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## Unite to shield press freedom

Journalists urge rising above divisions at media convention organised by Noab, Editors' Council

### STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Journalists yesterday slammed the government for failing to protect media houses and workers from mob violence, saying stalled reforms and bureaucratic inertia have left the press more vulnerable than ever.

Warning that a fragmented media remains an easy target for political intimidation and physical violence, top editors and journalists at the Media Convention 2026 called for national unity to keep the country on a democratic path

"By invoking the 'July spirit' to justify violence, they [attackers] are actually trying to destroy the core democratic spirit of that movement," said Nurul Kabir, president of the Editors' Council and editor of the daily New Age.

"When media institutions are attacked or silenced, the rights of the whole society are bound to be obstructed."

He said, "I will carry a lifelong trauma knowing that the attack on The Daily Star was not merely an attempt to destroy a physical building, but rather medieval brutality... They [attackers] deliberately set

### KEY OBSERVATIONS

- 1 Formulating code of conduct for journalists, editors and owners proposed
- 2 Stalled reforms, non-enactment of law to protect journalists frustrating amid continued insecurity
- 3 Threat is constant, protection is minimal for journalists outside Dhaka as past attacks remain unpunished
- 4 Journalist leaders mull regional conventions

and protect media freedom.

This was the first edition of the convention, jointly organised by the Newspaper Owners' Association of Bangladesh and the Editors' Council at the Krishibid Institution, Bangladesh auditorium in Dhaka, to protest sustained attacks on freedom of expression and democratic values.

Speakers said assaults on the media stand in stark contradiction to the spirit of the July uprising.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



Journalists rise for the national anthem at the opening of the Media Convention 2026, held yesterday at the Krishibid Institution Bangladesh.

PHOTO: STAR

## 'We'll always stand by you'

Tarique tells grieving families of enforced disappearance victims

### STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP will always stand by the families who lost their dear ones in the fight against fascism, party Chairman Tarique Rahman said yesterday.

He added that any democratic government has an obligation and responsibility towards the victims and their families.

"Many children are still waiting, hoping that their disappeared father will one day return and knock on the door. Many mothers are still holding on to hope that their lost child will once again call out to them.

"This waiting carries a profound responsibility for

SEE PAGE 13 COL 1

### MANIFESTO EXPECTATIONS

With the national election less than a month away, political parties are finalising their manifestos. The Daily Star spoke to experts to identify the pressing issues that should top the agenda for parties.

## Affordable care must be next govt's focus

Say health experts

### TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

As major political parties prepare to roll out their election manifestos, health experts say that ensuring quality primary healthcare for all and reducing high out-of-pocket expenditure should be their top priority.

They note that primary healthcare remains weak and underfunded, particularly in urban areas, despite its

critical role in preventing diseases and protecting people from falling into poverty due to high medical costs.

Health should not be treated as the sole responsibility of a single ministry; rather, it should be integrated into all government policies and activities, they observe.

To achieve these goals, the experts have called for an overhaul of health

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman consoles a distraught mother of a victim of enforced disappearance during a programme held yesterday at the China-Bangladesh Friendship Conference Centre in the capital.

PHOTO: STAR

**FIRST DEATH ANNIVERSARY**  
**WE ARE DEEPLY GRIEVED**

Today 18 January 2026 is the First Death Anniversary of Mrs. Nurun Nahar Gias (Saqi) BSc (Hons) (DU) MSc (DU) EMBA (AIUB); Wife of: Prof. Dr. ASM Giasuddin MSc (DU) PhD (London) PGD (London) MPH (SUB, BD) Emeritus MNYAS (USA), Founder Director & Senior Consultant of Laboratory Medicine, Impulse Hospital, Tejgaon I/A, Dhaka-1208; Second Daughter of: Late Mr. Bazal Ahmed (Founder/First Managing Director of United Commercial Bank Ltd/UCBL, Dhaka, Bangladesh. She was a 'Mathematics teacher and Senior Academic Supervisor and Head of Senior Section' at Scholastica School & College, Uttara, Dhaka for many years. Mrs. Nurun Nahar Gias (Saqi) hailed from Daulatpur, Fatiksari, Chittagong and her husband Prof. Dr. Giasuddin hails from East Syedpur, Sitakund, Chittagong, Bangladesh. Presently, the family lives at Mohakhali DOHS, Dhaka-1206, Bangladesh.

On this occasion, we earnestly request you all to pray to Almighty Allah for eternal peace and salvation of her departed soul in haven.

Prof. Dr. ASM Giasuddin (Husband), Prof. Dr. Rubayat Sheik Giasuddin (1st son) & his wife Dr. Nafisa Tabassum, Engr. Mr. Shafaat Sheik Giasuddin (2nd son) & his wife Mrs. Farzana Sultana, Inaya (1st Grand Daughter), Zaina (2nd Grand Daughter), Kiyana (1st Grandson) & Farzan (2nd Grandson)



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Noab and Editors' Council members pose for a group photo at the Media Convention 2026, held yesterday at the Krishibid Institution Bangladesh auditorium.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON



**Regardless of whether you agree with the editorial stance of The Daily Star, you must realise that if this attack is allowed to happen today, it will be your turn next.**

**NURUL KABIR,**  
president of Editors' Council and editor of New Age



**The fight for press freedom is often lonelier and more dangerous beyond the capital. The previous government was responsible for torching of our offices ... we have never received justice.**

**MAMTAZ SHIRIN BHAROSHA,**  
Editor of Dainik Jugor Alo from Rangpur



**We should not think that when a newly elected government comes, all our problems will be solved. It did not happen in the past, and it will not happen now either.**

**MATIUR RAHMAN,**  
editor and publisher of Prothom Alo



**The information ministry has become the main impediment [to implementing media reforms]. They said that their power will be curtailed.**

**SYED ABDAL AHMED,**  
executive editor of Daily Amar Desh and member of Media Reform Commission



**We must remember that we have no true friends outside of our own community when the freedom of the press is at stake.**

**KADER GANI**  
Chowdhury, secretary general, BFUJ



**Many of us claim to be independent, yet our professional unions remain deeply and overtly divided along political lines.**

**REZWANI HAQUE,**  
chairman of Broadcast Journalists Centre



**Your party people will not tell you the truth. Bureaucrats will not tell you the truth. Intelligence agencies will not tell you the truth. Only independent journalism tells the government the truth.**

**MAHFUZ ANAM,**  
editor and publisher of The Daily Star

## Search on Indonesia plane missing with 10 people on board

**AFP, Makassar**

Indonesian authorities are searching for a plane carrying three government workers and seven crew members after contact with the aircraft was lost on Saturday, officials said.

The Indonesia Air Transport turboprop plane left from Yogyakarta and was headed to the city of Makassar on Sulawesi island, according to rescuers.

Three employees of the ministry of marine affairs and fisheries were on board, on a mission to conduct aerial monitoring of resources in the area, Minister Sakti Wahyu Trenggono told a press conference.

## Unite to shield press freedom

**FROM PAGE 1**  
"The chief adviser's press secretary claimed that by the time the government could send law enforcement, the damage was done. Are we simply expected to take the press secretary at his word? Did they not have access to intelligence reports that might have predicted or even prevented such violence?

"If these high-profile institutions in the capital can be targeted with such impunity, who will be there to protect us if we are attacked in the districts and remote areas?"

Mamta Shirin Bharosha, editor of Dainik Jugor Alo from Rangpur, reminded journalists that the fight for press freedom is often lonelier and more dangerous beyond the capital.

"The previous government was responsible for setting fire to our offices, yet to this day, we have not received justice."

Kaler Kantha's Brahmanbaria Correspondent Gowrang Debnath said local journalists live under constant threat.

"I faced four cases during the Awami League era, but now I am being targeted. For those of us working in the districts,

the threat is constant and the protection is minimal."

Kamal Ahmed, head of the Media Reform Commission and consulting editor of The Daily Star, said that a specialised law to protect journalists is urgently needed, but it has yet to be enacted or implemented.

"The government has committed to enacting this law and protecting journalists, and so the government will have to take responsibility for all the repression that journalists have faced since this commitment was made."

Faruk Wasif, director general of the Press Institute of Bangladesh, said though the draft law for journalist protection was finalised after extensive stakeholder consultations, there is no explanation for why it has not been enacted yet.

