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## '2,000 killed in Iran unrest'

Regime official tells Reuters as Trump urges Iranians to keep protesting, promises 'help' on its way

AGENCIES

US President Donald Trump yesterday urged Iranians to continue nationwide protests, promising that help "was on its way," as the death toll from more than two weeks of violence crossed 2,000.

World condemnation of Iran's crackdown on protesters also intensified, with the United Kingdom, France, Germany and the European Union summoning Iran's ambassadors to demand answers over what they described as horrific reports of mass killings.

With the Islamic Republic's clerical establishment facing its biggest demonstrations since 2022, Trump has repeatedly warned of intervention if force is used against protesters.

- Trump announces 25% tariffs on Iran trade partners
- China vows retaliation over new US tariff
- Iran to press capital crime charges for 'rioters'

He was scheduled to meet his national security team at the White House to discuss options on Iran, as the country's foreign minister said Tehran was "ready for any action."

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Charred musical instruments, documents, and books stand in quiet testimony during an exhibition of items recovered after the December 19 mob attack and arson at the Bangladesh Udichi Shilpigosthi office. The exhibition was organised at the office on Topkhana Road yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

## BCB unmoved in ICC video conference

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Cricket Board yesterday reaffirmed its decision not to travel to India for the upcoming ICC T20 World Cup, citing security concerns, during a video conference with the International Cricket Council.

During the meeting, ICC urged BCB to reconsider its position, pointing out that the schedule for the tournament, to



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## BNP man dies in army custody

Family alleges torture; army forms probe body, withdraws officers concerned

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia



Shamsuzzaman Dablu

said Dablu died after falling ill during a joint forces operation.

According to the release, joint forces conducted a special operation around 11:00pm on Monday, acting on specific intelligence to recover illegal firearms.

During the operation, Dablu was detained from a pharmacy near Jibannagar Upazila Health Complex, on allegations of possessing illegal weapons, the release said.

Based on information obtained from him, the patrol team later searched the pharmacy and recovered a 9mm pistol, one magazine and

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

## 11-party plans contingency

Mulls leaving up to 10% seats 'open' if seat-sharing deal not sealed

MAMUNUR RASHID

If the 11-party alliance is unable to agree on backing a single nominee in some constituencies, it will keep those seats "open" for its all members.

Sources in the coalition said the number of such seats could be up to 10 percent of the 300 constituencies.

Leaders of the 11 parties, including Jamaat, Islami Andolan Bangladesh, and the National Citizen Party (NCP), have been engaged in seat-sharing discussions since the first half of December but are yet to finalise a deal.

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## Bangladesh sets record by parachute jumps with 54 flags

BSS, Dhaka

Bangladesh has secured a place in the Guinness World Records by setting a new record for flying the highest number of flags while parachuting on Victory Day, December 16, 2025.

On Monday, the World Records Management Team officially informed Team Bangladesh of the achievement, said a press release issued by the chief adviser's press wing yesterday.

According to the description published on the Guinness World Records website, "The most flags flown simultaneously while skydiving [parachute jump] is 54 and was achieved by Team Bangladesh in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on December 16, 2025.

The team attempted this record to unite skydivers from across Bangladesh in a single historic achievement and demonstrate national collaboration. The attempt was made to commemorate Bangladesh's 54th Victory Day."

Expressing joy at Bangladesh's official inclusion in the Guinness World Records, Chowdhury Ashik Mahmud Bin Harun, executive chairman of the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA), said, "Today is a day of pride for everyone in the country. We want to share this joy with all the people of Bangladesh."



Firefighters work at the site of a private delivery company's logistics hub hit by Russian missile strikes in Kharkiv, Ukraine yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## '2,000 killed in Iran unrest'

FROM PAGE 1

In a Truth Social post, Trump also urged protesters to take over institutions and record the names of "killers and abusers."

"Iranian Patriots, KEEP PROTESTING," Trump wrote yesterday. "I have cancelled all meetings with Iranian Officials until the senseless killing of protesters STOPS. HELP IS ON ITS WAY."

Asked what he meant by "help is on its way" to protesters in Iran, Trump told reporters that they would have to "figure it out".

On Monday, Trump announced a 25 percent tariff on any country doing business with Iran, intensifying pressure on nations that import oil from Tehran, including China.

The tariff would "immediately" target the Islamic Republic's trading partners that also do business with the US, Trump said in a social media post. "This order is final and conclusive."

The White House said Trump remained "unafraid" to deploy military force against Iran but was pursuing diplomacy as a first resort.

Axios, citing an unidentified senior US official, reported that White House envoy Steve Witkoff over the weekend met with Reza Pahlavi, the exiled son of Iran's last shah and a prominent voice in the fragmented opposition, to discuss the protests roiling that country.

Iranian authorities have insisted they have regained control after successive nights of nationwide protests since Thursday.

Rights groups, however, accuse the government of using live ammunition against demonstrators and obscuring the scale of the crackdown through an internet blackout that has lasted more than four days.

As international phone calls resumed after days of disruption, an Iranian official yesterday told Reuters that about 2,000 people, including security personnel, had been killed in the unrest.

Later, the US-based HRANA rights group said it had verified the deaths of 2,003 people during Iran's protests, including 1,850 protesters, 135 government-affiliated individuals, nine people aged under 18, and nine non-protester civilians.

The Norway-based NGO Iran Human Rights estimated that about 10,000 people had been arrested.

Iranian state media reported that dozens of security force members had been killed. Authorities have declared three days of national mourning.

The protests, which began on December 28, have spread across all provinces of Iran, according to the BBC and other international media. Protesters are now calling for an end to the clerical rule of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Meanwhile, the Tehran prosecutor's office said authorities would seek capital charges against some suspects arrested over the demonstrations.

State television quoted prosecutors as saying an unspecified number would be charged with "moharebeh," or "waging war against God," a Sharia law offence that carries the death penalty.

Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi

told Al Jazeera that the government had been "in dialogue" with protesters in the early phase of the movement and that the internet was cut only after authorities confronted what he described as "terrorist operations" directed from abroad.

Addressing Trump's threats, he said: "We are prepared for any eventuality, and we hope Washington will choose a wise option. It doesn't matter which option they choose—we are ready for it."

On Monday, the government sought to reassert control with mass nationwide rallies that Khamenei hailed as proof the protest movement had been defeated, issuing what he called a "warning" to the US.

Rising deaths drew condemnation alongside calls for restraint from regional and global powers.

The UN human rights chief said he was "horrified" by mounting violence against peaceful protesters.

Trump envoy met exiled Iranian crown prince: report

Iran seizes US arms, explosives: FM says protest 'planned'

UK, France summon Iran ambassador

UN slams 'horrific' killings: EU vows swift sanctions

"This cycle of horrific violence cannot continue. The Iranian people and their demands for fairness, equality and justice must be heard," Volker Turk said, also voicing concern that the death penalty could be used against thousands of detainees.

His remarks came amid reports that Erfan Soltani, a 26-year-old protester detained last Thursday, could be executed as early as tomorrow.

The EU said it stood "ready to propose new sanctions," adding to measures already in place.

"When a regime can only hold on to power through violence, it is effectively finished," German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said during a visit to India. "I believe we are witnessing the last days and weeks of this regime."

Reza Pahlavi, the US-based son of Iran's ousted shah, said Trump was a leader who "means what he says and says what he means."

"The red line has definitely been surpassed by this regime," he said.

Some countries, however, urged caution amid threats of US intervention.

Qatar called for restraint and said it was working to mediate rising tensions.

"Any escalation would have catastrophic results in the region and beyond," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Majed al-Ansari said.

Russia's Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu condemned what he called "foreign interference" in Iran's internal affairs following talks with

Iran's National Security Council.

US TARIFF IRKS CHINA

China threatened retaliation after Trump announced the new tariffs.

Liu Pengyu, spokesperson for the Chinese embassy in Washington, said Beijing would "take all necessary measures" to safeguard its interests.

China is Iran's largest trading partner, purchasing 77 percent of its oil exports in 2024, according to Kpler. Other major partners include India, the UAE, Japan and South Korea.

It remains unclear how the tariff would be applied and whether it would be imposed in addition to existing US import taxes. China already faces tariffs of up to 45 percent, while India faces a 40 percent levy over Russian oil imports.

REGIME STILL FORMIDABLE FORCE

Analysts caution that despite the scale of protests, predicting the regime's immediate collapse would be premature.

Iran's security apparatus—anchored by the Revolutionary Guards and Basij forces numbering nearly one million—makes external pressure without internal fracture difficult, said Vali Nasr.

"For this to succeed, crowds must stay in the streets much longer, and parts of the state, particularly security forces, must defect," he said.

Supreme Leader Khamenei, 86, has weathered several uprisings since 2009, said Paul Salem of the Middle East Institute, calling this the fifth major challenge to the regime.

Alan Eyre, a former US diplomat, said protesters would need to overcome entrenched institutions, loyal constituencies and the scale of a country of 90 million people.

IRAN SEIZES US ARMS, AMMO'

Iran's intelligence agency said it seized US-made weapons and explosives from "militants" who allegedly planned assassinations and sabotage. State television reported arrests of suspected "terrorist groups" linked to Israel in Zahedan.

Separately, Iran's top military commander accused the US and Israel of deploying ISIL fighters inside Iran, without presenting evidence.

Araghchi claimed authorities possessed recordings of foreign voices directing "terrorist agents" to fire on police and protesters.

TRUMP MULLS IRAN OPTIONS

The office of US Vice President JD Vance said senior officials were preparing diplomatic and military options for Trump.

Vice President Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio are presenting a suite of options ranging from diplomacy to military action," said Vance's communications director William Martin.

The remarks came as Senator Lindsey Graham urged Trump to escalate pressure, calling the collapse of Iran's clerical leadership the "biggest prize" of his presidency.

He said US action should target "the infrastructure that allows the killing," while warning that deploying US ground forces would risk heavy casualties.

The US last year bombed Iranian nuclear sites after joining Israel's 12-day war with Iran.

## BNP man dies in army custody

FROM PAGE 1

four rounds of ammunition, it added.

After the operation, Dablu reportedly fell ill and lost consciousness. He was immediately taken to the upazila health complex, where the on-duty physician declared him dead at around 12:25am, according to the release.

Describing the incident as "unexpected and unfortunate", the ISPR said it was "in no way acceptable". It added that the camp commander and all other army personnel concerned had been withdrawn to the cantonment following the death.

A high-level investigation committee has been formed to determine the actual cause of the incident, the release said, adding that legal action would be taken under army law against those found responsible.

Local Sramik Dal leader Shafiqul Islam Khoka said Dablu owned Hafiza Pharmacy, located opposite Jibannagar Upazila Health Complex.

He alleged that army personnel picked Dablu up from the pharmacy on Monday night and took him about 50 metres away to the BNP's local office.

Khoka showed journalists a room inside the office and claimed Dablu was assaulted there for nearly two hours.

He also alleged that Dablu was gagged during the assault.

Habibur Rahman, general secretary of BNP's Ward No. 8 unit in Jibannagar municipality, said he was present when Dablu was taken to the party office.

He told journalists that Dablu was tied up and slapped, after which the mobile phones of those present were seized.

Dablu was then taken inside, his

hands tied, and beaten severely for about one and a half hours, Rahman alleged, adding that he died there.

Army personnel later took Dablu to hospital, both Rahman and Khoka said.

Jibannagar Upazila Health and Family Planning Officer Mokbul Hossain said Dablu was brought to the health complex at 12:16am yesterday.

Speaking to The Daily Star at the health complex yesterday noon, Dablu's wife Jesmin Nahar said, "How can a healthy person die just after being picked up? This was a planned killing. Army personnel picked him up from his own pharmacy and killed him."

