the Railway Ticket Printing Colony.

At the same time, entry fees introduced by the private operator, currently Tk 300 per person, have made visits difficult for low-income residents.

"Tk 300 per person is unaffordable for us," said Mohammed Rubel, a clerk at a private company. "We went intending to see the lake, but after seeing the entry fee, we returned and went to the nearby zoo instead because it was affordable."

During a recent visit, groups of tourists were seen enjoying boat rides, while children played on amusement rides along the shore.

Aysha Siddika, a homemaker visiting with her family, said, "There are many recreational options here at the same time. The children can play, and we can go boating. That's why whenever we get time, we come here with the family on our day off."

Abdul Aziz, a visitor, added, "Boating here gives us a feeling similar to Kaptai Lake in Rangamati."

Responding to these concerns, Concord authorities said operational costs necessitate entry fees and that steps have been taken to reduce the number of engine-powered boats.

Biswajit Ghosh, manager of Concord's Foy's Lake operations, said, "It is true that the entry fee is high for low-income people. But maintaining the facilities and running the operations involve significant expenses. We have brought the number of boats down to five or six from a much larger number."

A century ago, Foy's Lake was created to serve a simple civic need. Today, it stands at the crossroads of utility, nature and recreation. While it continues to supply water to railway colonies and its forests support the city's wildlife and environment, it also draws visitors seeking leisure.

The challenge ahead is to maintain this balance – preserving its natural beauty and ecological role, while allowing people to enjoy the lake responsibly, said experts.



The Tangail saree’s global fame and the weavers we forget



A Tangail weaver at the loom, weaving a saree.

PHOTO: SHADAB SHAHROKH HAI

If the next generation sees weaving as a path to poverty, the tradition will not continue—no matter how many exhibitions celebrate it.

S DISHA

The Tangail saree has travelled far. Once woven quietly in riverside villages, it now appears in fashion catalogues, festival exhibitions, and heritage headlines. With UNESCO recognising the Tangail saree as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, it has entered the global imagination as a symbol of Bengal’s fine craftsmanship. Yet behind this recognition lies an uncomfortable truth: while the saree’s reputation has soared, the lives of the weavers who make it remain precarious, undervalued, and increasingly uncertain.

In Tangail—Pathrail, Nagarpur, Kalihati, Basail, Balla, and Sontosh—the day begins with the clack of looms. Inside modest homes, wooden frames creak rhythmically as yarn is drawn,

tightened, and released. Bowls of river water sit nearby, ready for the mar process that prepares the thread. This is not factory labour measured only by output; it is a craft shaped by memory, patience, and bodily skill. But for many weavers, this skill no longer guarantees dignity or security.

The Tangail saree’s uniqueness is inseparable from its geography. The region’s rivers—the Dhaleshwari and the Louhajang—have long provided the iron-free water that supports traditional weaving practices, especially the mar process, when yarn is treated before weaving to achieve softness and strength. Even when Tangail-style sarees are woven elsewhere with similar designs, the finishing often fails to feel the same. The cloth may look identical from a distance, but it does not carry the same softness, drape, and lasting

comfort.

Nilkamal Basak, managing director of Nilkamaler Saree and a member of the Basak weaver community, points directly to the ecological foundation of the craft: “The Dhaleshwari and Louhajang rivers flow through our Tangail. When our ancestors came here, the water of these rivers was so clear and iron-free. This type of clear water is ideal for making any kind of weaving.”

Historically, the craft was sustained by the Basak community, master weavers whose migration across Bengal was shaped by both survival and ecology. From the Indus Basin to

Murshidabad, then through Dhamrai and finally to Tangail, they moved where fine weaving could be produced.

Over time, Tangail weavers developed distinctive techniques and designs. While most cotton fabrics tighten and lose softness over time, Tangail sarees behave differently, becoming softer with use. This durability is rooted in the traditional mar process practised by Tangail’s weavers. Elsewhere, yarn is typically treated with ordinary rice starch (bhatar mar). In Tangail, however, master weavers use khoi er-mar—a starch made from puffed rice—which coats the fibres more gently. The result is yarn that remains smooth, stable, and resistant to shrinkage, even after repeated washing. Nilkamal Basak describes the discipline behind it: “After applying mar, the yarn is wrung thoroughly so that the fibres are stabilised. This prevents them from absorbing excess water. As a result, the yarn becomes shiny and does not shrink. This method has been practised in our Tangail for a long time, which is not found anywhere else.”