Syed Abdal Ahmed, executive editor of the Daily Amar Desh and a member of the Media Reform Commission, expressed frustration that none of the commission's recommendations has been implemented. "The information ministry has become the main impediment. They said their power will be curtailed."

Veteran journalist Shafik Rehman said, "Matiur Rahman and Mahfuz Anam have certainly played a big role behind this convention because they saw their offices burned ... The target was to destroy Prothom Alo and The Daily Star by any means."

Dhaka Tribune Editor Reaz Ahmad said, "The government had a fantastic opportunity to reform the sector. They could not do that. Instead, they have made us more vulnerable."

Senior journalists said that in the absence of external allies, unity within the profession is essential.

Kader Gani Chowdhury, secretary general of the Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists, urged media workers to put aside internal divisions. "We've seen the consequences of divisions -- one group remained silent when the Sangram editor was arrested, while another group celebrated when figures like Matiur Rahman and Mahfuz Anam were targeted."

"We must remember that we have no true friends outside of our own community when the freedom of the press is at stake."

Rezwan Haque, chairman of Broadcast Journalists Centre, said, "Many of us claim to be independent, yet our professional unions remain deeply and overtly divided along political lines."

He added that journalists must work to remove partisan affiliations from within the profession.

"In this case, two or three podcast speakers played a very bad role. This was wrong."

He added that he, like all journalists here, want to be united.

Matiur Rahman, editor and publisher of the Prothom Alo, warned that any conflict among journalists weakens journalism.

"No matter what our opinions, thoughts, ideas, or political beliefs are, we must stay united on issues related to newspapers, journalism, and personal safety. We must understand one another and stand by each other."

"We should not think that when a newly elected government comes, all our problems will be solved. It did not happen in the past, and it will not happen now either."

Rezwan Haque, chairman of Broadcast Journalists Centre, said, "Many of us claim to be independent, yet our professional unions remain deeply and overtly divided along political lines."

He added that journalists must work to remove partisan affiliations from within the profession.

Mozammel Haque, editor of

the Bogura-based Daily Karatoa, said that although the number of press clubs outside Dhaka has increased significantly, journalistic quality has not improved at the same pace.

AHM Mushtaqur Rahman, president of the Laxmipur Press Club, criticised the practice of treating editorial positions as political appointments, saying it erodes press independence and credibility.

Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, warned that reducing media to a purely profit-driven enterprise would destroy public trust and democratic values.

He cautioned media owners against treating journalism like any other commercial industry. "If you invest in media with the same mindset as other industries, that media will never earn people's trust."

"Experience tells us that societies where independent journalism is strong are democratic, less discriminatory and more respectful of people's rights."

He said independent journalism is the only institution that spoke uncomfortable truths to those in power. "Your party

people will not tell you the truth. Bureaucrats will not tell you the truth. Intelligence agencies will not tell you the truth."

"Only independent journalists tell the government the truth."

### CODE OF CONDUCT

Speakers also called for internal accountability and a code of conduct for the media.

Rezwan Haque said an industry-wide code of conduct should be formulated and enforced.

Reaz Ahmad said, "We need to clean our houses and the best way is through self regulation. If we can't do that we cannot earn back the trust of the people. An industry-wide code of ethics is needed."

Munima Sultana, general secretary of Nari Sangbadik Kendra, also recommended implementing industry standards. "We are demanding that the government will reform the media but can we not implement some of the reforms ourselves?" she questioned.

Kamal Ahmed pointed out that while everyone acknowledges that professional standards are not being upheld in the industry, more needs to be done to identify the reasons

behind it and get rid of the obstacles.

Nurul Kabir also called for the formulation and implementation of a code of conduct.

Mahfuz Anam said, "Those of us who have the privilege of being an editor, it is our moral, ethical duty to uphold the highest standards both in our personal and professional lives."

"Every decision of our personal lives affects our media organisations."

He also stated that owners too must have a code of conduct.

Media leaders also said they were considering conventions like this at regional level.

Leaders of journalist organisations, including the Association of Television Channel Owners, Broadcast Journalist Centre, Jatiya Press Club, Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists, Dhaka Union of Journalists, Dhaka Reporters Unity, Diplomatic Correspondents Association Bangladesh, Economic Reporters Forum, Photo Journalists Association, and the Crime Reporters Association of Bangladesh, attended the convention.

## Affordable care must be next govt's focus

**FROM PAGE 1**  
management, including restructuring the system under three separate directorates -- clinical, academic, and public and primary healthcare -- along with higher budgetary allocations to improve coordination, efficiency, and accountability.

The country goes to the polls at a time when the health sector faces major challenges, including inadequate funding, shortages of health workers, high out-of-pocket expenses, unequal access to services and weak governance.

As thousands of people continue to be deprived of quality treatment, the rise in the total fertility rate for the first time in 50 years has fuelled fresh concerns.

Public health expert Prof MA Faiz said that primary healthcare has not

received due importance, particularly in urban areas, where services remain very poor. It should be given priority regardless of whether the area is rural or urban.

He suggested that a doctor-led team should provide services to a defined population size, ensuring that no one is left behind.

In Bangladesh, the universal service package exists only in name. It should be gradually expanded -- both in terms of the number of services and the population covered -- to ensure universal health coverage. Individuals should bear costs according to their financial capacity, said Prof Faiz, also former director general of Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

"This needs to be done to reduce people's out-of-pocket expenditure that remains very high in the country. Excessive healthcare costs are pushing many people into poverty while depriving many others of services."

He also stressed the need for skill-driven medical education to produce the required manpower capable of providing quality primary healthcare.

"The health budget must be increased to achieve these goals," he added.

Outlining the major tasks for the next government, Prof Liaquat Ali, a member of the Health Sector Reform Commission, said it will need to review the commission's report and set priorities for implementing the recommendations.

The first priority should be to enact a law declaring primary healthcare a constitutional obligation and provide these services free of cost, said Prof Liaquat, also a former vice chancellor of Bangladesh University of Health Sciences.

### EXPERTS' SUGGESTIONS FOR NEXT GOVT

- ➊ Strengthen quality primary healthcare, especially in urban areas
- ➋ Reduce out-of-pocket healthcare expenditure
- ➌ Integrate health into all government policies, activities
- ➍ Allocate at least 15% of national budget to the sector
- ➎ Improve governance, functionality of govt hospitals
- ➏ Bring private healthcare facilities under an accreditation council
- ➐ Ensure quality education, training for health professionals

Mohib Ullah Khondoker, a member of the executive management committee at Gonoshasthaya Kendra, said the next government must properly regulate the medicine market. It must ensure that all

and activities, he said.

The country has a large network of government hospitals to provide curative care, but these facilities are not functioning properly mainly due to poor governance and shortages of funds and manpower, he said, calling for effective measures to make them functional.

Private facilities, which charge higher fees but often fall short of quality service, must be brought under an accreditation council to ensure standards, said Prof Hamid, also convener of Alliance for Health Reforms Bangladesh.

Steps must be taken to improve the quality of medical education and promote professional development for doctors so that they stay aligned with global advancements in healthcare, he added.

## Hotel owner beaten to death in Gazipur

**OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur**

A businessman was beaten to death in Kaliganj upazila of Gazipur yesterday.

The deceased, Liton Chandra Ghosh alias Kali, 55, was the owner of 'Baishakhi Sweetmeat and Hotel' located on Baranagar Road adjacent to the Kaliganj municipality.

Three people were detained for their suspected involvement, said Md Zakir Hossain, officer-in-charge (OC) of Kaliganj Police Station.

The detainees are Swapna Mia, 55, his wife Majeda Khatun, 45, and their son Masum Mia, 28. Contacted, the OC said the accused has a banana plantation. A bunch of bananas went missing from their plantation.

When they found the bananas in the hotel of Liton yesterday morning while searching, an argument started between the two parties over this.

At one stage, the accused punched and kicked Liton, causing him to fall to the ground and die on the spot, he said.

The deceased's family told police that Masum came to the hotel around 11:00am. At that time, he had an argument with a hotel employee Ananta Das over a trivial incident. Later, Masum's mother came to the spot and got into a fight.

When hotel owner Liton came forward to calm the situation, he was beaten up. At one stage, he was also hit on the head with a shovel and he died on the spot, said the OC.