Chuadanga Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Kamal Hossain said the autopsy was completed yesterday at Chuadanga Sadar Hospital, and the body was handed over to family members in the evening.

Protesting the death, locals and BNP activists staged a demonstration from morning to noon, blocking the main gate of the Jibannagar Upazila Health Complex and chanting slogans demanding justice.

District BNP leaders also submitted a memorandum to the deputy commissioner, demanding a fair trial.

"We have already informed the Cabinet Division, the Election Commission and the home ministry about this matter," the DC said.

Chuadanga Superintendent of Police Mohammad Monirul Islam said police were not informed about the operation.

"The army conducted an operation around 11:00pm on Monday night. We later came to know about it. Police were not informed," he said, adding that doctors declared Dablu dead after he was taken to hospital.

## 11-party plans contingency

FROM PAGE 1

They said Jamaat leaders yesterday held meetings with Islami Andolan and Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis to move the talks forward. Top leaders of the coalition members are expected to meet today.

Discussions with partners are ongoing, Ahsanul Mahbub Zubayer, assistant secretary general of Jamaat, told The Daily Star.

"Ameers [top posts in Islamic parties] could meet at any time tomorrow [today]. They will finalise the constituency-wise arrangement and announce the decision."

Maulana Jalaluddin Ahmed, secretary general of Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, said, "Suppose we manage to reach an agreement in 260 to 270 seats but fail in 20, 30 or 40 seats. In that case, those may be kept open."

However, he maintained that their efforts to bring the votes of those who support Islamist parties into "one box" would remain intact even if some constituencies are left open.

Asked how that would be possible, he said, "If a decision is made to keep some seats open, those who wish to field candidates will do so. About a week after campaigning begins, the popularity of all candidates will be reviewed. Everyone except the one who is ahead of all others will step aside."

Talking to this correspondent, Khelafat Majlis Secretary General Ahmed Abdul Kader said, "So far, we have reached an agreement for 90 percent of the seats. The remaining five or 10 percent may have to be kept open. That is because two parties,

and in some cases even three, want these seats. There appears to be no alternative but to keep them open. But the alliance will remain... that is certain."

Meanwhile, several top coalition leaders have raised questions about Jamaat's "authoritarian approach" in the seat-allocation process.

Mojibur Rahman Monju, chairman of Amar Bangladesh (AB) Party, said everyone says this is an 11-party alliance. "But so far, we have not seen the 11 parties hold a joint meeting even once. That leaves us somewhat confused."

He said NCP and his party sought 50 seats – 35 for NCP and 15 for AB Party.

"Later, we saw that they [Jamaat] spoke with the NCP and with us separately. We expressed our dissatisfaction over this."

Although there has been discussion that a meeting of the coalition's top leaders is likely to take place today, Monju said he had not been invited as of yesterday evening.

Asked, Jamaat leader Zubayer said, "There are discussions with everyone, more or less. There is a liaison committee for seat-sharing talks, with members from eight parties. Representatives of three parties that joined the alliance recently may not be there, but contact is maintained with everyone as required."

On September 18 last year, Jamaat, Islami Andolan, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, Khelafat Majlis, Bangladesh Khelafat Andolan, Jatiya Ganatantrik Party (Jagpa), Nezame Islam Party and Bangladesh

## NEWS

### Court orders seizure of Saifuzzaman's foreign assets

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday ordered the relevant authorities to confiscate 330 foreign properties owned by former minister Saifuzzaman Chowdhury and his related persons and entities in connection with corruption allegations.

The properties include condominiums, apartments and villas. They were bought between January 2011 and September 2023, shows the documents submitted by the Anti-Corruption Commission before the court.

Of the 330 properties, 117 are located in Cambodia, 59 in the UAE, 47 in Malaysia, 40 in the US, 33 in Vietnam, 23 in Thailand, nine in India and two in the Philippines, according to ACC records.

Judge Md Sabbir Faiz of the Metropolitan Senior Special Judge's Court in Dhaka yesterday passed separate orders after ACC Deputy Director Md Moshirul Rahman, who is the head of the enquiry, filed eight applications with the court, said Riaz Hossain, bench assistant of the court.

"During the course of enquiry, it has been learned through confidential sources that Saifuzzaman Chowdhury along with his related persons and entities is attempting to transfer or dispose of their immovable properties to other parties," said ACC official Moshirul Rahman in the applications.

If the immovable properties are transferred or relocated, there is a strong likelihood of substantial loss to the state.

"So, it is imperative that the said properties be immediately confiscated and that the confiscation orders are transmitted to the concerned country through MLAR for collecting evidence," he added.

Speaking to the media after the meeting, BCB vice-president Faruque was among the attendees.

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## BORDER FIRING Foreign ministry summons Myanmar envoy

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The foreign ministry yesterday summoned Myanmar Ambassador to Bangladesh U Kyaw Soe Moe and expressed deep concern at the recent instance of gunfire from Myanmar towards Bangladesh near Whykong Union of Teknaf, Cox's Bazar.

A 12-year-old Bangladeshi girl was injured by stray bullet during heavy fighting reportedly between the Arakan Army and Rohingya armed groups across the Myanmar border, a foreign ministry statement said.

Besides, another youth named Mohammad Hanif, 28, of Lombabil area under Whykong union was critically injured in a landmine explosion along the Teknaf border.

Bangladesh reminded that the unprovoked firing towards Bangladesh is a blatant violation of international law and a hindrance to neighbourly relationship.

Bangladesh asked Myanmar to take full responsibility and requisite measures to stop such cross-border firing.

Bangladesh also asked the Myanmar envoy to ensure that whatever happens

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1



Laughter drifts through Pangsha village as two elder sisters gently push their little sister on a swing, enjoying a winter afternoon in Barishal's Babuganj upazila yesterday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

## Ward-level Jamaat leader killed at Rajabazar home

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



A leader of Bangladeshi Jamaat-e-Islami was killed at his home in Dhaka's Paschim Rajabazar early yesterday. The deceased -- Anwar Ullah, 65, a homeopathic practitioner -- was vice-president of ward-27 of Dhaka North City Corporation.

His son-in-law, Md Shamsuddoha, said two masked men entered the house around 2:00am after cutting the grille and tortured Anwar, tying his hands.

"My mother-in-law called me around 5:00am and informed me about the incident. I rushed to the house and found him unconscious. A scarf was wrapped around his neck," he told The Daily Star. The killers took away some valuables and gold jewellery.

Anwar was taken to a nearby hospital, where doctors declared him dead, Shamsuddoha added.

Originally from Cumilla, Anwar Ullah was a teacher and had been living in the first-floor flat with his wife.

Police and members of the Crime Scene Unit of the Criminal Investigation Department rushed there and collected evidence.

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## Without accountability, democracy will fail

Speakers tell discussion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Democracy in Bangladesh cannot survive without accountability, said speakers at a dialogue yesterday, warning that promises lose meaning when governments are not answerable to the people.

They stressed the need for internal reforms within political parties, greater transparency, and stronger engagement with civil society to improve governance.

Speakers also highlighted the importance of social protection for women and marginalised groups, addressing economic inequality, and incorporating citizens' voices into policymaking.

The dialogue, titled "Citizen Manifesto 2026: Expectations for National Election and Democratic Transition," was held at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in Agargaon. It was organised by Prapti with support from the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD).

BNP Standing Committee member Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury stated that accountability must function both within and outside parliament.

"Without accountability, promises disappear again and again," he said, adding that civil society is a key partner

in governance and that restricting its role signals the rise of authoritarianism.

He also said parliamentary committees must function effectively to ensure oversight.

On the economy, Khosru said it should be democratised so that all citizens benefit, not just a small group.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Reform parties for internal democracy

Guarantee security so candidates, voters can participate without fear

Reduce influence of money, muscle power in polls

Strengthen institutions to protect rights, prevent abuse of power

He noted that while governments enjoy an initial "honeymoon period," many fail because they cannot accept criticism despite rising public expectations.

Saiful Alam Khan Milan, a central executive committee member of Jamaat-e-Islami, said security during elections is a major concern.

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## Fair polls futile without major reforms

Speakers tell Shujan  
event, raise alarms about  
'security vacuum'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Politicians, academics and civil society members yesterday warned that a fair election alone cannot ensure a democratic transition without major structural reforms.

At a dialogue, they also raised concerns about a "security vacuum" and the risk posed by unrecovered weapons.

Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik (Shujan) organised the divisional dialogue titled "Expectation of the July Mass Uprising, Reforms and Election Manifestos" at the CIRDAP Auditorium in the capital.

Presenting the keynote, Shujan Secretary Badiul Alam Majumdar said without far-reaching reforms, any future elected government could again turn authoritarian.

He stressed the need for an active Election Commission, an end to the influence of money in elections, and a neutral media.

Badiul further demanded strict accountability of law enforcement agencies to prevent extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances.

He said the Anti-Corruption

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## BNP alleges bias in postal ballots Flags 'unfair' placement of party symbol

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP yesterday filed a complaint with the Election Commission (EC), alleging that its name and symbol are not clearly visible on postal ballots sent to expatriate voters for the upcoming 13th National Parliamentary Election.

The party claimed that its name and symbol had been positioned in the middle of the postal ballot, while those of several other political parties were deliberately placed in the first row, raising concerns of bias.

Speaking to reporters after meeting the Chief Election Commissioner at the EC headquarters in Agargaon, BNP Standing Committee member Nazrul Islam Khan said the placement was "intentional" and makes it difficult for voters to identify the party when the ballot is folded.



When the ballot is folded, the BNP's name and symbol are not easily visible, he said. He said the EC admitted that it had not paid sufficient attention to the issue.

Nazrul said three major political parties had their names and symbols in the first row of the postal ballot. He added that if the ballot had five or six columns instead of four, such placement would

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## FEB 12 REFERENDUM Campaigning for 'no' vote anti- people: Nahid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

National Citizen Party (NCP) Convener Nahid Islam yesterday alleged that a certain political party is using various tactics to campaign for a "no" vote in the referendum scheduled for February 12.

"Those who never wanted reforms are now taking a stand for a 'no' vote. Those who advocate a 'no' vote do not want the welfare of the country," he said while inaugurating the "NCP Caravan" in Dhaka as part of the party's referendum campaign.

Nahid said when the referendum commission was formed, the same party questioned why the interim government was pursuing reforms, arguing that no reforms were needed even after the referendum.

Referring to the referendum, he said supporting a "no" vote would go against the will of the people. "I believe those who oppose the reforms will not be able to win the election. To succeed, they must support a 'yes' vote and stand for reforms," he said.

He also alleged that the said party was



promising schemes such as "Family Cards" and

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## Include cancellation of Adani power deal in polls manifestos

CAB's youth wing urges  
parties, candidates

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The youth wing of the Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB) has demanded that political parties and candidates contesting the upcoming national election include the cancellation of the power purchase agreement with Indian company Adani Power in their election manifestos.

They also placed 12 other demands on power and energy issues at a press conference at the auditorium of Dhaka Reporters' Unity yesterday, calling for commitments from election contestants.

The other demands include postponing an increase in imports of liquefied natural gas for at least the next five years; prohibiting any increase in coal-based power generation; transforming the sector into a service-based one from a profit-driven model; reducing imports of fossil fuels by at least 5 percent within the next five years; increasing solar power generation to 15 percent; ensuring 100 percent onshore gas exploration by state-owned BAPIX; cancelling deals with all furnace-oil-based power plants under the Quick Enhancement of Electricity and Energy Supply (Special Provisions) Act, 2010; ensuring compensation from those companies; preparing a roadmap for using the explored gas in Bholia and Chatal;

SEE PAGE 9 COL 4



Holding banners and placards to raise awareness about noise pollution, a group of people stood at the Science Lab intersection in Dhaka yesterday as part of the environment ministry's 10-day campaign across the capital.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

## July activists, NCP breakaways to unveil new platform Friday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A new political platform led by demonstrators of the July uprising and breakaways from the National Citizen Party is set to make its debut this Friday.