The distinctive borders of the Tangail saree, known as paar, with their buti, floral, and geometric designs, are the result of a long process of refinement. The spread of Jacquard weaving, the craft also became an exercise in mathematical precision: punch cards, locally called mala, allowed complex patterns to be encoded and reproduced with near-perfect consistency. The saree became not just beautiful, but technically sophisticated.

Yet the custodians of this knowledge find themselves increasingly sidelined. What once functioned as a household-based economy of skill is now compressed into a fragile system

defined by thin margins and chronic insecurity. The spread of power and semi-power looms has boosted output and reduced costs, but it has also altered how labour is valued. Supply chains are controlled by intermediaries, while weavers are paid by the piece at rates that rarely account for the time, expertise, or physical toll of the work. Social protection remains minimal, health insurance largely absent, and the prospect of old age deeply uncertain.

For women weavers, this precarity is even more pronounced. Their labour is routinely absorbed into domestic life and dismissed as assistance rather than acknowledged as skilled work. After long hours at the loom, they return to unpaid household duties. Their contribution, although essential, remains persistently overlooked.

Against this background, UNESCO recognition is a significant milestone, but prestige does not automatically translate into fair wages, safe working conditions, or stable livelihoods. Without deliberate policy and market interventions, recognition can even deepen inequality: the saree’s brand value rises, prices climb, and profits accumulate elsewhere, while the weavers remain stuck at the bottom of the chain.

This is why the crucial question is not only what makes the Tangail saree unique, but what kind of future it will have. A living craft survives only when people can afford to practise it. If the next generation sees weaving as a path to poverty, the tradition will not continue—no matter how many exhibitions celebrate it.

Recognition must be matched by concrete measures: fair pricing mechanisms, direct market access for weavers, stronger co-operatives, and public support through healthcare, pensions, and training programmes that protect skill transmission. Otherwise, the Tangail saree will become a paradox—globally admired, yet locally abandoned.

S. Disha is an undergraduate student of Applied Linguistics at BRAC University, exploring the intersections of culture and community.

ONE HEALTH, ONE FUTURE

The critical role of Bangladesh’s veterinarians

K. B. M. SAIFUL ISLAM

Bangladesh’s public health story is often told through the lens of hospitals, epidemics, and human suffering. We speak of dengue seasons that grow longer, of malnutrition that persists, and of climate driven diseases entering new regions. Yet beneath these visible crises lies another struggle; one that begins not in hospital wards but in farms, fish ponds, live bird markets, and the countless households where humans and animals share space, water, and risk. This struggle determines whether our food is safe, whether outbreaks can be contained, and whether lifesaving antibiotics will remain effective for the next generation. At the centre of this quiet frontline stand Bangladesh’s veterinarians.

Their work extends far beyond treating sick livestock, poultry or pets. Veterinarians stand at the intersection of human, animal, and environmental health; an intersection that global experts now call “One Health.”

In a country where people live in close and constant contact with domestic and peri domestic animals, where zoonotic diseases and multidrug resistant organisms are increasingly reported, veterinarians are not peripheral actors. They are central to national health security. Yet their contributions remain largely invisible. Their shortages are rarely discussed. Their challenges seldom reach the policy agenda, and their potential, which is immense, transformative, and urgently needed, remains underused.

A nation built on interdependence

Bangladesh’s food system is vast, intricate, and deeply interdependent. Livestock and aquaculture are woven into Bangladesh’s rural and peri urban life. Chickens in courtyards, goats near kitchens, cattle in backyard sheds, and fish ponds beside homes are not just economic assets; they are daily companions and buffers against crisis. However, this intimacy brings risk. A contaminated batch of milk can affect hundreds of families. A poultry outbreak can seed infection in humans. An anthrax infected carcass can trigger a cluster of human cases. A dog bite can still mean a death from rabies.

