



"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

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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 RAIHAN

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.

Aysa 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, SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



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 Khaleda Zia. Following

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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.

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.

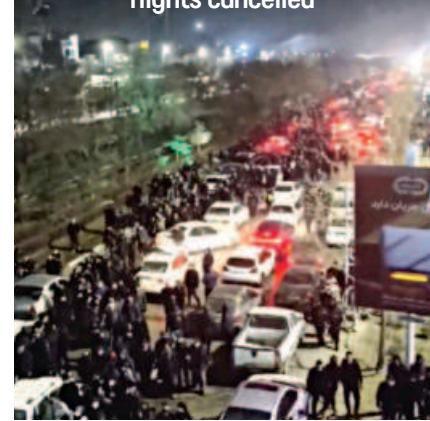
The unrest has not mobilised as many layers of society as other bouts of political, economic or human rights protest in the past decade and a half, but dozens are reported dead and the authorities look more vulnerable because of a dire economic situation

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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

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Russia fires Oreshnik missile at Ukraine

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How NCP-Jamaat coalition benefits Jamaat, BNP more

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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

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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