The platform, ideologically rooted in social democracy, will also be joined by current and former leaders of the left-leaning Bangladesh Chhatra Union, as well as socio-cultural activists who played active roles in the uprising and the movement to topple the Sheikh Hasina government.

The official launch will be announced from the Central Shaheed Minar in the capital on January 16, said founding member Anik Roy, a former joint convener of the NCP.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Anik said, "We want to carry forward the generational fight." He added that the platform's economic framework would be based on the concept of a "democratic economy".

Distinguishing itself from traditional political parties, the organisers plan to introduce a rotating leadership structure to prevent the accumulation of power.

"The leadership structure will be fluid, meaning the chief of the platform will

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# INTERNATIONAL

Greenland could vote to join Russia  
Says Medvedev

REUTERS

Russian Security Council Deputy Chairman Dmitry Medvedev said Greenlanders could vote to join Russia if US President Donald Trump did not move quickly to secure the Arctic island, Interfax reported on Monday.

"Trump needs to hurry. According to unverified information, in a few days there could be a sudden referendum, at which the entire 55,000-strong Greenland could vote to join Russia," Interfax reported, quoting Medvedev, a former Russian president. "And then that's it. No new little stars on the (US) flag."

Trump has revived his push for the United States to take control of Greenland. The Arctic island's Prime Minister Jens Frederik Nielsen told a press conference in Copenhagen yesterday that Greenland chooses Denmark over the US.

India accuses Pak of cross-border drone incursions

REUTERS, New Delhi

India's army chief said yesterday that the head of Pakistan's military operations had been told to control what he said were drone intrusions from Pakistan into India, months after the nuclear-armed rivals engaged in their worst fighting in decades.

An Indian military source said there were five drone intrusions on Sunday evening on the frontier in the Jammu region of Indian Kashmir.

In another incident on Friday, a drone from Pakistan was suspected to have dropped two pistols, ammunition magazines, 16 bullets and one grenade that were recovered following a search.

Indian army chief General Upendra Dwivedi said at least eight drones had been sighted since Saturday. "These drones, I believe, were defensive drones, which want to go up and see if any action was being taken," Dwivedi told reporters.



Palestinians inspect a collapsed war-damaged building in Gaza City on a windy winter day. A rainstorm swept the Gaza Strip yesterday, flooding tents, collapsing homes of displaced families, and killing at least six people, local health officials said.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## JAMMU & KASHMIR REGION China rejects India's claim over Shaksgam valley

Asserts the territory belongs to Beijing

DAWN ONLINE

Beijing has rejected New Delhi's claim over the Shaksgam valley in Jammu and Kashmir and said that the territory "belongs to China".

At a press conference on Monday, when asked by the Press Trust of India (PTI) for comment on the Indian criticism of China's infrastructure development projects in the Shaksgam valley, China's Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mao Ning said that it was "fully justified" for China to conduct infrastructure construction "on its own territory".

"The territory you mentioned belongs to China," she said. India's foreign ministry spokesperson had on Friday said that it reserved the right to take necessary measures to safeguard its interests as the Shaksgam valley was "an Indian territory".

"We have never recognised the so-called China-Pakistan boundary agreement that happened in 1963. We have consistently maintained that the agreement is illegal and invalid," he said at a press conference in response to a question from India's state-owned public television broadcaster Doordashan.

The Indian spokesperson added that New Delhi also does not "recognise the so-called China-Pakistan Economic Corridor".

"The entire union territories of Jammu and



Kashmir and Ladakh are an integral and inalienable part of India," he maintained, adding, "This has been clearly conveyed to Pakistani and the Chinese authorities several times".

He added that India had "consistently protested with the Chinese side against attempts to alter the ground reality in Shaksgam Valley".

Mao Ning, in response to the Indian foreign ministry spokesperson's comments, said that China and Pakistan had in the 1960s signed a boundary agreement and delimited the boundary between the two countries, terming it "the right of China and Pakistan as sovereign countries".

"The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), as an economic cooperation initiative, aims at promoting local socio-economic development and improving people's livelihood," she said.

"The China-Pakistan boundary agreement and CPEC do not affect China's position on the Kashmir issue and the position remains unchanged."

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## Stay out of Gaza ISF

Bangladesh must not be drawn into this misadventure

The interest expressed by National Security Adviser Khalilur Rahman in participating in the proposed International Stabilisation Force (ISF) for Gaza is both perplexing and troubling. It is difficult to comprehend the rationale behind such an initiative by an interim government that is expected to leave office within a month or so, but still appears willing to saddle the country and its armed forces with a commitment that borders on an outlandish adventure.

The clarification offered by the chief adviser's press secretary, Shafiqul Alam, regarding the adviser's discussions with US officials is neither convincing nor coherent; indeed, it appears internally contradictory. Referring to United Nations Security Council Resolution 2803, he stated, "As one of the largest contributors to UN peacekeeping forces and an ardent supporter of the Palestinian cause, Bangladesh's interest in participating in the ISF is contingent on the fulfilment of a number of principles." These, he explained, include the force being temporary and operating under a clear UNSC mandate, the establishment of a permanent ceasefire and complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, and the transfer of responsibility for Gaza to the Palestinians.

However, Resolution 2803 tells a different story. It states that "as the Force establishes control and stability, the Israel Defense Forces will withdraw from the Gaza Strip based on standards, milestones, and timeframes linked to demilitarisation that will be agreed between specified parties—save for a security perimeter presence that will remain until Gaza is properly secure from any resurgent terror threat." The language of the resolution makes it abundantly clear that the proposed multinational force is not intended as a peacekeeping mission. Rather, it is designed to secure Gaza while the IDF retains a continuing presence. In effect, the IDF's withdrawal is conditional and open ended.

It is also noteworthy that although the UNSC adopted the resolution, two veto-wielding members—Russia and China—abstained, citing the lack of clarity and warning that the force "could actually transform it into a party to the conflict." Even members who voted in favour expressed reservations about the resolution's vagueness. While attempting to justify the interim government's interest in the ISF, the government's spokesperson pointed out that all Muslim members of the UNSC supported the resolution. Yet, Pakistan and Somalia explicitly voiced concerns over the absence of any meaningful role for the Palestinian Authority and the lack of a clear pathway towards Palestinian statehood.

Against this backdrop, the interim government's reiteration of Bangladesh's long-held policy—staunch support for the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital—rings hollow due to the willingness to deploy Bangladesh's armed forces in support of an ill-defined mission.

It is well-documented that Israel is among the most persistent violators of UN resolutions adopted by both the Security Council and the General Assembly. Since the ceasefire mediated by President Donald Trump came into effect on October 10, 2025, Israel has reportedly violated it nearly 1,200 times, including through airstrikes, shelling, and the demolition of homes, resulting in the deaths of at least 439 Palestinians. Extending support to a security operation that risks becoming a direct party to the conflict—particularly one that may operate against Palestinian interests—would mark a departure from Bangladesh's long and principled history of solidarity with the Palestinian struggle against illegal and brutal occupation. Moreover, an interim government scheduled to hand over power within weeks has no authority to entangle the country in such a complex conflict situation.

## A manifesto that must not be ignored

Political commitment essential to ensuring workers' rights

The 15-point manifesto placed by the National Workers' Rights Advocacy Alliance for the political parties ahead of the upcoming national election is a timely and necessary step. At a time when parties are preparing to seek public mandates, the alliance's call to prioritise labour rights and social justice deserves serious attention. Workers have historically been at the heart of political movements in this country, yet their interests have routinely slipped down the list of priorities by successive governments. Job insecurity, low wages, unsafe workplaces, and weak social protection continue to define the lived reality of millions of workers. That these issues persist despite constitutional guarantees exposes a deep gap between legal measures and practice.

Central to the manifesto is the demand for a national minimum wage that ensures a dignified living standard for workers. This reflects long-standing demands from labour rights groups and aligns with the basic idea that work should provide more than mere survival. However, our past experience shows that announcing rights is much easier than enforcing them, especially in an economy where most workers are in the informal sector. Without strong enforcement, clear monitoring, and real political commitment, a national minimum wage may remain a promise on paper rather than a force for real change.

Equally important are the proposals to amend labour laws to ensure universal legal recognition and protection, guarantee freedom of association and collective bargaining—including in export processing zones—and strengthen workplace safety and accident compensation. Given our history of industrial tragedies and lack of accountability, transparent investigations and fair compensation are essential to ensuring justice and preventing future accidents. The emphasis on gender equality, protection from harassment and violence, and six months of paid maternity leave reflects a broader understanding that labour rights are also human rights.

Workers are often praised for their contribution to the nation, only to be sidelined once ballots are counted. This should not happen this time. As election manifestos take shape, political parties must move beyond verbal support and commit to implementing these demands with clear timelines and accountability. Establishing a permanent national labour commission could be an important step, provided it is empowered, independent, and effective. Ultimately, if political parties are serious about change, they must show it by placing workers' rights at the centre of their agenda.

# How Khaleda Zia approached economic reforms in 2001-06



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SADIQ AHMED

As the World Bank's sector director for Poverty Reduction and Economic Management (PREM), I worked very closely on the reform programme in Bangladesh led by former Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia in 2001-06. As PREM sector director, I was responsible for managing policy-based lending operations, known as development support credit (DSC). I managed four such credits amounting to over \$1 billion, of which the first three were administered during 2003-2005. This lending, along with support from the IMF, was necessary to stabilise the balance of payments.

Below, I provide my analysis of how the reform programme was developed and implemented, and the major outcomes of the programme, with a view to demonstrating that substantial reforms can be implemented with good results under astute political leadership and a strong economic team.

To set the stage for the reforms, in early 2003, my vice-president and I called on Khaleda Zia at her office near the old Dhaka airport. She received us warmly and we had a one-hour conversation on the multiple economic challenges facing her government and the need for far-reaching reforms.

She listened intently as we described these issues and stated firmly that she was committed to implementing all necessary reforms. She said she would empower her finance minister, Saifur Rahman, and his team and provide all required political support. That was a stunning message and a clear signal of her delegated and inclusive management style, which is somewhat rare

in today's mostly autocratic global political leadership.

At the end of our meeting, her principal secretary, Dr Kamal Siddiqui, introduced me to her in Bangla, saying I was the leader of the World Bank's economic team and the senior-most Bangladeshi staff in Washington DC. She turned towards me and smilingly said, "I am delighted to meet you, and I hope you will keep an eye on our needs."

Since that meeting, there was no turning back. The Bangladesh core reform team was headed by Finance Minister Saifur Rahman and included Commerce Minister Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury, Bangladesh Bank Governor Dr Fakhrudin Ahmed, Principal Secretary to the PM Dr Kamal Uddin Siddiqui, and Finance Secretary Zakir Ahmed Khan. This was, undoubtedly, an outstanding team of well-trained and seasoned policymakers. They combined academic excellence with sound administrative experience and political savviness—a rare combination these days.

The multi-year reform programme was far-reaching and was grounded in the government's own poverty reduction strategy paper. The reforms encompassed macroeconomic management, public finance, banking sector, trade policy, public enterprises, public financial management, procurement, public administration, and anti-corruption.