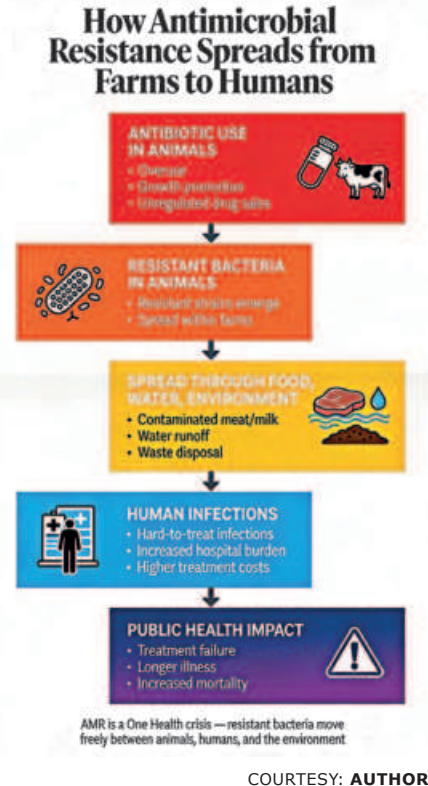
These are not hypothetical. Bangladesh has faced repeated anthrax episodes, avian influenza waves, and persistent rabies risks. A national One Health zoonotic disease prioritisation exercise identified anthrax, rabies, Nipah virus, zoonotic influenza, brucellosis, and zoonotic tuberculosis as high priority threats requiring coordinated action that depends heavily on veterinarians.

Geography and demography amplify these risks. High population density means humans and animals share space intensely. Floods, cyclones, and heatwaves disrupt ecosystems and spread pathogens. Urbanisation creates new interfaces: stray dogs around garbage dumps, free roaming poultry near markets, and backyard livestock in expanding townships. In this context, One Health becomes a necessity, not a slogan.

The veterinary frontline: Essential but overstretched

A government veterinarian in a peri urban upazila may be responsible for tens of thousands of animals. His day may begin with a sudden spike in poultry mortality, requiring sample collection and emergency biosecurity advice. Later, he may inspect a slaughterhouse with poor drainage and minimal hygiene. In the afternoon, he may train farmers on antibiotic use; only to see many still rely on unregulated drug sellers.

Veterinarians are trained in both animal production and health management. They possess in depth expertise in epidemiology, microbiology, pathology, and public health, knowledge that is essential for ensuring healthy animals. They understand how



COURTESY: AUTHOR



COURTESY: AUTHOR

In skilled hands, life begins as veterinarians deliver newborn kittens through an emergency caesarean section at a clinical facility.

diseases jump species, how bacteria evolve under antibiotic pressure, and how food becomes contaminated. Yet the system often treats them as “animal doctors” rather than strategic actors in national health security.

High-income Asian countries offer a contrasting picture. In Japan, veterinarians are integral to public health centres and food safety agencies. South Korea embeds veterinarians in hazard-tracking systems that monitor risks from farm to fork. Singapore’s whole-of-government One Health model links animal health, food safety, and environmental monitoring. Bangladesh’s veterinarians, by contrast, operate with fewer resources, limited institutional support, and far less recognition, despite carrying responsibilities just as critical.

Food safety: The invisible infrastructure of trust

Food safety attracts attention only during crises: adulterated milk, contaminated meat, or festival related outbreaks. However, most of the time, it is an invisible infrastructure of trust. People eat what is available and affordable, trusting that someone, somewhere, is keeping it safe.

In Bangladesh, that trust is fragile. Live bird markets often have cramped cages, mixed species, poor waste disposal, and minimal hygiene. Slaughter is frequently performed on the floor. Milk may be transported unrefrigerated through multiple

intermediaries. Fish ponds may be treated with antibiotics or chemicals without guidance.

Veterinarians should anchor this safety net. But to do so, they need clear mandates, legal authority, laboratory support, and adequate resources. Many countries involve veterinarians at every stage of food safety — from slaughterhouse approval to export certification. Bangladesh has regulations, but implementation is uneven and veterinary expertise underutilised.

