



"Through this [award], if we can make the smallest contribution in bringing a change, I think it would be one of our bti's greatest achievements.... The woman is also the unsung hero of every home."

ARSHI HAIDER
chairman of bti

Classical and contemporary dancer Mubashira Kamal Era mesmerises the audience with a stunning solo performance at the bti-The Daily Star Stellar Women-2025 gala at the Banquet Hall of the Kurmitola Golf Club last night. Bottom, a panel discussion on "Transforming Society by Empowering Women" was held on the sidelines of the event, participated by Shaheen Anam, executive director of Manusher Jonno Foundation; Farah Kabir, country director of ActionAid Bangladesh; and Shaila Shahid, climate resilience and DRR specialist at Miyamoto International, USA.

PHOTO: STAR



"The Stellar Women Award is unique. It recognises professional women for their skills, intelligence, academic achievements, and personal courage."

MAHFUZ ANAM, editor and publisher of The Daily Star

Vengeance brings disaster

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of retaliation inevitably lead to dangerous consequences.

"The nation has seen the consequences of vengeance or retaliation on August 5, 2024. Even if there are differences of opinion, they must be bridged through discussions. Differences should not escalate into conflicts," he said.

He emphasised that the democratic process must continue at all national and local levels, including union parishad, municipal, and trade body elections.

Urging politicians to work for the country's independence and sovereignty, Tarique said lessons must be drawn from pivotal moments in history, including 1971, 1990 and August 5, 2024.

"If we keep these events in mind and work honestly for the country, I firmly believe we can lead the nation in the right direction," he said.

Calling on leaders of all parties and people from all walks of life to remain engaged, Tarique said that, as a political worker, he foresaw many difficult challenges ahead.

"We have different kinds of differences among us. We should be able to discuss these differences through dialogue," he added.

Referring to his recent travels to different parts of the country since returning, he said he sensed a deep yearning for direction and hope, particularly among the younger generation.

"Not only the new generation, but every generation expects guidance. People have many expectations from those involved in politics. Even if it is not possible to fulfil all expectations, if politicians work to protect the country's independence and sovereignty, it will be possible to lead the nation on the right path," he said.

Seeking constructive engagement from the media, Tarique called for criticism that is purposeful rather than performative.

"Criticism is necessary, but not criticism for the sake of criticism. We want criticism that helps solve the country's problems."

Outlining policy ideas, Tarique said the BNP plans to introduce a "farmer card" for around one and a half crore farmers.

"The huge number of people who

Celebrating women

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provide food for 20 crore citizens have no proper platform to raise their issues. We must hear their problems ourselves."

Referring to the role of his late mother Khaleda Zia, he said the party also plans to introduce a family card to help educated women become economically self-reliant if the BNP is voted to power.

He said the party intends to adopt a prevention-based approach in the health sector to reduce costs and improve public wellbeing.

"If people are made aware of which foods increase the risk of kidney disease, heart problems or diabetes, state expenditure will fall and people will remain healthier," he said, adding that healthcare workers would be appointed for this purpose.

Anam then thanked bti for joining hands in this venture.

The event also featured a panel discussion titled "Transforming Society by Empowering Women", joined by Shaheen Anam, executive director of Manusher Jonno Foundation; Farah Kabir, country director of ActionAid Bangladesh; and environmental lawyer Shaila Shahid, a WIN DRR award winner, as panelists.

Shaheen Anam said, "Women's economic empowerment does not happen in a vacuum.... Nearly 50 percent of our girls are married before the age of 18, which cuts short education and employment opportunities."

She also stressed the need for policy support such as childcare, safe hostels and security for working women, adding that unpaid care work must also be recognised.

"Empowerment starts from home.... In an environment where even demanding equal rights comes under attack, breaking stereotypes about what women can and cannot do

has become extremely challenging." She further said women need support at home and better organisation, adding, "There is not a single woman who is not working, whether through paid or unpaid work."