The reform programme was not only comprehensive, but also tough in many areas requiring careful political management. One such sensitive reform was the liberalisation of the exchange rate. In May 2004, I received a phone call from Finance Minister Saifur

Rahman, who said local Bangladeshi economists were strongly opposed to the liberalisation of the exchange rate as doing so would destabilise it. Since I believed that this reform was essential to support the expansion of exports, I suggested that I first talk with the Principal Secretary Kamal Bhai.

Kamal Bhai promised to brief the PM. I then called the finance minister and briefed him about my conversation with Kamal

commitment and delegated management style. Economic reforms are only meaningful if they yield results. The broad macroeconomic performance in the post-reform period is summarised in Table I. The evidence paints a remarkable picture of progress. GDP growth expanded by an average of 1.3 percentage points per year, fuelled by increases in private investment and exports. Private investment responded to the deregulation drive in trade

The macroeconomy was stable despite exchange rate liberalisation. Inflation rate increased owing to taka depreciation and an increase in demand from rising investment, exports and GDP growth. The nominal exchange rate moved from Tk 57.9 per US dollar in FY2003 to Tk 67.1 per dollar in FY2006, amounting to an average depreciation of five percent per year. This re-alignment of an overvalued exchange rate was a critical factor for the surge in exports, which also benefited from trade reforms. But unlike the fear expressed by critics, the exchange rate did not overshoot or destabilise, and inflation hovered around six to seven percent per year.

Fiscal performance also improved as total revenues grew modestly and there was a reduction in subsidies owing to performance improvements in SoEs, energy pricing adjustments, and better management of the power sector. The increase in fiscal space and cutback in subsidies allowed some modest improvements in spending on health, education and social protection.

There was solid improvement in the banking sector as deregulation raised the asset share of private banks and lowered the share of the corruption-infested public banks. The portfolio quality improved dramatically as gross NPLs fell sharply from 28 percent to 13 percent. The number of banks with NPL exceeding 10 percent fell substantially from 21 in 2003 to 12 in 2006.

Moving forward, the main lesson is that only comprehensive and sustained economic reforms hold the key to improved economic performance. A second message is that there is no alternative to a first-rate economic team working seamlessly under the guidance of a strong finance minister. A final message is that astute political leadership is the ultimate key to success. The example set by Begum Khaleda Zia through her uncompromising political support for the reform programme and delegation of responsibilities to a competent reform team seals her place as a core champion of economic reforms in Bangladesh.

## REFORM OUTCOMES FY2001-FY2006

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	PRE-REFORM FY2001-FY2003	POST-REFORM FY2004-FY2006
Average yearly real GDP growth rate (%)	5.0	6.3
Average inflation rate (%)	3.0	6.5
Investment rate (end of period % of GDP)	30.8	33.2
Average yearly export growth rate (%)	7.1	17.2
Exports (\$ billion, end of period)	6.5	10.4
Reserves (\$ billion, end of period)	2.5	3.5
Nominal exchange rate (Tk/\$)	57.9	67.1
Gross NPL end of period (%)	28.6	13.1
Revenue to GDP (end of period %)	10.3	10.7
Fiscal deficit (end of period % of GDP)	3.4	3.2
Debt to GDP (end of period %)	51.1	49.3
Poverty (UPL Headcount %)	48.9 (2000)	38.4 (2005)
Labour productivity (Tk 000, 1995-96 prices)	53.5	60.0

SOURCE: BANGLADESH BUREAU OF STATISTICS, BANGLADESH BANK, MINISTRY OF FINANCE

Bhai. The next day, Finance Secretary Zakir Bhai called to say the PM had approved. This is a strong testimony to Khaleda Zia's sound leadership. In similar tough situations involving banking, privatisation, and energy pricing reforms, the then PM again provided solid backing to her economic team. This was a remarkable demonstration of her reform

and investment. The surge in exports by 17.2 percent was truly remarkable. These laid the foundations for growth of employment and incomes. Average labour productivity expanded by 3.9 percent, supporting the rise in real wages and incomes. Poverty declined by an unprecedented 9.5 percentage points over the five years of 2000-2005.

# Bring courts and legal aid closer to the people



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MD. ARIFUJJAMAN

transport and food. After months of adjournments, Karim stopped attending. The case did not end. His participation did. "I did not lose in court," he says. "I lost on the road." Such attrition is common. Cases collapse because persistence requires resources that the poor do not have.

Theoretically, legal aid is supposed to fill this gap. In practice, it often

constitution also empowers the state to organise and expand subordinate courts to meet public necessity, and recent judicial reforms mean that there could be more of them in the future. But the scarcity of upazila-level courts persists. This is not a legal limitation; it is a policy choice.

Establishing magistrate and civil courts at the upazila level would not be revolutionary. It would be corrective. Litigants would spend less on travel and lose fewer working days. District courts would see

reduced congestion. Court-annexed mediation could operate where disputes arise, rather than as a distant procedural option. Most importantly, relocating legal aid services to the upazila level would widen access. Justice functions best when it is local, visible, and accountable.

Neighbouring countries have experimented with bringing justice closer to citizens through local courts and community-based dispute resolution mechanisms like Gram Nyayalayas, which are

mobile, village-level courts in India, established under the Gram Nyayalayas Act, 2008. Such models are not flawless, but they recognise a basic truth: justice that remains far away favours the powerful and exhausts the poor.

Bangladesh does not need sweeping new laws or ambitious declarations. It needs functional courts where disputes arise, and legal aid offices where poverty resides. A justice system that cannot be accessed cannot protect.



VISUAL: FREEPIK

Bangladesh's constitution promises equal legal protection for all, yet millions of citizens, especially in the rural areas, are left out of the justice process due to distance, delay, and exploitation. As courts and legal aid offices remain concentrated in district towns, pursuing justice becomes an unaffordable journey for many.

Take the case of Salma Begum (not her real name), clutching a folded bundle of papers at the Rangpur bus terminal. The documents include a police report, a legal aid certificate, and a handwritten list of dates she cannot read. Salma has been travelling since 4:00 am from her village to attend a hearing in a district court she never saw before. She knows that if she returns without progress, she will have to borrow money again.

For millions of Bangladeshis, this journey—physical, financial, and emotional—is what it takes to reach the justice system. The constitution promises equality before the law and protection of legal rights for all citizens. The state has enacted legal aid legislation to support those who cannot afford representation. Courts exist, judges are appointed, and reforms are regularly announced. Yet justice, for many, remains distant in the most literal sense.

and civil courts in Bangladesh have historically operated from district headquarters, even when they are formally assigned to serve individual upazilas. Legal aid offices are similarly concentrated in district towns. Abdul Karim (not his real name), a marginal

cannot. Shahana Akter (not her real name), a rural housewife seeking maintenance after abandonment, qualified for state-funded legal assistance. Her lawyer was free. Getting to court was not. Twice, she borrowed money to attend hearings that were postponed. The third time, she stayed home.

Legal aid in Bangladesh covers representation, not transport, accommodation, or lost income. When courts remain distant, legal aid becomes a partial promise—helpful to those who can reach the system, insufficient for those who cannot. Distance also breeds dependence. District courts are crowded, unfamiliar spaces for rural litigants, many of whom have limited literacy and little understanding of procedure. In this environment, informal intermediaries thrive. Many get scammed by brokers who are structural by-products of centralisation and thrive on exploiting confusion, delay, and distance.

The constitution, again, offers no barrier to judicial decentralisation. On the contrary, it encourages it. However, the right to protection of law weakens when remedies are physically distant. Commitments to social justice and non-discrimination cannot be fulfilled by a justice system concentrated in urban centres. The

AHQ, E in C's Branch, Works Directorate, Dhaka Cantonment						
Invitation for Tenders						
Military Engineer Services						
Notice No. 300/Ad/68/E-3/14						
1	Ministry/Division	Ministry of Defence	2	Agency	Military Engineer Services	
3	Procuring entity name	E in C	4	Procuring entity district	Dhaka	
5	Procurement method	Open Tendering Method (OTM)	6	Budget and source of funds	GOB	
7	Development partners (if applicable)	None	8	Project/programme name (if applicable)	Construction of Cancer Center at Dhaka CMH (2nd Phase)	
9	Selling of tender will commence from	15 January 2026 (During office hour).	10	Selling of tender will close on	29 January 2026 (During office hour).	
11	Last date & time of submission of tender	01 February 2026 at 1200 hours.	12	Date & time of opening of tender	01 February 2026 at 1230 hours.	
13	Name & address of the office(s)	Tender Selling & Information Centre at GE (Army) Central Dhaka & AHQ, E in C's Branch, Works Directorate, Dhaka Cantonment.	- Selling tender document	Tender Selling & Information Centre at GE (Army) Central Dhaka & AHQ, E in C's Branch, Works Directorate, Dhaka Cantonment.	- Receiving tender document	Tender Selling & Information Centre at GE (Army) Central Dhaka
- Opening tender document	Tender Selling & Information Centre at GE (Army) Central Dhaka	a. MES enlisted contractors Class 'C' for Lot No. 15(a).	b. On receipt of DGFI clearance with others Department (equivalent classes) contractors may also apply for tender.	c. Contractors having experience in similar works with enlistment in other govt., semi, government & autonomous organization may also apply.	d. Having experience of similar work mentioned in Lot No. 15(a) amounting Tk. 2,60,00,000.00 in a single tender during last 05 (Five) years.	
14	Eligibility of tenderer	a. MES enlisted contractors Class 'C' for Lot No. 15(a).	b. On receipt of DGFI clearance with others Department (equivalent classes) contractors may also apply for tender.	c. Contractors having experience in similar works with enlistment in other govt., semi, government & autonomous organization may also apply.	d. Having experience of similar work mentioned in Lot No. 15(a) amounting Tk. 2,60,00,000.00 in a single tender during last 05 (Five) years.	
15	Brief description of works	Manufacture & Supply of furniture for Construction of Cancer Center at Dhaka CMH (2nd Phase) (GP-01).	Identification of Lot	Location	Price of tender document (non-refundable)	
1	2	3	4	5	6	
a.	Manufacture & Supply of furniture for Construction of Cancer Center at Dhaka CMH (2nd Phase) (GP-01).	Cancer Center Dhaka CMH	5000.00	11,20,000.00	(twelve) months	
16	Name of official inviting tender	Director of Works	17	Designation of official inviting tender	Director of Works	
18	Address of official inviting tender	Army Headquarters, E in C's Branch, Works Directorate, Dhaka Cantonment, Web address: www.army.mil.bd	19	Contact details of official inviting tender	Tel No. 9832870, Fax No. 9832882 E-mail: wksdte@army.mil.bd	
20	The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject all tenders					

XEN E/M  
For Director of Works  
Works Directorate  
Engineer in Chief's Branch  
Dhaka Cantonment  
Tel: Mili: 8711111 Ext: 2886  
Civil: 9832886

আইনসম্পর্কসম্বন্ধ সেমনা/১৮

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## Campaigning

FROM PAGE 3

"Health Cards" without explaining how they would be funded. "It'll be later seen that only party members or their relatives will receive these cards, while people will be burdened with additional taxes and VAT," he claimed.

Nahid said the Awami League government in 2008 had "plundered the country" by promising rice at Tk 10 per kg and warned that such promises had previously harmed the nation. "This time, people are more aware. After not voting for the past 16 years, votes cannot be bought," he said.

He added that the upcoming election is not only about forming a government but will also shape the country's next 50 years.

He expressed confidence that the 11-party alliance would win the election and form the government.

Addressing voters, Nahid said, "If you don't like us, don't vote for us – but vote 'yes' in the referendum. Otherwise, only parties will change, and the fascist system will return without any reform."

At the programme, NCP spokesperson Asif Mahmud said the main goal of the caravan is to raise public awareness.