Antimicrobial resistance: A silent epidemic

If one issue captures the urgency of One Health, it is antimicrobial resistance (AMR). In Bangladesh, antibiotics are widely accessible without prescription. In the veterinary sector, this leads to prophylactic and growth promoting use in poultry, cattle, and fish. Even well-trained veterinarians struggle to ensure responsible antibiotic use when diagnostics, enforceable regulations, and economic incentives are lacking.

On the human side, patients often self-medicate or demand antibiotics even for viral illnesses. Hospitals and clinics with limited lab capacity rely on broad spectrum drugs. Resistant bacteria move freely between humans, animals, and the environment.

Veterinarians must be empowered as stewards of antimicrobial use in animals, promoting vaccination, better housing, and improved nutrition over routine antibiotics.

Still, AMR cannot be solved from the veterinary side alone. It requires joint surveillance, shared data, and multidisciplinary committees involving veterinarians, physicians, microbiologists, and environmental scientists.

Learning from Asia, and moving forward

Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, China, India, and Nepal all demonstrate elements of strong veterinary public health systems: integrated surveillance, strict food safety enforcement, and veterinarians embedded in public health institutions. Bangladesh has made progress through platforms like One Health Bangladesh and zoonotic disease prioritisation exercises, but implementation gaps persist. Policies exist on paper, yet frontline veterinary services remain underfunded. Coordination is discussed in workshops, but data systems remain siloed.

A call to action

Bangladesh can no longer afford to overlook its veterinary sector. Strengthening it is not a technical detail; it is a strategic imperative. This means deploying more veterinarians, investing in laboratories, integrating veterinary expertise into national health planning, and empowering One Health platforms to function as operational mechanisms rather than symbolic bodies.

Veterinarians are guardians of food safety, custodians of antimicrobial stewardship, and sentinels for emerging diseases. When a veterinarian advises a farmer against indiscriminate antibiotic use, tests pond water, or demands improvements in a slaughterhouse, they are protecting human lives.

Bangladesh’s future health security depends on recognising this truth: when animals are healthy, people are healthy. Unless we support those who keep animals healthy, we will remain unprepared for the challenges ahead.

Prof. Dr. K. B. M. Saiful Islam is a One Health activist, former Member of the National Coordination Committee (NCC), One Health Bangladesh, former Dean of the Faculty of Animal Science & Veterinary Medicine, and former Chairman of the Department of Medicine and Public Health at Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

A BLUEPRINT AT SEA

Why Bangladesh needs a coherent maritime policy

The vast and largely untapped maritime potential of Bangladesh, if strategically managed through a comprehensive maritime policy and a well-defined long-term strategy, could serve as a cornerstone for effective maritime governance.

MASUDUL KARIM SIDDIQUE

Strategically positioned along the northern edge of the Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh exercises jurisdiction over roughly 118,813 square kilometres of maritime space. Its coastline extends more than 700 kilometres, encompassing 12 nautical miles of territorial waters and an Exclusive Economic Zone that reaches 200 nautical miles from the shore. Owing to Bangladesh's deep dependence on international trade, with maritime ports handling about 94 per cent of all foreign commerce, the sea has become a national economic corridor.

The country's major seaports—including Chattogram, Mongla, and Matarbari—serve as strategic gateways connecting Bangladesh with the West, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and beyond. These ports handle the majority of international cargo, including imports of petroleum products, chemicals, machinery, and consumer goods, as well as exports of agricultural products, textiles, and garments. Notably, the garment industry alone accounts for nearly 80 per cent of total export earnings. Bangladesh's two principal Sea Lines of Communication—one oriented towards Southeast Asia and the other towards the Middle East—are vital for ensuring the uninterrupted flow of essential commodities and energy supplies.

In recent years, Bangladesh's major seaports have experienced significant improvements in efficiency, operational capacity, and overall performance. As the nation's principal maritime trade hubs, these ports have strengthened their ability to manage growing volumes of cargo and container traffic through better coordination, upgraded infrastructure, and enhanced service delivery. Steady growth has also been observed across the port network, supported by ongoing modernisation initiatives and improved connectivity with national transport and logistics systems. Together, these advancements reflect Bangladesh's expanding maritime capabilities and highlight the strategic role of its ports in facilitating international trade, attracting investment, and bolstering the country's economic resilience and long-term development ambitions.