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## Bhasan Char Sandwip's, not Hatiya's says land ministry

STAFF CORRESPONDENT,  
Chattogram

The Ministry of Land has finally resolved the longstanding dispute over the administrative jurisdiction of Bhasan Char, deciding that the island's six mouzas belong to Sandwip upazila of Chattogram and not Hatiya of Noakhali.

On January 15, the survey branch of the ministry issued a letter to the relevant authorities, directing them to take necessary actions following the new decision.

According to the official letter issued on January 13, signed by Ibrahim Miazzi, assistant secretary to the land ministry, the decision was based on rigorous scientific data.

Earlier in 2017, the then government issued

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1



The Flower Festival, organised by the Chattogram district administration in Sitakunda, drew thousands of visitors over the weekend. DC Park in Faujdarhat was packed, with no space left to sit, as the area transformed into a festive city showcasing 140 species of flowers. The event runs daily from 10:00am to 8:00pm until February 8.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

## Candidates' names added to in-country postal ballots: EC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission yesterday announced that candidates' names will be added alongside their electoral symbols on in-country postal voting (ICPV) ballots for the 13th national election scheduled for February 12.

"Candidates' names will be added to postal ballots along with electoral symbols only for voters registered inside the country, not for expatriates," Election Commissioner Abdur Rahman Masud told the media.

For expatriate voter registration, the EC launched the Postal Vote BD app on November 18, initially targeting voters in 140 countries. Registration was completed in 121 countries before ending on January 5.

Three categories of voters registered through the app -- expatriate Bangladeshis, government officials assigned election duties, and people in legal custody.

Saudi Arabia recorded the highest number of registrations with 2,39,186 voters, followed by Malaysia (84,293) and Qatar (76,139).

According to EC data, a total of 15,33,683 Bangladeshi voters living in 121 countries registered through the app. The EC has sent 7,28,043 postal ballots to expatriates.

The chief election commissioner said around 1.3 crore Bangladeshis live abroad and described the initiative as a step toward ending their disenfranchisement.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7



## 'Action' if EC allows dual citizens to run Warns NCP

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The National Citizen Party spokesperson Asif Mahmud yesterday warned that NCP would take action if the Election Commission allows loan defaulters or dual citizens to contest the elections.

"The Constitution of Bangladesh clearly states that anyone who acquires foreign citizenship or shows allegiance to another country loses eligibility to contest parliamentary elections," he said at a press briefing at the NCP's central office in Banglamotor last night.

Despite this, he claimed that several candidates with dual nationality have approached the EC and acted with impunity.

"One candidate even brought 200 to 300 people to the commission," said Asif, also chief of NCP's election management committee. "If any loan defaulter or person with dual citizenship is made eligible to contest under any conditions or interpretations, we will oppose it," he said.

"We will continue our legal battle. Candidates who are loan defaulters or hold dual citizenship will not be allowed to contest the election," he added.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

## Mob culture pushing country towards 'popular fascism'

Speakers tell discussion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh may be shifting from the "state fascism" of the previous regime to "popular fascism", where social media mobs influence justice, and people remain silent out of fear, warned speakers at a discussion yesterday.

They said the interim government has not broken from old power structures and has largely maintained the "old settlement" of governance, leaving the country vulnerable to instability.

The discussion, titled "Next Elected Government and Citizen Expectations", was organised by the Bangladesh Research Analysis and Information Network (BRAIN) at Bishwo Shahitto Kendro in the capital.

At the event, economist Zia Hasam said authoritarianism is changing form.

He said the previous regime's "state fascism", enforced

If I have to constantly worry about facing an online mob or demands for my dismissal while teaching sociology or transitional justice, then academic freedom does not exist.

PROF SAMINA LUTHFA OF DU

The administration appears fearful and submissive to powerful forces, and that the promised "new settlement" has not emerged. Instead, the government is repeating the old system of partisanship and revenge.

PROF SAYEED FERDOUS OF JU

through policing and enforced disappearances, has collapsed, but the ground has now been set for "popular fascism" driven by fear, division and what he described as "extreme anti-India sentiment".

He said speaking against state repression once showed courage, but now speaking against mob pressure leads to attacks on credibility.

He urged the government to form a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, citing Rwanda's post-genocide process, and called for national healing instead of a politics of elimination.

Prof Samina Luthfa of Dhaka University's sociology department called political parties' record on women "disgraceful", noting that women received only 4 percent of nominations and at least 30 parties did not nominate a single woman.

"You have invisibilised the women of the July uprising," she said, adding that women who led protests have been excluded from decision-making.

She said Bangladesh is not ready to meet global standards on gender equality.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6



Fishers pull in their catch from the Atrai River near Ahsanjan Bazar in Naogaon's Atrai upazila, using long nets tied to boats anchored with bamboo as the water recedes. Locals allege unscrupulous traders and fishers are depleting stocks by catching fish before they mature and extracting large quantities during the lean season. The photo was taken from the Ahsanjan stretch of the river recently.

PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

## FEBRUARY 12 POLLS EU deploys 56 long-term observers

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) yesterday deployed 56 long-term observers (LTOs) to all 64 administrative districts of Bangladesh.

"The long term observers are a critical element of our mission. Their observations and insights will ground our impartial and fact-based evaluation of the electoral process," Deputy Chief Observer Inta Lase said at a city hotel yesterday.

An 11-member EU EOM team arrived here in late December, and 90 more short-term observers will join them ahead of the elections scheduled for February 12.

Diplomats from EU embassies in Dhaka, along with those from Norway, Canada and Switzerland, will also observe the polls. In total, 200 EU observers will monitor the national election.

Long-term observers will closely follow key aspects of the election at the regional level and support the analysis of the core team of experts based in Dhaka.

"Our observers will work in teams of two and in their areas of observation, they will meet voters, election officials, candidates and political parties, as well as

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

## RMG worker raped while fiance forcibly detained in Bhola

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

A readymade garment (RMG) worker was allegedly gang raped by two local youths after her fiance was beaten and tied up on the Meghna river embankment in Manpura upazila of Bhola district early Friday.

Police said the incident occurred in Taltoli area of Char Goalia union around 2:20am.

The victim is from Sunamganj, while her fiance is a resident of Manpura. Both work at a garment factory in Dhaka and had come to Manpura recently for family arrangements ahead of their marriage.

The victim filed a rape case with Manpura Police Station against five named individuals and three to four unidentified persons, said Sub-Inspector Ibrahim Nayan, also the investigation officer.

According to the case statement, the 18-year-old victim and her fiance, Sajib Hossain, arrived in Manpura on January 14. Their wedding was scheduled for January 15, and she was staying at Sajib's grandmother's

SEE PAGE II COL 8

## 4 killed, 18 hurt in road accidents

STAR REPORT

Four people were killed and 18 others injured in road accidents in three districts yesterday, according to reports from our correspondents.

In Sylhet, two people were killed and 12 others were injured as two buses collided head-on and another bus hit them from behind on the Dhaka-Sylhet highway in Dayamir area, said Md Morshedul Hasan Bhuiyan, officer-in-charge of Osmaninagar Police Station.

The deceased were identified as Md Mujibur Rahman, 55, from Dashai Hawladar village in Naria upazila of Shariatpur; and Bakul Rabidas, 26, from Kaponkhelpar village in Osmaninagar.

Firefighters from Tajpur along with police carried out rescue operations and took the injured to a nearby hospital.

In Sunamganj, a bus collided head-on with a pickup on the Sylhet-Sunamganj regional highway in Bhuiyan Gaon area of Chhatak upazila, leaving the pickup driver dead and at least five others injured.

The driver -- whose identity could not be known immediately -- died on the spot.

SEE PAGE II COL 5

## EU deploys 56 Probe body formed

FROM PAGE 3

citizen observers and youth activists, not only in the cities, but also in small towns and in villages," Lise said.

The observers have received extensive briefings on the electoral process, the political environment, the legal framework, and the media and social landscapes in Bangladesh.

The mission was deployed following an invitation from Bangladesh's authorities and is led by Chief Observer Ivars Ijabs, a Member of the European Parliament.

The observers will monitor election-day proceedings, including voting, counting, and tabulation of results. A delegation of Members of the European Parliament will further reinforce the mission.

### SALE OF USED MOTORCYCLES

Expression of Interest is invited from genuine buyers by a private foreign company for the purchase of the following 59 used motorcycles, being sold on an "as-is, where-is" basis. Sealed offers must be submitted on or before 22 January 2026.