He claimed the AL has begun promoting a "no" vote. In response, the NCP has launched a nationwide campaign for a "yes" vote.

## Foreign ministry

FROM PAGE 3

between Myanmar authorities and the armed groups in Myanmar should not in any way affect the lives and livelihoods of the people in Bangladesh.

The Myanmar ambassador assured that his government would take measures to stop such incidents and expressed its sincere sympathy to the victims.

On Sunday, locals blocked the Cox's Bazar-Teknaf road in protest of such incidents.

Meanwhile, at least three people, including members of Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and Nabi Hossain groups, were injured in gunfights between Myanmar's rebel group Arakan Army and Rohingya armed groups and later crossed into Bangladesh.

In December 2024, the Arakan Army claimed to have taken control of around 271 kilometres of the Bangladesh-Myanmar border in Rakhine state. Since then, tension and security risks have been rising along the Teknaf border.

For the last few days, the Arakan Army and Rohingya armed groups have been engaged in fierce fighting across the border of Teknaf.

## Without accountability, democracy will fail

FROM PAGE 3

Candidates and voters must be able to participate without fear, and political parties should ensure fair and peaceful polls, he said.

He urged political parties not to nominate individuals involved in corruption, extortion or land grabbing, and said Jamaat's manifesto prioritises women's rights, education, employment, housing and safety.

"All citizens, regardless of religion or minority status, should have equal access to opportunities," he said.

Gonoforum Acting President Subrata Chowdhury said political parties must reform internally before expecting national level good governance. "Without internal democracy, participatory governance is impossible," he said.

Independent candidate for Dhaka 9, Tasnim Jara, highlighted the lack of social security for informal workers such as rickshaw pullers.

She also said, "Even elected representatives cannot act against their

party, and institutions meant to check corruption or human rights violations are often controlled by the very people they should monitor."

"Citizens' rights and democratic accountability are weak. Without real mechanisms, people have no choice but to protest on the streets to demand their rights," she added.

Nusrat Tabbasum, joint convener of the NCP, stressed youth leadership and civic responsibility, saying votes should not be treated as commodities and social protection requires collective effort.

She said meaningful reform needs patience, education and civic engagement.

AB Party Chairman Mojibur Rahman Manzu apologised for failing to deliver a new political order, saying the party had been forced to operate within the old system.

"If a political party can ensure good governance, many other problems will be solved automatically," he said.

CPB General Secretary Abdullah Al Kafee Ratan

said MPs should not hold business interests to prevent conflicts of interest.

He also said elections in Bangladesh are heavily influenced by money, limiting fair competition for smaller parties.

Manisha Chakraborty, Barishal district coordinator of Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal, urged greater focus on social welfare and budget allocation, noting that Bangladesh has one of the lowest minimum wages and education budgets in South Asia.

"Our manifesto will push for education to receive at least 6 percent of GDP and health around 15 percent of the total budget," she said.

Political scientist Rounaq Jahan said citizens' opinions should guide political decisions, stressing that security must respect human rights.

Security should not mean controlling people with force, she said, adding that many parties still rely on money and muscle power, ignoring real grassroots opinions and democratic principles.

CPD distinguished fellow Devepriya

Bhattacharya said national unity, citizen rights and institutional reform are essential to build an inclusive, accountable, and just Bangladesh.

"Governance must

reflect the voices and needs of marginalised groups, ensure human rights, and strengthen the rule of law through independent and professional institutions," he also said.

## BNP alleges bias

FROM PAGE 3

not have been possible.

"We have demanded correction, as the current method is incorrect and creates confusion," he said.

On the issue of candidates with dual citizenship, Nazrul said some nominations were being cancelled across parties and stressed that the law should apply equally to all.

He said two Jamaat-e-Islami candidates and one candidate from another party have already been disqualified. Many of those affected had left the country over the past 15-16 years, acquired foreign citizenship, and have now returned.

"It would be unfair to bar them from contesting elections on this basis," he said.

He also said the EC informed them that legal

action would be taken, including blocking NIDs, if anyone attempts fraud or disrupts the election.

Nazrul further alleged that a political party is collecting voter IDs, NIDs and mobile numbers nationwide for a "clear political agenda."

Regarding the referendum, he said, "We are not against reforms. We have participated in discussions and submitted notes of dissent where necessary."

Responding to the BNP's allegations, EC officials said the postal ballots were arranged alphabetically.

Election Commissioner Abdur Rahmank Masud told The Daily Star last night, "We have heard their complaints. We will sit tomorrow and look into the matter."

## Fair polls futile

FROM PAGE 3

Commission should be made a constitutional body and political parties must practise internal democracy.

Former BNP lawmaker Nilufar Chowdhury Moni questioned the possibility of a "historic election" when 1,335 government weapons looted after August 5 remain unrecovered.

"If these weapons are distributed across 300 constituencies, that would mean nearly five military-grade weapons per seat. This is a serious threat," she said.

She criticised law enforcement agencies for acting as "spectators" during recent incidents of mob violence.

He also pointed out that only 65 women are contesting the election, despite women making up nearly half of the electorate.

Sakib Anwar of Nagorik Oikya, referring to recent attacks on media outlets and cultural institutions, said, "On that night, and the following day when Udichi was set on fire, Bangladesh effectively functioned as a government-less state."

He warned that similar inaction on election day day would render reform discussions meaningless.

Senior journalist Abu Sayeed Khan described mob violence as the biggest challenge to the election.

He criticised the government for using soft terms such as "pressure groups" instead of clearly condemning mobs. "The government's silence is leading the public to suspect their complicity."

He also said reform proposals failed to adequately address economic inequality.

Professor Rashed Ali Titumir said voters cannot make informed choices without "credible alternatives", which he said have been lacking since 2008.

He criticised the Election Commission for failing to develop a policy against disinformation.

He also stressed that policy making should remain the responsibility of elected representatives, not bureaucrats.

Dhaka University Professor Jasim Uddin

called for a complete overhaul of the education system in election manifestos, urging a shift from certificate-based education to skills development.

NCP Joint Convener Sarwar Tushar said the usual festive election atmosphere is absent with only 29 days left before the polls, adding that public doubt remains over whether the election will take place.

He also criticised the local administration, claiming "joint operations" are being weaponised to arrest innocent people based on political lists while known criminals find shelter within major parties.

Gonoforum General Secretary Mizanur Rahman said the interim administration has failed to control money and muscle power, warning that without strict accountability, the country could revert to the old system.

Hasan Al Mamun of Gono Odhikar Parishad cited scholar Sirajul Islam to argue that the culture of "lathial" or muscle-power politics is driven by a lack of economic opportunities.

Creating sustainable employment is the only way to replace the politics of violence with a moral society, he added.

Sanjeeb Drono, general secretary of the Bangladesh Adhikar Forum, demanded a separate ministry for indigenous peoples and called for special measures to uplift marginalised communities.

Jamaat-e-Islami Dhaka City South Nayeb-e-Ameer Helal Uddin, Gono Odhikar Parishad Senior Vice President Faruk Hasan, and Bangladesh Socialist Party (Marxist) Chief Coordinator Masud Rana also spoke, among others.

## PRAYER TIMING

JANUARY 14

Faz Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha

AZAN 5:30 12:45 4:00 5:36 7:00

JAMAAT 6:05 1:15 4:15 5:40 7:30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

## Ward-level Jamaat leader killed

FROM PAGE 3

Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Police Sub Inspector Rubayet Rakib, in the inquest report, states that injury marks were found on the deceased's forehead and right knee.

The report mentioned that unknown assailants killed him by tying his hands, gagging his mouth with clothes, and torturing him.

Akkas Ali, assistant commissioner of Tejgaon Zone police, said CCTV footage showed two individuals entering the

house, and police suspect the intruders killed the man and stole valuables. "We are investigating the matter."

Officer-in-Charge Monirul Islam Monir said CCTV footage suggests the suspects went there to commit theft and killed Anwar

The house's security guard, Rezaul Islam, said he heard no noise. Around 5:00am, Anwar's eldest son-in-law, who lives in the same building, informed him that a robbery had occurred and that Anwar

meanwhile, Jamaat-e-Islami Dhaka city North Ameer Mohammad Selim Uddin and Secretary Muhammad Rezaul Karim condemned the killing. In a joint statement, they demanded immediate arrest of the perpetrators.

This development comes days after former adviser Mahfuj Alam issued a call for "fresh blood" in the political landscape.

In a Facebook post on January 10, Mahfuj wrote, "In the last two weeks, I have spoken to hundreds of students and citizens who were once optimistic about a new political settlement. I saw a kind of frustration and lack of confidence in everyone I spoke to. But, at the end of the conversation, we came to the decision that we all want to try once

more."

He invited those who believe in a discrimination-free system, human rights and justice and are uninterested in traditional bi-party or alliance structures to connect.

## Include

FROM PAGE 3

reducing the power of the LPG Operators Association of Bangladesh; and providing LPG licences through open tenders.

Dhaka University students Aritro Roddur Dhar, Ashiquil Islam, Sabat Mostafa Prothon and Sadman Sabik Khan Sami, and Brac University student Talha Bin Imran presented the demands. CAB's Energy Adviser M Shamsul Alam was also present.

The protesters carried out a programme titled "March to the Election Commission", beginning their procession around 1:00pm, but were blocked by police in front of the Islamic Foundation in Argaoon.

The organisers said similar marches and memorandum submissions would take place today at EC offices in divisional cities across the country.

Members of law enforcement agencies, including Ansar, police, Rab and the Coast Guard, were seen deployed in and around the EC headquarters following the July Oikya protest.

At the protest, Musaddiq Ali Ibne Mohammad, one of the key organisers of July Oikya and Ducus's literary and cultural affairs secretary, said no "Baksal-type forces" such as the JP would be allowed to contest the election.

He further said, "Everyone who is helping these 14-party and fascist forces to contest the election, including by allowing them to run as independent candidates, must be brought to justice."

After 1:00pm, a July Oikya delegation entered the EC headquarters to submit a memorandum,

## Police block July Oikya

FROM PAGE 4

while the remaining protesters staged a sit-in front of the Islamic Foundation.