Bangladesh's Exclusive Economic Zone is rich in fisheries, offering substantial potential for sustainable Blue Economy development. The maritime space maintains a vibrant and expanding fisheries sector, which plays a vital role in national food security, employment, and economic growth. A significant portion of the country's total fish production is derived from its marine waters, reflecting the richness of the Bay of Bengal and its importance to coastal livelihoods. Marine fisheries continue to contribute meaningfully to domestic supply, export potential, and the overall resilience of the national economy. This growing reliance on marine resources underscores the need for sustainable management, enhanced monitoring, and capacity development to fully harness the opportunities offered by the maritime domain.

Bangladesh's offshore oil and gas prospects present a significant opportunity to strengthen the country's long-term energy security. The government has already designated multiple offshore blocks in the Bay of Bengal, and effective exploration of these areas holds the

potential to lessen dependence on imported energy. Harnessing these resources could not only diversify the national energy supply but also enhance economic stability, support industrial growth, and reinforce the strategic importance of Bangladesh's maritime domain. Realising this potential, however, will require sustained investment, advanced technology, and strong regulatory frameworks to ensure responsible and efficient development.

The security front in Bangladesh's maritime domain presents a challenge that is multidimensional in nature, requiring serious vigilance and adaptive responses on a day-to-day basis. The Bangladesh Navy and Coast Guard have shown firm commitment to addressing piracy, armed robbery, and petty theft incidents around major anchorages, establishing a full presence to protect commercial shipping activities. In combating smuggling and drug trafficking, maritime security forces have stepped up patrol operations and strengthened surveillance capabilities along coastal and offshore routes, especially in potentially exploitable areas.

The humanitarian situation presented by forcibly displaced nationals of Myanmar has added layers of complexity to border security operations, requiring a balanced approach that respects both security imperatives and

cooperative arrangements. These ongoing efforts reflect Bangladesh's commitment to strengthening maritime governance and developing comprehensive policies that ensure the security, sustainability, and prosperity of its maritime domain in an increasingly complex regional security environment. Although the Bangladesh Navy and Coast Guard are working relentlessly, these scenarios underscore the need for more coordinated maritime governance and comprehensive policies to ensure the security and sustainable management of Bangladesh's maritime domain.

The vast and largely untapped maritime potential of Bangladesh, if strategically managed through a comprehensive maritime policy and a well-defined long-term strategy, could serve as a cornerstone for effective maritime governance. A robust policy framework would not only provide strategic guidance on key priorities but also facilitate systematic inter-agency cooperation, ensuring that all relevant authorities work in a coordinated and synergistic manner. So far, the Bangladesh Navy has acted as the lead agency in advancing and coordinating the country's maritime affairs. However, establishing a central coordination mechanism would be particularly valuable in integrating the activities of various maritime agencies, thereby addressing overlapping jurisdictions and fragmented responsibilities.

The effectiveness of government policies and priorities in maritime management could be significantly enhanced through sustained investment in maritime research and development. One notable challenge is that deep-sea fishing in Bangladesh has remained largely confined to relatively shallow waters, limiting the country's ability to fully harness its marine resources. Expanding deep-sea fishing operations to the full extent of Bangladesh's Exclusive Economic Zone could generate significant economic and employment benefits. Furthermore, integrating more maritime-related subjects into university curricula would help develop a skilled workforce capable of supporting future growth, innovation, and sustainable development in the maritime sector.

In essence, a combination of well-articulated policy, strategic planning, scientific research, and human resource development can enable Bangladesh to fully harness its maritime resources, strengthen governance structures, and achieve sustainable and inclusive maritime development. Bangladesh has already taken important steps by establishing legal and institutional frameworks that provide a foundation for maritime management. The Territorial and Maritime Zones Act 2021 offers a legal basis for defining and administering the country's maritime zones and jurisdiction. The Blue Economy Cell, operating under the Cabinet Division, has identified multiple sectors with the dual objectives of promoting national prosperity and addressing challenges such as climate change and poverty. Additionally, the Coastal Zone Policy, approved in 2005 under the Integrated Coastal Zone Management framework, provides general guidance for sustainable coastal management, supported by a Coastal Development Strategy that outlines policies for implementation through mainstreaming, investment, and governance measures.