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3	Hero Honda	2010	100	5	c. Cox's Bazar - 01 units
4	Hero Passion Xpro	2020	110	1	d. Bogura - 03 units
5	Keeway	2019	100	9	e. Khulna - 04 units
6	Mahindra	2015	110	6	f. Sylhet - 02 units
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A sap collector climbs a date palm tree in the Duhorpara area of Barishal's Uzirpur upazila early yesterday to collect date palm sap. After collecting the sap, he pours it into containers wrapped with banana leaves and sells it at local markets, inset. He makes around Tk 1,200 a day. PHOTO: TITU DAS



## KATALGANJ, PANCHLAISH Excavation of canal triggers waterlogging

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Chattogram

Excavation work on a local canal for its expansion and renovation has caused waterlogging in the Katalganj and Panchlaish areas of Chattogram city, adding to the suffering of residents and commuters.

To facilitate the excavation of the Hijra Khal, the Chattogram Development Authority (CDA) has constructed temporary dams on the canal, thereby obstructing the passage of drainage water and causing it to overflow onto the streets.

The renovation is part of the CDA's mega project to re-excavate 37 canals to mitigate waterlogging in the port city.

During a recent visit, this correspondent found several points of the road submerged under stagnant water, making commuting an ordeal for local residents, including students, patients and elderly people. Several prominent schools, hospitals and diagnostic centres are located in the area.

"We used to suffer due to waterlogging when it rained. Now even in winter the suffering continues," said Akbar Hossain, a local resident.

"We have informed the Chattogram City Corporation and CDA authorities, but no step has been taken yet to resolve the matter," he added.

Nabila Huq, who brought her mother to a local clinic for medical tests, said, "Dirty water splashed onto our clothes from passing vehicles. If a major road remains waterlogged for days even in the dry season, it makes us question the nature of the development work."



Contacted, Ahmed Anwarul Nazrul, chief engineer of CDA, acknowledged the issue but said they have no alternative other than to continue the excavation work and complete it.

"The work began in the first week of December, and may take another two months to complete," he added.

CDA's Executive Engineer Ahmed Moinuddin, also the project director, said the canal is being widened from 13 feet to 26 feet.

"For the greater good, people have to endure some temporary inconvenience. We are also planning to replace the existing narrow bridge with a larger one. We expect to finish the canal work by mid-February," he added.

CCC Mayor Shahadat Hossain recently visited the site and assured residents of a permanent solution.

He noted that the Hijra Khal, which flows from Mehedi Bag to the Chakta Khal in Bakalia, is vital for drainage in key areas like Panchlaish and Sholashahar.

"The canal has shrunk significantly due to rampant encroachment over the years. Building owners who occupy the canal's land will have to vacate around 12 feet of land as per the RS and BS records. Some parts of the buildings will have to be demolished," Shahadat also said, urging residents to cooperate for long-term benefits.

"We have pumping machines to clear the stagnant water on the road. If we can manage to endure this till February, we will be free from waterlogging for the rest of the year," he added.

## Pushed towards extinction

Retaliatory killings, habitat loss threatening fishing cats across country

SAKIB AHMED

Global Ecology and Conservation on ScienceDirect, documented conflict involving at least 395 adult fishing cats and 170 kittens. Of them, 117 were released back into the wild, while 34 were sent to zoos or rescue centres located more than 20 kilometres from the conflict sites.

However, Akash, also a zoology professor at Dhaka University, said releasing the animals far from conflict



zones may not offer a lasting solution, as human settlements continue to expand into natural habitats.

Conservationists said fear and misidentification drive much of the violence, as villagers often mistake fishing cats for more dangerous predators such as tigers or leopards due to a lack of awareness.

Recent research, however, offers some hope. A separate study conducted

between 2020 and June 2024 in four districts of the northeastern Sylhet region found that a site-based rescue and release approach can serve as an effective short-term conservation measure.

During the study period, researchers recorded 86 live fishing cats and seven dead individuals. Of the live animals, 76, including 35 kittens, were released within a week at or near their capture sites. Reunification of released kittens with their mothers was successful in 62 percent of cases, according to a study published in December in Global Ecology and Conservation on ScienceDirect.

MA Aziz, a zoology professor at Jahangirnagar University and one of the study's authors, said the Sylhet region was selected after being identified as a conflict hotspot.

"The landscape there is dominated by scattered swamps, patchy reserve forests and tea gardens, which provide an ideal habitat for fishing cats. That is why our research focused on improving rescue and release practices in the Sylhet region," he said.

Aziz said timing is crucial for successful releases, particularly for kittens.

"Our study recommends releasing rescued kittens within 24 hours to

SEE PAGE II COL 5

## 'Action' if EC allows dual citizens

FROM PAGE 3

Expressing concern over the electoral process, Asif said the current election appears to be following the pattern of the previous three polls.

"We will not allow this Election Commission to organise a designed, one-sided election like the previous three commissions. NCP will work with alliance partners to resist this," he said.

He said the final day of the appeal hearing is today and that the party will decide its next steps after observing

the commission's conduct.

"If the commission remains within its mandate and ensures impartiality by adhering to the Representation of the People Order and the Constitution, our cooperation will continue," he said. "If they make any mistake there and try to push through loan defaulters and dual citizens through bias or loopholes, we will take action against the Election Commission," he warned.

Asif also alleged that the BNP is violating the Constitution and existing laws ahead of the upcoming national election.

"We clearly see BNP candidates flouting the Constitution and prevailing laws. Yet the BNP portrays itself as a democratic force in various forums, which contradicts its actions," he said.

"They present themselves as champions of democracy, but their activities reflect the opposite. They are acting against democracy, the Constitution of Bangladesh, and existing laws," he added.

### Prime accused

FROM PAGE 3

15, neighbours traced the smell to Mim's flat and called 999 after she refused to open the door.

Police later searched the flat and found Rokeya's body under a bed and Fatema's body above a false ceiling in the bathroom.

According to police and family members, Fatema went to Mim's flat for private lessons around 5:00pm on December 25. When she did not return, Rokeya went to look for her, but neither came back.

Police said a quarrel broke out between Mim's younger sister and Fatema that night over financial issues. During the altercation, the younger sister strangled Fatema to death. When Rokeya arrived, she too was strangled with a scarf.

### NOTICE

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF BANGLADESH HIGH COURT DIVISION (SPECIAL STATUTORY JURISDICTION)

#### COMPANY MATTER NO. 2293 OF 2025

An application under Section 81(2) and 85(3) read with Section 396 of the Companies Act, 1994.

#### AND

#### IN THE MATTER OF:

Daraz Bangladesh Limited

#### ... PETITIONER

-VERSUS-

Mercari Asia Limited and others

#### ... RESPONDENTS

Notice is hereby given that an application under Sections 81(2) and 85(3) read with Section 396 of the Companies Act, 1994 has been filed before the Company Bench of the Hon'ble High Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh for condonation of delay and to pass order to call, hold and conduct annual general meetings of Mercari Asia Limited (Company) for the years 2024 and 2025 and to pass necessary direction to hold board meeting/s and to continue usual activities of the Company. The Hon'ble Company Bench presided over by his Lordship Mr. Justice Ahmed Sohel has been pleased to admit the aforesaid application by an order dated 30.12.2025.

Any person wishing to contest or oppose the aforesaid application may appear before the Hon'ble Court either in person or through a duly appointed Advocate. A copy of the said application may be obtained from the undersigned on payment of requisite costs.

#### Hossain Mohammad Shahidul, Barrister-at-Law

Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh  
Concord Ovalish (1st Floor), House No.-62, Road No. 11A  
Dharmodi Residential Area, Dhaka-1209

Tel: 01766-282950

### NOTICE

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF BANGLADESH HIGH COURT DIVISION (SPECIAL STATUTORY JURISDICTION)

#### COMPANY MATTER NO. 2292 OF 2025

An application under Section 81(2) and 85(3) read with Section 396 of the Companies Act, 1994.