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জিতি-১০০



## গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার

## বাংলাদেশ ইউনেক্সো জাতীয় কমিশন

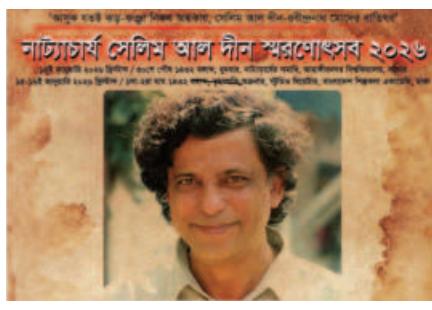
মাধ্যমিক ও উচ্চ শিক্ষা বিভাগ

## ইউনেক্সো পার্টিসিপেশন প্রোগ্রাম ২০২৬-২০২৭ এর জন্য প্রকল্প প্রস্তাব আহ্বান

(১) শিক্ষা, (২) বিজ্ঞান, (৩) সামাজিক ও মানবিক বিজ্ঞান, (৪) সংস্কৃতি (৫) যোগাযোগ ও তথ্য-প্রযুক্তি (৬) সন্মুখ বিজ্ঞান ও (৭) পরিস্থিত্যান বিষয়ে উত্তীর্ণী এবং মৌলিক প্রকল্প প্রস্তাব আহ্বান করা হচ্ছে।

প্রকল্প প্রস্তাবের নির্ধারিত ফরম বাংলাদেশ ইউনেক্সো জাতীয় কমিশনের ওয়েবসাইট ([www.bncu.gov.bd](http://www.bncu.gov.bd)) থেকে সংগ্রহ করে পূরণ করুন।

ফরম এবং আনুষঙ্গিক কাগজগত্ব (বৈধায় ০৫ কপি) আগস্ট ০৫ তারিখ বিকাল ৮ টার মধ্যে নিয়মানুস



## Dhaka Theatre announces Selim Al Deen memorial festivals

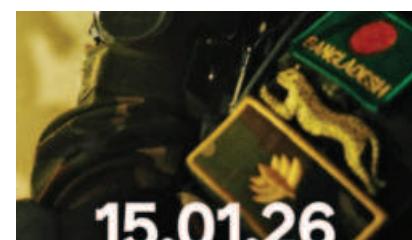
Dhaka Theatre has announced a multi-day programme to mark the 18th death anniversary of Natyacharya Selim Al Deen, one of the most influential figures in Bangla theatre, who passed away on January 14, 2008. Closely associated with Dhaka Theatre as its founding ideologue, Selim Al Deen's creative and theoretical contributions continue to shape modern Bengali theatre. The commemorations will begin on January 14 with floral tributes at his grave at 10am. Later that afternoon, Dhaka Theatre will host a seminar at the National Theatre of Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, focusing on Selim Al Deen's ideas on Bengali aesthetics and his dualist-non-dualist theatre theory. The evening will feature a staging of his play *Deyal*, directed by Anik Islam. The programme continues with performances of *Nimajjan* on January 15, directed by Nasir Uddin Yousuff, and *Rangmahal* on January 17, directed by Farul Ahmed, reaffirming Selim Al Deen's enduring legacy on the Bangladeshi stage.

RAKSHANDA RAHMAN MISHA

When Pritom Hasan recently shared a behind-the-scenes glimpse of himself singing amid army personnel, fans immediately sensed that something special was on the way. The image hinted at a unique and exciting collaboration between the popular singer and the Bangladesh Army. Anticipation grew further yesterday when the first official look was unveiled — a photograph of an army uniform accompanied by the caption, "15.01.26."

Curious to know how this unique project came together, The Daily Star reached out to Pritom Hasan for more insight into the collaboration and the journey behind it.

"We were talking about this project for a long time," Pritom shared. "We probably started discussing it back in December, but due to time constraints,



we couldn't execute it properly then. Still, we were determined to do something meaningful around the idea."

For Pritom, the collaboration holds deep personal significance. "Ever since I was a child, I wanted to join the Army. Unfortunately, that dream never materialised because I was terrible at

studies, especially math. So when this opportunity came, I wanted to give my maximum effort and create something truly meaningful," he said.

That childhood fascination eventually found its expression through art. Pritom explained that after initial discussions, he began shaping the project creatively. "We had several conversations and then created an audio concept. Monzur Anik came on board as the director. Rasel Mahmud *bhai* has penned the lyrics for this song. Previously, I've already worked extensively with Anik and Rasel *bhai* before, so there was a strong understanding between us."

He went on to describe how the project evolved from an idea into a



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHEH

visual reality. "I created a vision through the audio and showed Anik exactly what I wanted to do. He captured the shoot brilliantly. I'm extremely grateful to the Bangladesh Army for their cooperation. They supported us in every possible way during the shoot."

For Pritom, the goal was clear from the start: to create something exceptional, both visually and sonically. "We definitely wanted to do something that hasn't been done before," he said. "I'm truly happy with the outcome. Hopefully, it will resonate with the younger generation who are often drawn towards Hollywood and different styles. For them, this will be a real treat."



## Bella Hadid, Pedro Pascal raise \$5.4m for children in Palestine, Sudan

A Los Angeles benefit concert raised \$5.4 million for children's medical aid in Palestine and Sudan, bringing together musicians, poets and activists under the Artists for Aid banner. Organised by Canadian Sudanese artiste Mustafa the Poet and co-hosted by Bella Hadid and Pedro Pascal, the show took place at the Shrine Auditorium on January 10.

Proceeds will support the Palestine Children's Relief Fund and the Sudanese American Physicians Association. Performers included Alex G, Clairo, Daniel Caesar, Jazmine Sullivan, Lucy Dacus, Omar Apollo and Shawn Mendes. Chappell Roan appeared during Dacus's set; Mendes dueted with Maggie Rogers to cheers from fans.

### WHAT'S THE HAPS?



## 'DHET!'

The Bangladeshi premiere of *DHET!* plunges viewers into a chaotic Dhaka night, following a ride-sharing motorcyclist racing against time to reach his next passenger. Written and directed by Ummid Ashraf, the short film captures the pulse of the city, blending suspense, urgency, and the unpredictability of urban life.

Date: Thursday | January 15, 2026

Time: 11am

Venue: Stamford University

# NEWS

## BNP rolling out centralised system

FROM PAGE 12

10C, Road 90 in Gulshan for that purpose. A research cell is also functioning from the premises, supporting campaign planning and analysis.

Party insiders said many of those working at the office are leaders and organisers affiliated with Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal and other associate bodies.

The Election Steering Committee is coordinating logistics and monitoring whether candidates are implementing party instructions at the constituency level.

A central monitoring team is tracking candidates' activities, including voter engagement, compliance with party directives and use of digital platforms.

"The steering committee is closely watching how candidates are campaigning, how they are using social media and whether they are following central guidelines," a senior organiser said on condition of anonymity.

The BNP's campaign strategy places strong emphasis on digital coordination. Party insiders said the digital operation includes an open hotline number, constituency-based committees, dedicated social media teams and legal aid committees to support candidates and activists.

The party's IT cell is preparing responses to what it describes as misinformation campaigns by rival parties, while its wing members have been deployed to district units to coordinate with booth committees, form WhatsApp groups and train local organisers.

Campaign songs have also become a key tool for online mobilisation, party sources said, offering a simple way to spread messages and energise supporters through digital platforms.

Alongside digital efforts, the Election Steering Committee is providing technical and organisational support to

candidates nationwide.

Multiple rounds of training and workshops, both online and in person, have focused on voter outreach, message discipline and campaign coordination.

Social media managers assigned to candidates have received separate training, and coordinators have been appointed to supervise online activities and maintain consistency in messaging.

Specialised sessions have also been organised for polling agents, underlining the party's focus on election day preparedness.

ABNP official familiar with the process said the party is seeking to professionalise its campaign by clearly defining roles and responsibilities at every level.

The party has also launched a call centre to maintain quick contact with grassroots activists and voters, respond to complaints and address election-related issues.

At the same time, the BNP is collecting detailed feedback from constituencies on rival campaign tactics and local voter concerns, including issues related to prices, agriculture, employment and public services.

Party leaders said this information is being fed back to the central office to shape issue-based campaigning and ensure candidates focus on local priorities rather than relying solely on national slogans.

Azharul Islam Mannan, the BNP candidate for Narayanganj-3, said he has been receiving regular instructions and guidance to strengthen public engagement.

"We are getting party instructions and advice to increase public engagement through local outreach," he said, adding that the party has provided training both online and offline.

Mannan said workshops have been organised on working with the proposed

family card programme and engaging with farmers, reflecting the party's emphasis on social protection and rural issues.

"Central leaders are keeping regular contact with us, and clear guidelines have been given for campaigning on social media," he said, adding that a dedicated media cell has been formed to support candidates' digital outreach.

Polling agents have also been identified for each centre, with training set to continue.

Rafiqul Islam Jamal, the BNP candidate for Jhalakathi-1, said the party has placed particular emphasis on grassroots level training.

"In my constituency, the person handling my social media has been receiving training from the BNP," he said, adding that potential polling agents have also been trained.

Faridpur-1 BNP candidate Khandaker Nasirul Islam said the party has already provided posters and other campaign materials, along with training for those managing his social media.

He added that polling agents have been instructed to strictly follow the election code of conduct.

Several candidates said they have not yet raised concerns about neutrality on the ground but noted that any irregularities observed during campaigning are being reported to the central leadership for action.

Party insiders said the level of centralised oversight marks a shift in the BNP's election strategy, reflecting lessons from previous polls.

"The leadership wants discipline, coordination and accountability," a BNP strategist said. "Candidates know they are being monitored, and that creates pressure to follow instructions."

[Our Narayanganj, Faridpur and Pirojpur correspondents contributed to this report.]

## 82 officers, 13 detention centres identified

FROM PAGE 12

Of them, seven from CTTC, four from Rab, two from DB and one police officer were directly identified by the victims by name.

In the report, at least five accounts from officers and soldiers specifically detailed the actions and orders of Major General Ziaul Ahsan, former director general of the National Telecommunication Monitoring Centre (NTMC).

Brigadier Rashidul Alam, who served as Rab-1 commanding officer from 2009 to 2013, recounted an orientation session conducted by Zia where two victims were shot on a bridge in front of him as part of his initiation into the agency.

Hegave details of Zia's involvement in the enforced disappearance of BNP leader Ilias Ali to an internal inquiry board established by the Bangladesh Army in early September 2024 to investigate alleged crimes by Rab.

A soldier deputed to Rab Intelligence described an incident in which a victim tried to escape by jumping into a river. According to his testimony, Zia retrieved the individual and executed him on the spot.

A witness from the armed forces testified that Zia took a detainee out of a vehicle, stripped him, and shot him twice in the head at close range before dumping the body off a bridge.

Another officer described a pattern of executions in which victims were shot in the head at close range under Zia's supervision. He testified that 11 people were killed in succession, their bodies tied to cement bags and dumped into the Buriganga.

Another Rab Intelligence operative testified that Zia ordered the release of a "bomber terrorist" because the arrest had been witnessed by the public, saying it was not a "clean pickup". The operative added that the individual was later abducted by Rab Intelligence members without witnesses, using interception.

Two security forces members provided direct testimony implicating Major Md Ashraful Abedin Noushad in two cases of execution.

A witness from the armed forces said Noushad, "following Zia's lead", took a target from a vehicle, shot him, and the naked body was seen falling from a bridge into the water.

Another soldier testified that after an execution, Noushad used tissues to clean faeces passed by victims out of extreme fear before being killed.

Brig Gen MH Hafizur Rahman, who was a senior officer of DGFI's Counter Terrorism Bureau (CTIB) in 2016, testified that he took part in the abduction of Brig Gen Abdullahil Amaan Azmi, acting on direct orders from then CTIB Colonel GS Col Kamrul.

Witnesses told the commission that Hafizur played a key role in CTIB's operations during a period marked by numerous abductions.

Maj Gen Kabir Ahmed, CTIB director between 2020 and 2022, told the commission he discussed Brig Gen Azmi's captivity with DGFI directors general Lt Gen Saiful Alam and Lt Gen Ahmed Tabrez Shams Chowdhury.

Meanwhile, Maj Gen AKM Aminul Haque said the abduction order for Azmi came directly from Lt Gen Md Akbar Hussain, who served as the DGFI director general from 2013 to 2017.

The 2024 Army Court of Inquiry also recorded that Akbar authorised the initial abduction and detention of Azmi in 2016.

Akbar admitted to the commission that he discussed Humman Quader Chowdhury's disappearance and his family's release demand directly with then prime minister Sheikh Hasina.

The report also had a list of those involved with the enforced disappearance of Barrister Mir Ahmad Bin Quasem Arman between 2016 and 2024.

These include former Rab directors general Benazir Ahmed, Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun, M Khurshid Hossain, and Md Harun Or Rashid; former additional directors general (operations) Md Anwar Latif Khan, Md Jahangir Alam, Tofayel Mostofa Sorwar, KM Azad, Md Kamrul Hasan, Md Mahbub Alam, and Abdullah Al Momen; and former intelligence directors Mohammad Abul Kalam Azad, Md Mahbub Alam, Md Sarwar Bin Kasem, Muhammad

Khairul Islam, Md Moshiur Rahman Jewel, and Saiful Islam Sumon.