Referring to government data, Shaheen Anam said high levels of domestic violence show that women are still seen as less equal at home. "The only way to counter this is by showing evidence of what women do and what they are capable of.... Every woman has the potential to become a Stellar Woman if given the opportunity."

"Men should see women as partners, not adversaries, and women should see men as allies, not enemies. Both must work together for real change to happen."

Farah Kabir said women's empowerment must go beyond symbolism and address deep structural inequalities, stressing that women are not a homogeneous group.

"Empowerment is a process through which people who are denied voice and entitlements acquire the ability to make choices.... Every human being has agency, and that mindset has to change."

Highlighting the rise in violence against women, she said Bangladesh must "move from impunity to accountability", noting that justice remains far-fetched due to entrenched systemic failures.

Kabir also criticised the lack of

political commitment, pointing out that "less than four percent of election candidates are women", and questioned whether political actors are "really ready to be inclusive".

She stressed the need to engage men and boys, reform education systems and adopt an intersectional, life-cycle-based approach to empowerment. "You cannot have selective justice. It has to be universal human rights."

Shaila Shahid said women across Bangladesh are emerging as "invisible faces and forces of resilience" through grassroots leadership in climate and disaster management.

Sharing experiences from the Sundarbans and the Satkhira region, she said, "Women are playing key roles in water management groups, conservation committees and disaster preparedness, supported by government agencies and local communities.... Real transformation happens when women are organised and when we put our trust in women."

She noted that women's leadership is shifting power relations and influencing policy.

Calling on young women, she said, "You do not need permission to begin."

Women and Children's Affairs Adviser Sharmin S Murshid was invited as the chief guest for the programme but could not attend due to a sudden illness.

The gala concluded with the presentation of crests, cheques and scarves to the awardees.

Iran protests rage on, crackdown fears grow

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Rasoulof and Jafar Panahi said.

In Tehran's Saadatabad district, people banged pots and chanted anti-government slogans including "death to Khamenei" as cars honked in support, a video verified by AFP showed.

Other images disseminated on social media and by Persian-language television channels outside Iran showed similarly large protests elsewhere in the capital, as well as in the eastern city of Mashhad, Tabriz in the north and the holy city of Qom.

In the western city of Hamedan, a man was shown waving a shah-era Iranian flag featuring the lion and the sun amid fires and people dancing.

In the Pounak district of northern Iran, people were shown dancing round a fire in the middle of a highway, while in the Vakilabad district of Mashhad, a city home to one of the holiest shrines in Shiite Islam, people marched down an avenue chanting "death to Khamenei".

Authorities say several members of the security forces have been killed, and Khamenei in a defiant speech on Friday lashed out at "vandals" and accused the United States of instigating the protests.

On Thursday and Friday, an AFP journalist in Tehran saw streets deserted and plunged into darkness ahead of any protests.

On Valiasr avenue, one of Tehran's main streets, businesses were

shutting unusually early.

"The area is not safe," said a cafe manager as he prepared to close at around 4:00 pm.

An AFP reporter saw shop windows broken, as well as security forces deployed.

State TV on Saturday broadcast images of funerals for several members of the security forces killed in the protests, including a large gathering in the southern city of Shiraz.

It also aired images of buildings, including a mosque, on fire.

Iran's army said in a statement that it would "vigorously protect and safeguard national interests" against an "enemy seeking to disrupt order and peace".

National security council chief Ali Larijani said in comments broadcast late Friday that "we are in the middle of a war", with "these incidents being directed from outside".

The Norway-based Hengaw rights group said it had confirmed five

Free speech key to democratic transition

Editors, senior journalists at meet-and-greet with Tarique

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Any political party that seeks democratic transformation must ensure an environment for free speech, editors and senior journalists said yesterday.

At a greetings exchange programme with BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman at a city hotel, they said journalists had endured torture and repression over the past 15 years under a fascist regime, which severely dented press freedom and made the working environment unsafe.

They added that the July uprising had created a new opportunity to safeguard freedom of speech in the country.