#### AND

#### IN THE MATTER OF:

Daraz Bangladesh Limited

#### ... PETITIONER

-VERSUS-

SourceCo Limited and Others

#### ... RESPONDENTS

Notice is hereby given that an application under Sections 81(2) and 85(3) read with Section 396 of the Companies Act, 1994 has been filed before the Company Bench of the Hon'ble High Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh for condonation of delay and to pass order to call, hold and conduct annual general meetings of SourceCo Limited ("Company") for the years 2024 and 2025 and to pass necessary direction to hold board meeting/s and to continue usual activities of the Company. The Hon'ble Company Bench presided over by his Lordship Mr. Justice Ahmed Sohel has been



আর্থিক  
অন্তর্ভুক্তির এক যুগ

জ. বাংক এশিয়া

এজেন্ট  
ব্যাংকিং  
আপনার দোরগোড়ায়

মাইলফলক

৭৫ লক্ষ

গ্রাম একাউন্ট

এক যুগ ধরে গড়ে ওঠা  
৭৫ লক্ষ জীবনের আশ্বার গল্প





People dressed as zombies carry a placard reading "Stop being a zombie in Madrid, Spain, yesterday. The first edition of 'Off February' -- launched in France, Spain, the UK, and the US by a small foundation -- proposes uninstalling social media apps from phones to regain a healthier and less addictive relationship with these platforms."

PHOTO: AFP

## 'We need Greenland for national security'

Trump threatens tariffs on allies as US lawmakers back Denmark, Greenland

AFP, Copenhagen

Donald Trump on Friday warned that he could slap tariffs on countries that do not support his Greenland takeover plans, as US Congress members visited Copenhagen to give their backing for Denmark and its autonomous Arctic island.

The bipartisan delegation, on a two-day trip to the Danish capital, said the US president's long-held territorial ambitions -- strongly rejected by Denmark -- were not shared by the American people.

Europeans have also been showing their backing for Greenland, in a military reconnaissance mission that a Danish general said Washington was invited to and which was linked to what Russia does after the war in Ukraine.

"I may put a tariff on countries if they don't go along with Greenland, because we need Greenland for national security," Trump said at a White House event.

The 11 visiting US lawmakers held talks with Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen and her Greenlandic counterpart Jens-Frederik Nielsen, as well as Denmark's foreign and defence ministers, parliamentarians and business leaders.

Republican Senator Lisa Murkowski said there was "good dialogue" and stressed it was important to "nurture" ties between the United States, Denmark and

Greenland.

"The vast majority" of Americans do not agree that it is a good idea for the United States to acquire Greenland, she told reporters.

"Greenland needs to be viewed as our ally, not as an asset," she added.

The visit follows a meeting in Washington on Wednesday at which Danish representatives said Copenhagen and Washington were in "fundamental disagreement" over Greenland's future.

In Greenland's capital, Nuuk, residents welcomed the show of support.

"Congress would never approve of a military action in Greenland. It's just one idiot speaking," a 39-year-old union representative told AFP.

"If he (Trump) does it, he'll get impeached or kicked out," said the union rep.

Trump has repeatedly criticised Denmark -- a Nato ally -- for, in his view, not doing enough to ensure Greenland's security.

The US president has pursued that argument, despite strategically located Greenland -- as part of Denmark -- being covered by Nato's security umbrella.



The head of Denmark's Joint Arctic Command, Major General Soren Andersen, said the military mission was "about Russia".

"When the war in Ukraine is over, hopefully with a good result for Ukraine, it is our expectation that Russia will move the resources they have been using in Ukraine on other theatres... including in the Arctic," he told AFP.

"So, in order to prepare for that, we simply have to step up... train, and that is what we are doing up here."

But he said he had not seen any Russian or Chinese combat ships in the area in the two and a half years he has been commander. The White House has said Trump's aim to take over Greenland would not be affected by the European military presence.

Britain, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden have announced the deployment of small numbers of military personnel to prepare for future exercises in the Arctic.

Large demonstrations were planned across Denmark and Greenland yesterday to protest against Trump's plan.

Ukraine team arrive in US for talks

AFP, Kyiv

Ukrainian negotiators have arrived in the United States for talks with the Trump administration on ending almost four years of war with Russia, a member of the delegation said yesterday.

They will meet US President Donald Trump's envoy Steve Witkop and his son-in-law Jared Kushner.

The talks will take place in Miami just days short of the fourth anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

"We will have an important conversation with our American partners regarding the details of the peace agreement," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's top aide Kyrylo Budanov said on social media.

Trump has pushed for an end to the war and has expressed frustration with both sides, with no breakthrough made.

He has also pressured Ukraine to accept peace terms that Kyiv likens to capitulation.

Ukraine's ambassador to the US said a day earlier that the talks would focus on security guarantees and post-war reconstruction.

Zelensky said on Friday he hoped Ukraine would sign agreements with the United States next week.

## UN biodiversity treaty enters into force

Deal aims to protect 30% of oceans by 2030

REUTERS, Singapore

has not yet ratified it.

"Whilst we only needed 60 for it to enter into force, obviously it's really critical for its implementation and for it to be as effective as possible for us to achieve global or universal ratification of the treaty," said Rebecca Hubbard, director of the High Seas Alliance, a coalition of environmental groups.

Under the treaty, countries must conduct environmental assessments of activities that have an impact on ocean ecology.

It will also create mechanisms allowing nations to

share the spoils of the "blue economy", including "marine genetic resources" used in industries such as biotechnology.

Environmentalists say more than 190,000 protected areas would need to be established in order to meet the "30 by 30" target to bring 30 percent of the oceans under formal protection by 2030. Currently, only about 8 percent or 29 million square kilometres (11.2 million square miles) is protected.

But the treaty will have little impact on what some conservationists identify as one of the greatest threats facing the marine environment - the clamour to extract mineral resources from the ocean bed.

"BBNJ is very ambitious but there are certain defined limits," McCarthy said.

"The question of mining in the substrate or in the seabed simply belongs to the ISA (International Seabed Authority). It's not something where the BBNJ gets a role."



Syrian army soldiers, along with their armoured vehicles, gather as they prepare to enter the town of Deir Hafer yesterday. Syria's army said it took control of Deir Hafer outside Aleppo city yesterday, a day after Kurdish forces agreed to withdraw from the area.

PHOTO: AFP

**Delta PLC.**

**Change of Name**

Pursuant to the amendments made to the Companies Act, 1994 (Act No. 18 of 1994) through the insertion of Section 11A by the Companies (Second Amendment) Act, 2020, all Public Limited Companies are required to use the suffix "PLC" at the end of their registered names.

In compliance with the said amendment, the name of Delta Limited has been changed to **Delta PLC.**, which has duly been approved and recorded by the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms (RJSC).

This change relates only to the suffix of the Company's name and does not constitute the creation of a new legal entity, nor does it affect the Company's corporate identity, ownership, management, rights, obligations, or liabilities. Accordingly, all existing contracts, approvals, licenses, permissions, undertakings, and legal instruments executed or issued in the former name shall remain valid, binding, and enforceable as if executed or issued in the revised name, in accordance with Section 11(8) of the Companies Act, 1994.

Date: 15 January 2026

Sd/-  
Dr. Md. Zakir Hossain  
Managing Director

'Powerful forces' undermining global ties

Says UN chief

AFP, London

UN chief Antonio Guterres yesterday deplored a host of "powerful forces lining up to undermine global cooperation" in a London speech marking the 80th anniversary of the first UN General Assembly.

Guterres, whose term as secretary-general ends on December 31 this year, delivered the warning at the Methodist Central Hall in London, where representatives from 51 countries met on January 10, 1946, for the General Assembly's first session.

Guterres paid tribute to Britain for its decisive role in the creation of the United Nations and for continuing to champion it.

But he said 2025 had been a "profoundly challenging year for international cooperation and the values of the UN".

"We see powerful forces lining up to undermine global cooperation," he said, adding: "Despite these rough seas, we sail ahead."

Guterres cited a new treaty on marine biological diversity as an example of continued progress.

The treaty establishes the first legal framework for the conservation and sustainable use of marine diversity in the two thirds of oceans beyond national limits.

"These quiet victories of international cooperation -- the wars prevented, the famine averted, the vital treaties secured -- do not always make the headlines," he said.

"Yet they are real. And they matter."



Nasa Administrator Jared Isaacman speaks during the rollout of Nasa's next-generation moon rocket, the Space Launch System (SLS) rocket with the Orion crew capsule, to the launch pad at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida, US, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

AFP, Washington

The son of Iran's late shah said Friday he was confident that mass protests would topple the Islamic republic and urged international action, as US President Donald Trump holds off on intervening in the unrest.