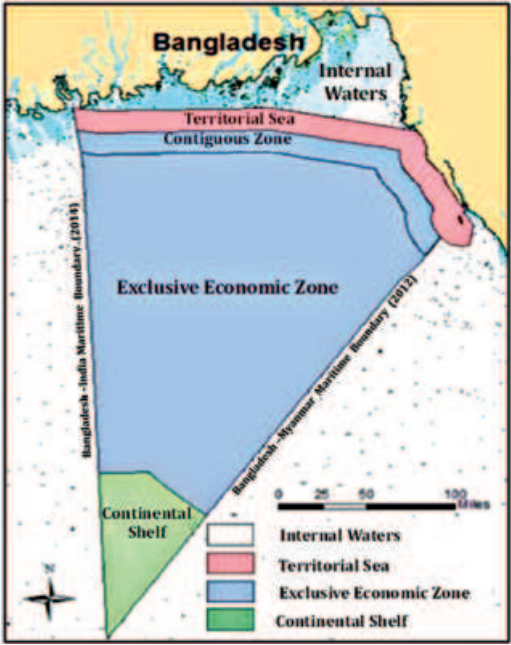
In academic discourse, Bangladesh is often described as a 'sea-blind' nation, reflecting a long-standing land-centric mindset that has traditionally constrained the country's engagement with maritime affairs. Although maritime issues have recently gained some attention through seminars and symposiums, these discussions have largely remained confined to academic circles. Limited maritime education and public outreach have contributed to generally low levels of maritime awareness among the population. Nevertheless, as terrestrial resources gradually decline, the nation will inevitably need to turn to the sea to sustain future economic growth, ensure food security, and support overall national development.

Given current and future demands, adopting a whole-of-government approach is essential for Bangladesh to manage its maritime affairs in a coherent, integrated, and strategic manner. Such a framework would enable the country to fully harness its maritime potential, strengthen national resilience, and advance progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. This could be realised through the establishment of a dedicated Ministry of Maritime Affairs, under which all dimensions of maritime governance—including ports and shipping, marine energy and mineral resources, fisheries, the marine environment and climate change, coastal tourism, marine scientific research and education, and maritime policing—could be effectively coordinated.

Centralising these functions under a single authority would help reduce duplication, enhance policy coherence, and support the efficient implementation of strategic objectives. While the authority may not directly execute policies, it would coordinate and oversee the activities of multiple agencies involved in sectors such as natural resources, transportation, energy and mining, tourism, foreign investment, and environmental management. The primary goal would be to ensure that all activities are aligned with national strategies and do not conflict with one another. The authority would promote inter-agency collaboration, oversee the progress of joint programmes, track the implementation of national strategic policies and projects, and report any delays or underperformance, thereby ensuring accountability and effective governance across the maritime domain.

Adopting coherent maritime policies through a whole-of-government approach would not only demonstrate Bangladesh's commitment to effectively managing its maritime domain but also bring together all relevant stakeholders under a unified framework to advance national interests. Well-formulated strategies are essential to clearly articulate objectives related to securing trade and commerce, safeguarding maritime resources, and ensuring the safety of life at sea. By implementing contemporary offshore policies and strategic frameworks, Bangladesh can fully realise its vast maritime potential, transition from its traditional land-centric orientation, and unlock the opportunities offered by the blue economy, fostering sustainable economic growth and national resilience.

Commodore Masudul Karim Siddique is a serving naval officer.



international obligations. In addition, the Bangladesh Navy has increased monitoring and enforcement activities in territorial waters in view of the potential threat from illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing to fish stocks, local livelihoods, and marine biodiversity. Meanwhile, environmental and climate-related challenges, including coastal erosion, flooding, and saltwater intrusion, have called for integrated responses that combine maritime security operations with disaster preparedness initiatives to protect vulnerable coastal communities.

The Bangladesh Navy and Coast Guard are continuously developing their operational capabilities through improved coordination, technological upgradation, and regional



Bangladesh's maritime space supports a growing fisheries sector vital to food security, employment, and economic growth.

