

## 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.

Many bus passengers were injured in the accident. Dr Habibur Rahman of Daudkandi Upazila Health Complex said 26 injured passengers received treatment there, while 12 were referred to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

## 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.

## Man, son among 4 killed as bike

FROM PAGE 3

According to police, a speeding bus hit a motorcycle and a CNG-run auto-rickshaw before overturning onto the motorbike. Fuel leaking from the motorcycle triggered a fire that quickly spread to the bus.

Firefighters rushed to the scene, extinguished the blaze and recovered four bodies, said Ershad Ullah, in-charge of Daudkandi Fire Service and Civil Defence Station.

Many bus passengers were injured in the accident.

Dr Habibur Rahman of Daudkandi Upazila Health Complex said 26 injured passengers received treatment there, while 12 were referred to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Police seized the bus, but its driver fled the scene, the OC said.

In a separate incident in Cumilla, two bus passengers were killed and 12 others injured when a bus overturned in the Eliotganj area of the Dhaka-Chattogram Highway late Thursday night.

The accident occurred around 10:30pm when the Chattogram-bound bus lost control while taking a U-turn and collided with a Dhaka-bound microbus, said Eliotganj Highway Police Station in-charge Ruhul Amin.

In Munshiganj, two people were killed after a bus ran over their motorcycle on the Dhaka-Mawa Expressway in Sreenagar upazila last evening.

"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 Swachchhasebak 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.