Reza Pahlavi, who lives in exile in the Washington area, has presented himself as leader of the opposition as the cleric-run state ruthlessly represses mass protests.

"The Islamic republic will fall -- not if, but when," Pahlavi told a news conference in Washington.

Since the demonstrations erupted in late December with a rallying cry of solving Iran's severe economic woes, Pahlavi has pleaded for US intervention.

Trump had repeatedly warned Iran that if it kills protesters, the United States would intervene militarily. He also encouraged Iranians to take over state institutions, saying "help is on the way."

But two weeks after he first suggested help, he has not acted. Security forces in the meantime have killed at least 3,428 protesters, according to Norway-based group Iran Human Rights, with other estimates putting the toll at more than 5,000 or possibly as high as 20,000.

Pahlavi took to social media Friday, with posts on X and Instagram calling for Iranians across the country to "raise your voices in anger and protest with our national slogans" at 8:00 pm on Saturday and Sunday.

Pahlavi, seeking to touch a nerve with Trump, called on him not to be like Democratic predecessor Barack Obama who negotiated with Tehran.

"I believe that President Trump is a man of his word and ultimately he will stand with the Iranian people as he has said," Pahlavi said when asked if Trump had given false hope.

"Iranian people are taking decisive actions on the ground. It is now time for the international community to join them fully."

Pahlavi called for targeting the command

structure of the elite Revolutionary Guards, as it is key to "instituting terror at home or terrorism abroad."

"I'm calling for a surgical strike," said Pahlavi, who controversially backed Israel's military campaign on Iran in June.

He also urged all countries to expel diplomats from Iran and to help restore internet access, which has been severely hampered.

Pahlavi, 65, said he wants to be a figurehead to lead a transition to a secular democracy, with a popular referendum to choose the next system of government.

He also has plenty of detractors who suspect a desire by his supporters to restore the monarchy and say changes should come from the opposition within Iran.

"I reaffirm my lifelong pledge to lead the movement that will take back our country from the anti-Iranian hostile force that occupies it and kills its children," Pahlavi said.

"I will return to Iran."

## Avoid Iranian airspace EU advises airlines

AFP, Paris

The European Union Aviation Safety Agency on Friday advised airlines to avoid Iranian airspace, after threats of US attacks that have put the Islamic republic on guard.

"Given the ongoing situation and the potential for US military action, which has placed Iranian air defence forces on a heightened state of alert, there is currently an increased likelihood of misidentification," the regulator said.

"The presence and possible use of a wide range of weapons and air-defence systems, combined with unpredictable state responses and the potential activation of SAM (surface-to-air) systems, creates a high risk to civil flights operating at all altitudes and flight levels."

Until Wednesday, the US had threatened military action if Iran did not abandon plans to execute arrested protesters. But after warnings from its Gulf allies of regional repercussions, Washington has since stepped back. US President Donald Trump on Thursday thanked the Iranian government for cancelling "all scheduled hangings" after threatening Tehran with "serious consequences" if the crackdown continued.

## SEARCH MONOPOLY CASE Google files appeal against decision

AFP, Washington

Google filed a notice on Friday to appeal a federal judge's ruling that it held an illegal monopoly on online search, court records show.

A US district judge decided in 2024 that the internet giant had a monopoly on search and text advertising through exclusive distribution agreements that made it the "default" option people were likely to use.

On Friday, Google said the ruling "ignored the reality that people use Google because they want to, not because they're forced to."

"The decision failed to account for the rapid pace of innovation and intense competition we face from established players and well-funded start-ups," Lee Anne Mulholland, Google's vice president of regulatory affairs, wrote in a blog post.

The company asked District Court Judge Amit Mehta to pause an order in the case requiring Google to share data with its rivals in an effort to level the playing field in online search.

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## A tragic recurrence of fire safety lapses

Uttara fire another reminder that much remains to be done

The death of six people—including two minors and one two-year-old—in a fire at a residential building in Uttara is a painful reminder of our persistent negligence regarding fire safety. The incident occurred around 7:50 am on Friday, when the blaze broke out on the first floor of a seven-storey building at Sector II. Although two units of firefighters arrived promptly and brought the fire under control by 8:25 am, six precious lives were lost.

Firefighters found the rooftop door locked, which may have been a major factor in the deaths, as residents were reportedly trying to reach it to escape. According to our report, roof doors in most buildings in the area are routinely kept locked for "security" reasons, preventing their use during emergencies. The building in question did have fire extinguishers on each floor, but according to officials, none had been used. Officials believe the fire may have originated from an electrical short circuit, or a gas leak in the pipelines, or a kitchen. Only a thorough investigation will reveal the actual cause.

Over the years, we have seen countless fire incidents in which the causes often included electrical faults, unsafe gas lines, and poorly maintained kitchens. Yet the broader issue remains unchanged. Despite innumerable fire tragedies in high-rise buildings—including residential ones—few have even basic fire safety mechanisms such as smoke detectors, sprinklers, and functional fire extinguishers. Fire drills are practically nonexistent in most buildings. Proper investigations will determine whether the Uttara building violated building codes by lacking a proper fire safety mechanism, but Friday's tragedy, in which the victims reportedly died of asphyxiation rather than burns, must prompt strict enforcement of fire safety measures.

The Fire Prevention and Extinguishing Act, 2003 defines high rises as buildings with seven storeys or more and sets out several prerequisites for compliance with the Bangladesh National Building Code. But how many buildings are actually compliant? Every high-rise, for instance, must have a fire exit and control panels to detect the precise origin of a fire. Owners must ensure that basic firefighting equipment is installed in accessible locations. The fire service, together with building owners, should train a portion of residents in the use of firefighting equipment and conduct regular fire drills. All buildings are required to have fire alarms and sprinkler systems installed in all flats. Rooftop doors must also remain unlocked. Moreover, building owners and tenants should routinely check gas pipelines for leaks, as well as faulty wiring and overloaded multiplugs, which often lead to fires.

Most importantly, the authorities must carry out regular monitoring of buildings to ensure that fire safety measures are in place and equipment is properly maintained. If rules exist only on paper and are routinely flouted because of poor monitoring and weak enforcement, it will inevitably lead to more such tragedies.

## Revive the Ishwardi Silk Seed Farm

Govt must solve funding and manpower crisis, restart production

It is shocking to learn of the fate of the state-owned Ishwardi Silk Seed Farm in Pabna. Established in 1962 on 107 bighas of land, the farm once played an important role in our silk industry. It produced silkworms, cocoons and yarn, created jobs, and supported rural livelihoods. Today, much of that legacy lies buried under weeds, dilapidated buildings and institutional apathy.

Reportedly, the farm's decline began in 2018 after staff salaries were stopped. What was once a fully functioning complex with rearing houses, laboratories, weaving sheds and ponds has remained largely abandoned since then. Activities have shrunk to a single room manned by just two officials, while one night security guard struggles to protect a vast, deteriorating property. Currently, the facility only plants mulberry trees to supply saplings to other silk farms across the country, with no production work taking place on the site. The infrastructure has crumbled, equipment has gone unused, and theft has occurred in the absence of proper monitoring. Around 50,000 mulberry trees have reportedly been lost due to neglect. Silkworm rearing has also remained suspended for seven years because of a lack of manpower and funding. This once-profitable facility has been left to incur losses simply because no timely intervention was made to stabilise operations and address governance failures.

The condition of this farm exposes how important state assets, including public-sector industrial and agro-based institutions, are often allowed to decay through prolonged neglect. Sericulture is a labour-intensive and environmentally friendly industry with the potential to generate rural employment, particularly for women, while also reducing dependence on imported yarn. Allowing such a facility to fall into ruin raises serious questions about the government's economic and development priorities.

We urge the government to urgently revive the farm for the greater benefit of the silk sector. It must address the funding and manpower shortages that were the key reasons behind the farm's decline. This will require a clear revival plan. The government should immediately allocate emergency maintenance funds, settle legitimate salary arrears, restore essential facilities, and deploy trained technical staff in the facility. Beyond this, it should reassess the business model of state-run silk farms by exploring public-private partnerships, decentralised management, and stronger accountability mechanisms to prevent a repeat of such wastage of public assets.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

### Sierra Leone's civil war ends



On this day in 2002, the civil war in Sierra Leone was officially declared over; more than 50,000 people are estimated to have died in the fighting and some 2,000,000 were displaced.