At the beginning of the event, Tarique greeted the editors and journalists.

In his speech, New Age Editor and Editors' Council President Nurul Kabir said that if Bangladesh is to achieve a democratic transformation of its future society and state, there must be an environment conducive to democratic journalism.

"In the past, many journalists faced lawsuits, attacks, and various kinds of injustice, and there was no proper environment to fight those cases legally."

Many who supported the previous regime now face cases and are in jail. They should be punished if found guilty, but that must be done through a proper judicial process. The government said it would look into the matter, but it has not kept its promise to ensure their legal rights, Kabir added.

"If we cannot stop the repetition of the injustices that occurred under the previous government, we will not be able to set an example of fair treatment of newspaper and media workers."

Shafik Rehman, founder editor of Jaijai Din, proposed introducing a pension system for journalists. He also suggested forming a committee to investigate the money theft from Bangladesh Bank and reorganising the law enforcement agencies.

"Recently, a survey showed that 70 percent of people in the country are interested in voting for the BNP. There is truth in this claim. But this interest must be turned into votes, and only then can the party come to power."

Manabzamin Editor-in-Chief Matiur Rahman

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21-yr-old dies after taking poison over unpaid dues

Family alleges provocation

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Syhet

A 21-year-old youth died after ingesting poison in Derai upazila of Sunamganj, with his family alleging that a creditor assaulted him and provoked him to take poison over unpaid dues.

The victim, Joy Mahapatra, son of Liton Mahapatra of Bhangadhar village in the upazila, fell seriously ill on Thursday evening and died at Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital on Friday morning.

Emanul Haque Chowdhury, officer-in-charge of Derai Police Station, said, "We are investigating the incident. No case has been filed yet."

According to locals, Joy bought a mobile phone on instalments for Tk 5,500 about three months ago from Amirul Islam of Burhanpur village. About Tk 2,500 remained unpaid, leading to a dispute.

Joy's mother, Shelly Mahapatra, alleged assault and provocation by the creditor.

She said, "My son came home vomiting. When I asked him what happened, he said Amirul made him ingest something over the debt issue."

"After my son was hospitalised, I went to meet Amirul, and he told me that he gave my son poison and told him to die if he couldn't pay the weekly instalment of Tk 500."

'Our stance unchanged'

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decision on our own -- it is a government matter. Our earlier stance remains unchanged."

Asked whether the team would participate if the schedule could not be shifted from India, Bulbul said, "At this moment, I cannot say anything until we receive the letter."

He also ruled out reports of

Bangladesh quick Mustafizur Rahman receiving unofficial offers for a return in Indian Premier League, calling them "completely fake news."

According to Indian media outlet NDTV Sports, ICC chairman Jay Shah will meet officials of Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) in Vadodara today to resolve Bangladesh's reluctance to travel to India.

Reza Pahlavi, the US based son

of Iran's ousted shah, hailed the "magnificent" turnout on Friday and urged Iranians to stage more targeted protests on Saturday and Sunday.

"Our goal is no longer just to take to the streets. The goal is to prepare to seize and hold city centres," Pahlavi said in a video message on social media.

Pahlavi, whose father Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was ousted by the 1979 revolution and died in 1980, added he was also "preparing to return to my homeland" at a time that he believed was "very near".

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Kurdish men had been shot dead by security forces in the western city of Kermanshah on Thursday and another man, a former bodybuilding champion, killed in the northern city of Rasht on Friday.

Yesterday, the start of the working week in Iran, one man in Tehran said he was unable to check his work email.

"This is the price to pay before the victory of the people," he said.

US President Donald Trump again refused on Friday to rule out new military action against Iran after Washington backed and joined Israel's 12-day war against the Islamic republic in June.

"Iran's in big trouble. It looks to me that the people are taking over certain cities that nobody thought were really possible just a few weeks ago," Trump said.

Asked about his message to Iran's leaders, Trump said: "You better not start shooting because we'll start shooting too."