PHOTO: STAR

The Gini is out of the bottle

Economic growth has created a class of wealthy Bangladeshis, but the poor are waiting for the trickle-down

“Persistent inequality fuels public anger, an anger that has spilled onto the streets in Bangladesh, Nepal and several other countries in recent years and has brought down governments,” says Anu Muhammad, former chairman of the economics department at Jahangirnagar University

AHSAN HABIB

For Didar Hossain, a shopkeeper in Chattogram, the celebrated expansion of Bangladesh's economy is a distant rumour.

With a fifth-grade education and a monthly income of roughly Tk 10,000, Didar supports a family of four and ageing parents whose medical bills consume a quarter of his earnings.

He owns a patch of land in his village, yet it lies fallow; farming it would cost more than the crops are worth. To make ends meet, he borrows from relatives and cuts back on food.

Didar is the face of the bottom 50 percent of Bangladeshis who, despite the country's economic growth, own a mere 4.7 percent of its wealth.

Yet, a short drive from Didar's shop, the scenario is starkly different.

In the luxury hotels and marble-floored shopping malls in the capital Dhaka and port city Chattogram, consumption has never been more conspicuous.

Since its independence in 1971, Bangladesh has been a development darling. However, the spoils of this expansion have been hoarded by a heavy-hitting few.

In 1972, the country had five millionaires. By the end of 2024, central bank data showed over 122,000 bank accounts holding more than Tk 1 crore each.

The top 1 percent now hold 24 percent of the total wealth and pocketed 16 percent of the national income in 2024, according to the World Inequality Report.

“Persistent inequality fuels public anger, an anger that has spilled onto



At the foot of Dhaka's high-rises, shanties sprawl across Sat Tala Bosti, a vast slum pressed tight against the city's richer quarters. From above, the scene shows a stark seam of inequality, where affluence and deprivation sit not miles apart but wall to wall.



Without a shift in the policy framework, inequality will remain entrenched, says Anu Muhammad, adding that there is still no sign of meaningful change in supporting policies in Bangladesh.

“Tax policy should have been progressive and centred on income tax. Instead, it depends heavily on VAT. At the same time, the social safety net remains shallow, while education and healthcare continue to be costly for people.”

He says, “If black money and laundered funds are included in the accounts, inequality would be much deeper.”

The labour market, he adds, reflects the same imbalance. About 85 percent of jobs come from the informal sector, many without contracts, job security or adequate leave.

A GLOBAL PATTERN, A FAMILIAR FAILURE
Across the

globe, living standards for the many are flatlining, even as capital aggregates ever more densely at the top. Inequality is the solvent dissolving the social trust that binds democracies. The arithmetic of this disparity is arresting.

The wealthiest decile of the global population now commands nearly three-quarters of all assets, leaving the bottom half to scrape by with a paltry 2 percent.

A cohort of fewer than 60,000 multi-millionaires controls a fortune triple that of half of humanity combined. In most nations, the poorer half of the population rarely holds more than 5 percent of national wealth, according to the World Inequality Report.

Yet the ultra-rich are making a negligible contribution to the public purse.

The report highlights a regressive anomaly in which effective tax rates, having climbed for the middle classes, drop precipitously for billionaires and centi-millionaires.

This fiscal opting-out does more than offend a sense of fairness; it starves the state of the capital required

to fund education, health and the green transition.

In Bangladesh, the tax system remains stubbornly regressive. The country relies heavily on value-added tax (VAT), a consumption tax that hits the poor hardest, rather than income tax.

There is no inheritance tax, a standard tool in the West for preventing dynastic hoarding of wealth. In the 2023-24 budget, the surcharge-free limit on wealth was actually raised to Tk 4 crore from Tk 3 crore, offering further shelter to the rich.

“Those who earn more should be taxed much higher,” argues Mohammad Abdur Razzaque, chairman of Research and Policy Integration for Development (RAPID), a think-tank.

But the state is unable to collect, according to the economist.

He says the revenue collection relative to GDP in Bangladesh is among the lowest in the world. Without that revenue, the government cannot fund the education and skill-upgrading required to make the formal labour market, the surest route out of poverty, accessible to the masses.

THE MISSING REFORM

In terms of inequality, Bangladesh is not an outlier in the South Asian region.