Former Rab DG Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun stated in his Section 164 testimony before the ICT that both he and the senior Rab leadership were fully aware that Arman was in their custody, stated the report.

Benazir Ahmed reportedly briefed his successor Mamun about Arman's detention at the TFI. Director Md Sarwar Bin Kasem also informed Mamun, while Saiful Islam Sumon was found to have had the key to the detention site as late as October 2024.

Additionally, Sheikh Hasina's security and military adviser Maj Gen Tariq Siddiqi was allegedly informed of Arman's detention and instructed the Rab DG to "keep him there".

A soldier stationed at the TFI centre also testified against colonels Abdur Razzak and Mahbub, and intelligence directors general Md Moshiur Rahman and Saiful Islam Sumon, stating that they visited the site, with the team alerted days in advance. He specifically recalled Jewel inspecting every cell on Eid ul-Fitr in 2023.

"Interviews of security force personnel across multiple years indicate that such inspections were routine, not exceptional. Taken together, the testimonies demonstrate senior-level knowledge, oversight and engagement with detention sites across the years," the report stated.

The commission also found prima facie evidence against ADC Ahmedul Islam of the CTTC, stating that he is accused in several complaints of enforced disappearance.

Meanwhile, a 56-year-old man, abducted by Rab-11 in 2017, testified that former Rab officer Alep Uddin tortured him severely. He said he was hung from cell bars by handcuffs for hours, during which he lost a fingernail from the abuse.

The report stated that all senior Rab leadership are culpable for the enforced disappearance of Arman, who was secretly detained at the TFI centre from 2016 to 2024.

"The assertion that the military lacked awareness of the conduct of its officers while on deputation cannot be sustained," argued the commission.

## Verdict in case against Hasina

FROM PAGE 12

Miah and former members -- Mohammad Khurshid Alam, Tamoy Das, Mohammad Nasir Uddin, Shamsuddin Ahmad Chowdhury and Nurul Islam -- as well as incumbent director Kamrul Islam, former deputy director Nayeb Ali Sharif and former assistant director Mazharul Islam, and Prime Minister's Office former secretary Mohammad Salahuddin are among the other accused.

The court also set January 18 for arguments in another graft case against 18 people, including Hasina, Tulip and Hasina's nephew Radwan Mujib Siddiq Bobby.

The prosecution said the verdict in the case would be scheduled for delivery after the arguments.

Earlier, Hasina was sentenced to 26 years' rigorous imprisonment in four graft cases between November 27 and December 1 last year. Her daughter Saima Wazed Putul, son Sajeeb Wazed Joy, sister Sheikh Rehana and niece Tulip were also convicted in one of the four cases each.

Between January 12 and 14 last year, the ACC filed six separate cases with its Dhaka Integrated District Office-1 over alleged irregularities in the allocation of plots under the Purbachal New Town project.

The anti graft body alleged that Hasina, in collusion with senior Rajuk officials, unlawfully secured six plots -- each measuring 10 kathas -- in the diplomatic zone of Sector-27 of the project for herself, Putul, Joy, Rehana, Bobby and Azmina, despite their illegibility under existing regulations.

On March 25 last year, the ACC filed six charge sheets with the Metropolitan Special Judge's Court in Dhaka. Hasina was named as a common accused in all six cases.

On July 31, charges were framed against 29 people, including Hasina, Tulip and Rehana, Joy, Putul, Bobby, Tulip and Azmina, in their respective cases.

Two security forces members provided direct testimony implicating Major Md Ashraful Abedin Noushad in two cases of execution.

## Bashar urges Tigers to focus on performance

SPORTS REPORTER

With Bangladesh's participation in the upcoming T20 World Cup clouded by uncertainty, former selector and Chattogram Royals mentor Habibul Bashar has urged the players to focus on confidence gained from recent performances rather than dwelling on off-field issues.

Test captain Najmul Hossain Shanto had earlier remarked during the Sylhet phase of the Bangladesh Premier League that some form of disruption seems to arise before every World Cup, often affecting the team's focus. Bangladesh are currently in talks with the International Cricket Council (ICC) after the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) decided not to play its World Cup matches in India, a situation that has inevitably shifted attention while players continue to feature in the BPL.

"You'll notice that before every World Cup, there's always some incident that takes place," Shanto had said in Sylhet. "As a player who has played one or two of these tournaments, I can tell you it affects us. But we act as if nothing affects us because we are professional cricketers."

Addressing the media after Chattogram's practice session on Tuesday, Bashar said the uncertainty should not distract the players.

"This situation is not in the hands of the players. If I were a player, I would focus on performing well in the BPL. While players naturally discuss these things among themselves -- talking about the present and the future is normal -- they are all professionals," Bashar said.

Bangladesh have played 24 T20Is since July last year, winning 14, and Bashar believes those performances should be the team's reference point heading into the World Cup. With the squad already announced and only limited scope for changes by January 31, the BPL remains the final platform for building confidence and pushing for any last-minute inclusion.

"While these are setbacks, we should be confident about how we have played over the last six months. We understand our brand of T20 cricket and our roles as a team. Instead of making excuses, we should focus on doing well in the World Cup," Bashar said.

Although he admitted such situations are undesirable before a major event, Bashar stressed that using them as excuses would only hurt the team's campaign.



SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh begin their campaign in the inaugural SAFF Futsal Championship 2026 today against India in one of three opening-day matches at the Nonthaburi Stadium in Bangkok, Thailand.

The match will kick off at 4:00pm (Bangladesh time), a few hours after the Sri Lanka-Bhutan fixture opens the seven-team tournament, which will be streamed live on the Sportworkz YouTube channel.

The encounter comes at a time of growing diplomatic unease between the two neighbours, adding an extra layer of intrigue to what is already a historic meeting in a new format of the game for both sides.

With traditional 11-a-side football still dominating fan culture across South Asia, the South Asian Football Federation have taken their first step towards promoting futsal in the region by launching separate competitions for men and women.

In the men's tournament, all teams will play each other once, with the table-toppers at the end being crowned champions.

None of the participating teams are established forces in futsal, but Nepal, Maldives and India are viewed as comparatively stronger sides than Bangladesh, Bhutan, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, largely due to their earlier exposure to the format.

For Bangladesh, this will be their second international futsal tournament, following their appearance in the AFC Futsal Asian Cup qualifiers last September.

India, Maldives and Pakistan were also part of that competition, but none of them managed to progress.



India recorded a solitary win over Mongolia, while Bangladesh, Maldives and Pakistan lost all their group-stage matches.

Under Iranian coach Saeed Khodarahmi, Bangladesh remain in a learning phase, but the team believe they have taken steps forward after an extended preparation period. Their build-up included a one-and-a-half-month training camp, capped by a 10-day stint on a proper futsal court in Thailand.

"We are getting better every day," said Bangladesh captain Rabbar Wahed Khan at a pre-tournament briefing. "Futsal has just started in South Asia, and I want people in Bangladesh to keep supporting us."

Coach Khodarahmi, however, was keen to stress that the challenge is not unique to Bangladesh.

"Not only for Bangladesh, it is a challenge for every nation," he said.

"If you don't have futsal coaches, referees and stadiums, it becomes really difficult for everyone."

The Bangladesh-India clash also offers an interesting subplot, with both teams being coached by Iranians. India are led by Reza Kordi, who has set measured objectives for his side.

"Our main objective is to show clear progress in our playing style and establish ourselves as a strong emerging team in South Asian futsal," Kordi said, adding that his "players now have a better understanding of the demands of futsal".

Meanwhile, the SAFF Women's Futsal Championship got underway at the same venue yesterday. Bangladesh women's team, led by former national captain Sabina Khutun, will begin their campaign on Thursday against India, who opened with an emphatic 11-1 win over Maldives, while Pakistan and Bhutan played out a 1-1 draw.

STAR SPORTS 2  
Big Bash League  
Hobart Hurricanes vs  
Brisbane Heat  
Live from 2:15 pm  
SA20  
Sunrisers Eastern Cape  
Live from 2:00 pm

vs Joburg Super Kings  
Live from 9:30 pm  
STAR SPORTS 1  
India vs New Zealand  
2nd ODI  
Live from 2:00 pm



## Mane, Salah battle for AFCON glory

AGENCIES

Three years after they last shared a pitch, former Liverpool teammates Sadio Mane and Mohamed Salah face each other again as Senegal meet Egypt in the Africa Cup of Nations semifinal in Tangiers on Wednesday.

It will be their first encounter since Liverpool's defeat to Real Madrid in the 2022 Champions League final, shortly before Mane left the club.

Mane has since moved from Bayern Munich to Al-Nassr in Saudi Arabia, while Salah remains at Liverpool despite speculation over a move to Saudi Arabia and reports of tension with coach Arne Slot before AFCON.

In Morocco, Salah has rediscovered form, scoring four goals in four matches as Egypt chase an eighth continental title.

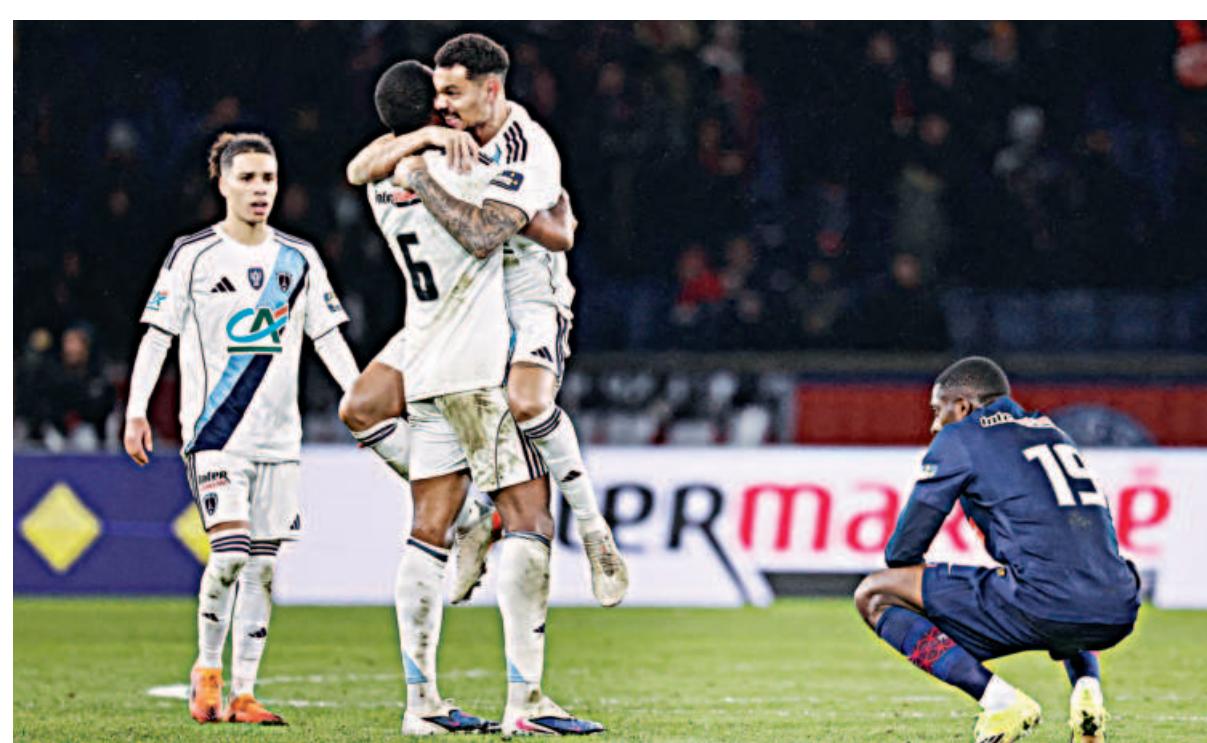
However, time is not on his side. Approaching 34, the Egypt captain has twice lost the AFCON final, including the 2022 defeat to Senegal where Mane scored the decisive penalty in the shoot-out after missing earlier in normal time.