# EDITORIAL

## Time to open railway tracks to private freight operators



Ahamedul Karim Chowdhury is adjunct faculty at Bangladesh Maritime University and former head of the Kamalapur Inland Container Depot (ICD) and the Pangaon Inland Container Terminal under Chittagong Port Authority.

AHAMEDUL KARIM CHOWDHURY

Bangladesh's export economy now moves faster than its railways can carry it. Factories, ports and private logistics firms have modernised to meet global demand. However, rail freight remains stuck in a system designed for a smaller, slower economy. Container trains bound for Chattogram are delayed, cancelled or pushed aside for passenger services. Inland container depots (ICDs) clog up. Highways choke. Ports feel the strain.

In an earlier article, I argued that ICDs cannot become engines of export growth unless freight trains are reliable, predictable and commercially driven. That warning has only grown more urgent. Bangladesh Railway is expected to support a rapidly expanding export economy while operating under rules that prioritise passenger trains, tolerate chronic locomotive shortages and treat freight as expendable. A container train booked for tonight must not vanish because a passenger locomotive failed elsewhere or the train was politically prioritised. Yet, freight guarantees are impossible under the monopoly system, as Bangladesh Railway lacks dedicated locomotives for freight and prioritises passengers over cargo.

This is why the debate must move beyond procurement delays and management shortcomings to a deeper reform: opening Bangladesh's railway tracks to private freight train operators.

There is no compelling reason why Bangladeshi logistics firms, exporters or foreign investors should not be allowed to run their freight trains—using their own locomotives, wagons and crews—on tracks owned and maintained by Bangladesh Railway. This would operate under transparent, regulated access agreements. The railway would retain ownership of infrastructure, control safety and manage traffic. What it would give up is its monopoly over freight operations.

This may sound radical, but globally, it is routine. India opened container train operations to private companies nearly two decades ago. Today, multiple firms run their own trains on Indian Railways' tracks, paying access charges while investing billions in wagons, terminals and networks. Across Europe, public and private freight operators compete on national rail systems. In the United Kingdom, all freight trains are privately operated even though the tracks remain state-owned.

Russia and parts of China allow private ownership of locomotives and wagons on public corridors. Even Pakistan—once as closed as Bangladesh—now permits private freight trains in exchange for track access fees.

None of these countries privatised

their railways. They separated infrastructure from operations.

That distinction matters. Bangladesh does not need to sell its tracks or stations. It needs to use them more intelligently. Allowing third-party freight operators would transform Bangladesh Railway from a cash-strapped monopoly into a network manager earning revenue from every train that runs, regardless of ownership.

The economic logic is straightforward. Bangladesh Railway struggles to procure enough locomotives for both passenger and freight services. Purchases take years. Maintenance backlogs grow. Every new passenger train further erodes freight

that happens only when regulation is weak. In every successful system, the state sets the rules: track access charges, safety standards, scheduling priorities and dispute-resolution mechanisms.

Companies compete on speed, cost and service quality—not political influence. Bangladesh already regulates airlines, ports and telecommunications. Railways do not require immunity from modern governance.

There is also a persistent fear that Bangladesh Railway would lose revenue or control. The opposite is more likely.

Instead of relying on erratic freight volumes and subsidies, the railway would earn stable income from track access, signalling, yard use and workshop services. Each additional private train would generate revenue without requiring new locomotives or staff. These funds could be reinvested in tracks, signalling and bottleneck removal, thus improving the network for both passengers and freight.

For ICDs, the impact would be decisive. Whether Kamalapur,

Private operators would have strong incentives to capture this traffic, invest in modern wagons and build integrated rail-based supply chains.

The transition must be carefully designed. The draft Bangladesh Railway Act, allowing private ownership of rolling stock and train operations, is a promising start. But it must be backed by clear rules on access, safety, liability and pricing. Safeguards against cartelisation are essential. Regulation must be strong enough to withstand pressure from all sides.

A sensible approach would be to begin with pilot corridors—especially the Dhaka-Chattogram route, which carries most container traffic. Selected private operators could run trains under strict safety and performance conditions, while Bangladesh Railway retains full control over dispatching and network management. Results would be quickly visible, as they have been elsewhere.

The real risk lies not in reform, but in inertia. As long as freight depends on spare locomotives left over from passenger services, Bangladesh will



PHOTO: SOBUZ KHAN/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

**'Bangladesh does not need to sell its tracks or stations. It needs to use them more intelligently.'**

capacity. When private operators bring their own engines, national capacity expands almost overnight—without a single taka of public investment in rolling stock, i.e., locomotives, carriages, wagons, etc.

Under this system, risk shifts from taxpayers to investors. Efficiency and innovation are rewarded. Reliability will improve even more dramatically. Private freight operators live and die by performance. A shipping line or garment exporter will not tolerate missed schedules. A private company that fails to deliver loses customers and revenue. A monopoly, particularly a government entity, does not face the same discipline.

That difference alone would turn rail freight from an unreliable afterthought into a professional logistics service.

Critics often warn that private trains would create chaos or profiteering.

Dhirasram, Ghorasal or future terminals, inland ports cannot function without dependable rail links. Exporters do not care who owns the locomotive. They care whether containers reach ports on time.

Under an open-access system, an ICD could contract directly with a private operator for daily—or multiple daily—block trains, backed by penalties for non-performance. Such commercial certainty is impossible under a monopoly.

There is also a broader national interest at stake. Bangladesh's highways are increasingly clogged with container trucks, fuel tankers, and bulk cargo. Every ton shifted to rail reduces congestion, accidents, fuel consumption, and emissions. Rail is inherently more efficient for long-distance freight, yet its share keeps shrinking because service is unreliable.

never have a dependable rail logistics network. Exporters will continue shifting to roads. ICDs will remain underused. Public rail investments will deliver diminishing returns.

Opening railway tracks to private freight operators is not an ideological debate. It is practical. Bangladesh's economy has outgrown a 19th-century model in which one state agency tries—and fails—to do everything. The modern world runs on networks, partnerships and regulated competition. If ICDs, ports and exporters are to thrive, they need a railway that delivers, not one that apologises.

Bangladesh has already transformed ports, power and telecommunications through public-private partnership. Rail freight should not be the last sector left behind.

## Bangladesh's renewed democratic chance



S.Y. Quraishi is former Chief Election Commissioner of India and author of Democracy's Heartland: Inside the Battle for Power in South Asia.

S.Y. QURAISHI

The road to Bangladesh's next general election, due on February 12, could decide far more than who governs next. It could determine whether the country restores its democratic soul or slips further into polarisation.

When I began researching my new book, *Democracy's Heartland: Inside the Battle for Power in South Asia*, I thought I knew the Bangladesh story—partition, language struggle, liberation war, military rule, the long duel between Awami League and BNP. But what I discovered in the process was more hopeful: a people who, time and again, have reclaimed democracy from those who tried to close it off.

Bangladesh's democratic instinct runs deep. The 1952 language movement, when students gave their lives defending Bangla, turned a linguistic demand into a national awakening, so much so that the world now marks February 21 as the International Mother Language Day. The 1971 Liberation War, triggered by the denial of an electoral mandate, produced a constitution that spoke the language of secularism, social

justice, and people's sovereignty. For a moment, the world saw a poor, war-torn, Muslim-majority nation proving that democracy and faith could coexist.

The decades that followed were uneven—coups, military rule, and political revenge scarred the system. Yet each time it seemed sealed shut, people forced it open again: against Ershad in 1990, during the caretaker crisis of 2007-08, and most recently in 2024, when students and young job seekers poured into the streets demanding fairness and dignity.

From an election manager's perspective, Bangladesh has been both a warning and an inspiration. Few countries have experimented so boldly with electoral design. The caretaker government system, introduced in the 1990s, was an ingenious attempt to ensure credible polls when parties distrusted each other. It worked for a while. The 1991, 1996, and 2001 elections are still cited as the fairest in memory. But the very need for such a mechanism was also a warning that when politics becomes a zero-sum war, no legal framework can compensate for its founding promise of inclusion.

Bangladesh's economic story has been extraordinary. From famine to food security, from "basket case" to global garment hub, it is now the world's second largest garment exporter and a regional leader in female employment and social progress. But "development first, democracy later" is a risky bargain. Authoritarian efficiency works until

suddenly, it does not. Growth without accountability creates brittle success.