In India, the top 10 percent capture 58 percent of national income; in Pakistan, the figure is 42 percent.

By contrast, the lowest inequality is found in Europe – Sweden, Norway and France – where fiscal policy is used aggressively to level the playing field.

Inequality is highest in South Africa, and no improvement has been seen over the past decade.

The top 10 percent of earners capture 66 percent of total income, while the bottom 50 percent receive only 6 percent. Wealth inequality is even more concentrated: the richest 10 percent hold 86 percent of total wealth, and the top 1 percent alone holds 55 percent, while the bottom 50 percent have a negative net wealth of 2.5 percent.

The income gap between the top 10 percent and the bottom 50 percent increased from 103 to 118 between 2014 and 2024.

Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Taiwan, and Thailand also have deep inequality problems, with income gaps between the top 10 percent and the bottom 50 percent above 50 percent.

For Bangladesh to change course, it requires a human-capital strategy that equips the poor for better-paying jobs, and a fiscal policy that dares to tax the politically connected.

Until then, the gap will widen. Back in Chattogram, Didar is pouring what little remains of his income into schooling his daughters, hoping they might one day escape the wrong side of the statistics.



While the Bangladesh economy has expanded, the benefits are concentrated. The top 1 percent own nearly a quarter of the wealth, while the Gini coefficient has deteriorated significantly since the 1970s.

Structural weakness in tax policy. The system relies on indirect taxes (VAT) rather than direct taxes on wealth and income.

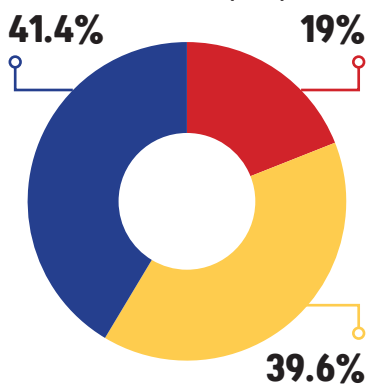
With 90 percent of MPs being millionaires in the 12th parliament, there was little political will to implement progressive taxation or inheritance taxes.

Experts suggest a dual approach: enforcing progressive taxation on the wealthy to fund public services, and aggressive investment in education and health to improve labour productivity for the poor.

TAKEAWAYS

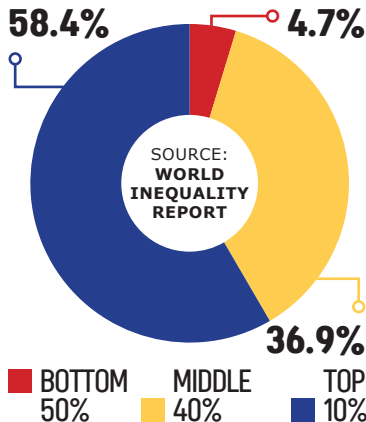
SHARE OF TOTAL INCOME

At the end of 2024 (In %)



SHARE OF WEALTH

At the end of 2024 (In %)



SOURCE: WORLD INEQUALITY REPORT



the streets in Bangladesh, Nepal and several other countries in recent years and has brought down governments,” says Anu Muhammad, former chairman of the economics department at Jahangirnagar University.

Inequality was at the core of the mass uprising that toppled the Awami League government in 2024.

But he believes that a change of government alone is not enough to solve the problem.

THE GINI CLIMBS, AND STICKS

Simon Kuznets, an economist, famously theorised that inequality follows an inverted “U” shape: it rises as a country develops and industrialises, then falls as the state becomes affluent enough to redistribute.

Bangladesh is stuck on the upward

slope. The Gini coefficient, a measure of inequality where 0 is perfect equality and 1 is perfect inequality, has marched steadily upward.

In 1974, the country sat at a Nordic-like 0.36. By 2022, income inequality had hit 0.50, while wealth inequality soared to a staggering 0.84.

The reason for this stickiness is political capture. The mechanism for redistribution – tax policy – has been hijacked by those it is meant to tax.

According to Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik (Shujan), a civil-society organisation, 67 percent of lawmakers in the 12th parliament were businessmen; 90 percent were millionaires. This represents a consolidation of power from the previous parliament, where 82 percent were millionaires.