Egypt also lost to Senegal in a World Cup qualifying play-off soon after.

Senegal, defending champions, are aiming for a third final in four editions, while Egypt are desperate to reclaim supremacy after missing the 2022 World Cup and failing to lift AFCON since 2010.

Mane has acknowledged that the pressure is lighter on him now that he has already achieved continental success, while Salah openly admits this trophy remains the one major honour he is determined to win with his country.

The pair arrive in Tangiers with contrasting pressures: Mane defending Senegal's status as champions, Salah seeking redemption and a final chance at international glory.



Paris FC's Otavio and Timothee Kolodziejczak celebrate as PSG's Ousmane Dembele cuts a dejected figure after the French champions' shock 1-0 defeat to their capital rivals in the French Cup round of 32 on Monday. PSG midfielder Senny Mayulu described the loss as a "slap in the face" as they were knocked out just four days after winning their fourth consecutive French Super Cup. Newly promoted Paris FC, back in the top flight after a 46-year absence, stunned PSG at the Parc des Princes, with former PSG player Jonathan Ikone scoring the decisive goal in the 74th minute.

PHOTO: AFP

## Alonso's swift Real exit: What went wrong?

STAR SPORTS DESK

Xabi Alonso departed Real Madrid saying he was "grateful to the club, players and fans", but the outcome appeared inevitable, waiting for it to be triggered by another fall.

That moment arrived on Sunday, when Real lost 3-2 to Barcelona in the Spanish Super Cup final in Jeddah -- a narrow defeat that was enough to end the reign of a coach appointed just seven and a half months earlier.

Even the scenes after the final whistle seemed to reflect the brevity and tension of Alonso's tenure at one of the most demanding clubs in the world, where the names on the team sheet often carry greater weight than the coach himself.

Kylian Mbappe, the club's top

scorer last season and again so far this term, was seen gesturing to his teammates to head straight down the tunnel instead of offering Barcelona the traditional guard of honour at the King Abdullah Sports City. Alonso appeared to urge him to stay, but eventually relented as

Real left the pitch without any sporting gesture to their archrivals, who lead second-placed Los Blancos by four points in LaLiga.

The episode underlined the growing perception that Alonso did not have total control of the dressing room, as reports suggested a rift between him and several of the top players.

Speculation about his future had been rife since Real endured a turbulent spell towards the end of 2025, when they lost three, drew three, and won only two of eight

matches. The team later recovered with five consecutive victories, including a Spanish Super Cup semifinal win over Atletico Madrid, before falling to Barcelona in the final.

Alonso had been backed with new signings after taking charge, yet a long list of injuries complicated his task -- a familiar challenge in recent times due to a congested football calendar.

The former Real midfielder was also unable to fully replicate the high-pressing, high-tempo style that had brought him success at Bayer Leverkusen. His players struggled to meet the demands of that system, a factor that ultimately contributed to his departure.

In pure numbers, Alonso's Real recorded 24 wins, six defeats, and four draws from 34 matches -- a return that would not normally prompt such a swift exit, were it not for the wider issues that continued to work against him.



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## DB raid spirals into internal investigations

Officers accused of misappropriating Tk 2.8cr of seized cash

TOUSIF KAIUM

Officials at the Detective Branch (DB) of police are facing an internal investigation over alleged misappropriation of Tk 2.8 crore in cash said to have been seized during a raid to recover counterfeit currency in the capital.

The detectives, acting on a tip-off, conducted a raid in Wari on November 8 last year, recovering counterfeit currency and cash, and arresting two people.

In the seizure list prepared after the raid, officials recorded the recovery of counterfeit currency worth Tk 6 lakh and Tk 19 lakh in legitimate cash.

However, during interrogation, the detainees -- Nurul Haque, 32, and Saidul Amin, 24, both Rohingya refugees from Teknaf -- claimed detectives had seized a total of Tk 3 crore in legitimate cash, leaving out Tk 2.8 crore from official documents.

Shafiqul Islam, additional  
SEE PAGE 5 COL 1



A group of women wait in line to buy rice and flour at subsidised rates from a TCB truck yesterday near the Martyred Intellectuals Memorial in Rayerbazar, Mohammadpur. Unable to cope with rising prices of essentials, more and more people from low- and middle-income groups are depending on the OMS (Open Market Sale) initiative.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

## Political leaders start getting armed escorts

127 of them are on 'risk list'

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN and BAHARAM KHAN

Law enforcers have started providing security to top political leaders and election officials ahead of the national election after assessing their security risks or threats.

Alongside gunmen, some leaders are receiving police escorts and house guard deployments at their residences.

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) has provided police security and escorts, and gunmen, to 15 political leaders and government officials, according to officials of the home ministry and the DMP.

Additionally, the Special Branch has provided gunmen to 17 individuals, most of whom reside in Dhaka and nearby areas, Khondoker Rafiqul Islam, additional inspector general of Police Headquarters, told The Daily Star yesterday.

In addition to security for leaders, the government has also decided to issue firearms on application, The Daily Star has learnt from home ministry officials involved with the proceedings.

Following that decision, many leaders have applied for firearms, and at least 100 people have applied for gun licences so far, they said.

Among the top political leaders receiving police escorts are BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman and Jamaat-e-Islami Shafiqur Rahman, said a senior official at the DMP.

Besides them, four election commissioners and the chief election commissioner are also receiving police escorts from the DMP.

For the Jamaat-e-Islami's security, the home ministry issued a letter on January 12 requesting the Inspector General of Police to arrange a gunman and deploy uniformed police members at his residence in Uttara citing existing security risks or threats.

In another letter issued on January 6, the ministry

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Yunus seeks UN support to counter misinformation

STAR REPORT

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus yesterday sought support from the United Nations Human Rights Office to counter a surge of misinformation targeting the February 12 elections.

"There has been a flood of misinformation surrounding the elections. It is coming from both foreign media and local sources," he told Volker Türk, the UN high commissioner for human rights, during a phone conversation, according to the CA press wing.

"They have flooded social media with fake news, rumours and speculation. We are concerned about the impact this may have on the elections," he added.

Türk said he was aware of the problem and offered the support of his office to address what he described as a growing challenge. "There is a lot of misinformation. We will do whatever is needed."

He added that the UN rights agency would work closely with Bangladesh to tackle the issue.

During the conversation,

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

## ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES 82 officers, 13 detention centres identified

Inquiry report details secret sites, executions and senior-level oversight

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 211 uniformed personnel -- 100 from the army, 98 from the police, five from the BGB, three from the navy, and one from the coast guard -- were interrogated, the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances said in a report released yesterday.

Submitted to Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus earlier, the report also contained a list of at least 13 secret detention centres where torture and enforced disappearance had taken place.

The centres were run by the Dhaka Metropolitan Police's Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime Unit, the Detective Branch, and police units in Bogura, Cox's Bazar, Dinajpur and Bagerhat.

The cells run by police were located in the respective lines, while the CTTC held its detainees on the first and seventh floors of its office, the commission found.

The sites run by Rab included the Taskforce for Interrogation Cell (TFC) operated by Rab Intelligence, a detention centre referred to as the "clinic" located in a glass facade building behind

### PRIMA FACIE INVOLVEMENT

40 Rab officers

11 DGFI officers

11 police officers

9 officers of CTTC

6 DB officers

3 officers of Lawful Interception Centre

2 NSI officers

the Rab Headquarters, and cells inside Rab-1, Rab-7 and Rab-11.

Meanwhile, the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence ran a Joint Interrogation Cell located in the same compound as the DGFI Headquarters, and the National Security Intelligence operated a secret detention centre inits Gulshan office.

The DB and CTTC often maintained weaker secrecy, allowing detainees to identify locations and officers, while Rab Intelligence and DGFI used tightly controlled systems to obscure identity and location, with military

officers operating in a culture of institutional

secrecy even without formal military oversight, said the report.

The full report details evidence found against key officers involved in enforced disappearance, with the operations codenamed "Golf Operations".

The commission also identified the prima facie involvement of 40 Rab officers, 11 DGFI officers, 11 police officers, nine CTTC officers, six DB officers, three Lawful Interception Centre officers, and two NSI officers.

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## 100 children killed in Gaza since ceasefire

Says Unicef, blames Israeli airstrikes, ground forces

AFP, Geneva

At least 100 children have been killed by Israeli airstrikes and ground forces in Gaza since the start of a tenuous ceasefire three months ago, the United Nations said yesterday.

The UN children's agency Unicef said that at least 60 boys and 40 girls had been killed in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territory since early October.

"More than 100 children have been killed in Gaza since the ceasefire," Unicef spokesman James Elder told reporters in Geneva.

"That's roughly a girl or a boy killed here every day during a ceasefire," he said, speaking from Gaza City.

"These children are killed from airstrikes, drone strikes, including suicide drones. They're killed from tank shelling. They're killed from live ammunition. They're killed from quad copters."

"We are at 100 -- no doubt," he said, adding that the true number was likely higher.

"A ceasefire that slows the bombs is progress but one that still buries children is not enough," AFP has sought a response from the Israeli military.

An official at Gaza's health ministry, which maintains casualty records, has reported a higher figure of 165 children killed during the tenuous ceasefire, out of a total

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1



The biting cold and thick fog left Sylhet city's streets largely deserted yesterday morning. The photo was taken at 8:30am in the city's Rikabi Bazar area.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

## 53 more aspirants now back in the race

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission yesterday upheld appeals from 53 aspirants, restoring their candidacy for the 13th National Parliamentary Election scheduled for February 12.

On the fourth day of hearings on appeals against returning officers' decisions to reject nomination papers, the EC reviewed 70 appeals. Of these, 53 were declared valid and 15 invalid.

The EC rejected the appeal of BNP-nominated candidate TS Ayub from Jashore-4 over allegations of loan default. However, it approved the nomination of his son, Farhad Sajid, who is contesting the same constituency as an independent candidate.

In Dhaka-2, Jamaat-e-Islami candidate Md Abdul Haque also regained his candidacy after the EC accepted his appeal.

The EC began hearing appeals on January 10 and will continue until January 18.

So far, 203 candidates have regained their candidacy over the past four days.

Earlier, 645 appeals were filed between January 5 and 9 during the scrutiny of nomination papers.

On January 4, the EC declared the nomination papers of 1,842 candidates valid and 723 invalid across 300 constituencies.

## PLOT SCAM Verdict in case against Hasina, Azmina, Tulip on Feb 2

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A special court yesterday set February 2 to deliver the verdict in a case filed against deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina and 17 others, including her two nieces -- British MP Tulip Siddiq and Azmina Siddiq -- over the Purbachal plot scam.

Judge Md Rabiu Alam of the Special Judge's Court-4 of Dhaka fixed the date after hearing arguments from both prosecution and defence, said Anti-Corruption Commission Public Prosecutor Mir Ahmed Ali Salam.

Former housing and public works state minister Sharif Ahmed, former secretary Kazi Washi Uddin, former additional secretary Md Oliullah, former administrative officer Saiful Islam Sarkar, former senior assistant secretary Purabi Goldar, and Rajuk's former chairman Anisur Rahman



SEE PAGE 10 COL 1