What makes Bangladesh remarkable is that the demand for change came from its youth. A generation raised in an era of growth and global connection is now insisting that prosperity without dignity is not enough. They are the true heirs of the language martyrs and freedom fighters; their protest is democratic renewal in action.

South Asia, as I argue in *Democracy's Heartland*, is not a democratic periphery; it is the democratic core of the world. Nearly 40 percent of all people living in democracies are South Asian, and Bangladesh lies at the heart of that story. From the ballots that delivered independence in 1970-71 to the ballots that must now restore trust in 2026, it has shown that democracy here is not imported. It is indigenous and hard-earned.

The path ahead will be difficult. The temptation to return to one-party dominance will persist; political vendettas may return. But Bangladesh has a rare advantage: it has overthrown authoritarian rulers before without descending into civil war. That memory can be its compass again.

If it can now combine economic dynamism with fair elections, stronger institutions, and an inclusive national identity, Bangladesh will not just repair its own democracy; it will also inspire a region struggling with democratic fatigue. For a country born of language, liberation, and people's power, there could be no better second act.

# 'Even minor election allegations must be scrutinised and addressed'

As the country moves towards what could be the most consequential election in decades, Dr Md Abdul Alim, election specialist and former member of the Electoral Reform Commission, spoke with Monorom Polok of The Daily Star about the Election Commission's readiness, the referendum process, and overall preparation for the poll.

**How would you rate the steps taken by the Election Commission and the government to maintain law and order during the election? Do you think these measures are adequate?**

If we look at past elections in Bangladesh, there was usually a clear pattern before the announcement of the schedule. Law enforcement agencies would carry out pre-election drives with three objectives: arresting miscreants who could disrupt the election environment, recovering illegal weapons, and ensuring that licensed arms were deposited at police stations. This time, we did not see such measures taken in advance.

There was some discussion about drives after the shooting of Osman Hadi, but they did not appear well-planned. As a result, we are seeing some incidents from time to time. Although the situation is currently under control, this is a unique election. Some political parties are not participating, and there are known internal and external attempts to disrupt the process. From the beginning, it was clear that law and order would pose a different kind of challenge.

Many of us have been saying that law and order would be one of the biggest challenges during this election cycle. I feel this issue should have been addressed more comprehensively. What was needed was a Comprehensive Election Security Plan based on risk assessment. Once risks are identified, there must be a detailed plan for remedies. I see a gap here. Even if the situation is under control for now, there is no guarantee that it will not deteriorate. These precautions were necessary, but they are largely absent.

**Some people are alleging that the government is supporting a particular party or group. Do you see any basis for such claims?**

At this stage, it still appears to be an allegation—just that. These complaints are not coming from a single party; almost all parties are complaining against the Election Commission. This is not new. During past elections held under political governments, even ruling parties lodged complaints. Often, these allegations reflect political positioning rather than verifiable facts.

That said, elections are extremely sensitive when it comes to neutrality, freedom, and fairness. Even minor allegations must be investigated and scrutinised. The Election Commission has a responsibility to respond to complaints and regularly update all electoral stakeholders through an official channel, but we have not always seen a proper



**Md. Abdul Alim**

institutional response. Sometimes responses come informally through media briefings, but that is not enough.

For the sake of voters and public trust, responses should be written, clear, and public. Whether complaints come from BNP, Jamaat, NCP, or others, the EC should respond explicitly and publish it on the official channel. This would help voters understand its position and strengthen trust in the process. Such a mechanism is essential, because questions will continue right up to election day.

**Recently, the public disclosure of candidates' financial information generated public interest. Although the EC does not audit such information, do you think it should do so in the public interest?**

From the Electoral Reform Commission, we recommended that, given the limited time before the election, verification should at least be done on a sampling basis, with the findings made public. Another important step has already been taken—a new provision has been added to the RPO allowing the EC to investigate and take action for up to five years after the election if a candidate submitted false information or concealed data in their affidavit. This means verification can also take place post-election.

However, full verification before an election is extremely difficult within such a short timeframe. My view is that sampling-based verification should be the first step. Second, the timeframe for verification should be extended so that a deeper review can be conducted before party symbol allocation and campaigning begin. Finally, the new legal provision allowing post-election scrutiny must be actively used.

Voters have a right to know their candidates—their assets, profession, and educational background. This information must be verified rigorously in the public interest.

**The impact of government campaigning on the referendum is still limited, especially at the grassroots level. How do you see this? Also, does the government's stated position in favour of a 'Yes' vote undermine its neutrality?**

In recent days, I have seen some government campaigns involving the referendum, but it is true that they have not yet reached the grassroots. If they fail to do so, problems will arise.

This election is different because voters will cast two votes. If voting takes two minutes per person, and a booth is reserved for 600 voters, for instance, then even 80 percent turnout would require far more

time than the nine hours available for this election. If the process is slow, voters may become frustrated by long queues and leave.

This means training is crucial. Assistant election officers must be well prepared. Voters must also enter the polling booth with their decisions already made. If they try reading and understanding the referendum questions while inside the booth, the process will slow down further.

During previous referendums, extensive campaigns were conducted. This time, political parties are more focused on the parliamentary election. Although BNP and Jamaat have called for a "Yes" vote, it needs to be communicated more widely. Parties must mobilise their grassroots activists.

As for the government's position, in all three previous referendums, the then governments had actively campaigned for a "Yes" vote. This one is a reform government, with reform as its core mandate. It formed various reform commissions and held dialogue with political parties for consensus. I have not seen any major party openly campaigning for a "No" vote. In that context, seeking public support for reform is not unethical.

**This election is different because voters will cast two votes. If voting takes two minutes per person, and a booth is reserved for 600 voters, for instance, then even 80 percent turnout would require far more time than the nine hours available for this election. If the process is slow, voters may become frustrated by long queues and leave. This means training is crucial. Assistant election officers must be well prepared. Voters must also enter the polling booth with their decisions already made.**

**Even before campaigning has begun officially, electioneering is already visible on social media and in public spaces. There are also allegations that religion is being used in electioneering violating the code of conduct. Can the EC address these issues?**

We have seen reports of fines and show-cause notices, but overall monitoring before the official campaign period remains weak. This is a longstanding pattern—enforcement often feels ad hoc.

With the formal allocation of party symbols approaching, which will mark the start of the campaign period, the EC should become much more proactive. Field-level officials must be instructed to monitor the code of conduct rigorously. Early enforcement is crucial to prevent violations from escalating once formal campaigning begins. The law allows for up to six months' imprisonment and a fine of Tk 1.5 lakh for violations.

Social media will play a decisive role, of course. For the first time, it has been formally included in the code of conduct, yet we are already seeing AI-generated misinformation and digital propaganda. Strong monitoring is essential to prevent content that could incite violence.

The EC should form expert monitoring teams—possibly seat-based—to assess harmful language and misinformation. The code prohibits negative or attacking language and the sharing of unverified content. While it may be difficult for ordinary citizens to verify information, those who violate these rules, especially political actors, must still be held accountable.

**As a member of the Electoral Reform Commission, can you tell us how many of your recommendations have actually been implemented? Are you satisfied with the progress so far?**

We made around 250 recommendations. Some key proposals—such as the Election Commissioner Appointment Act and the Delimitation Act—have not yet been implemented. However, several important reforms have been incorporated into the RPO. These include recognising the army as part of law enforcement, requiring alliance candidates to use their own party symbols, and allowing an MP's status to be cancelled for submitting false affidavits.

The "No Vote" option has not been revived as we proposed; it has been limited to single-candidate constituencies. Structural reforms such as establishing an Upper House in parliament or increasing women's representation require constitutional amendments and depend on the referendum.

I am not fully satisfied, but I remain hopeful. Many recommendations could still be implemented after the election and the referendum process.

## Proactive steps can future-proof jobs in the AI era



### AN OPEN DIALOGUE

Dr Abdullah Shibli is an economist and academic, currently working with a non-profit fiscal intermediary in Boston, US. He previously worked for the World Bank and Harvard University.

#### ABDULLAH SHIBLI

There is a widespread fear across US campuses, businesses, and industries that the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) and its rapid integration into all spheres of our lives will lead to job losses and a lifestyle where robots control our daily routines. However, further exploration of this notion shows that much of this projection is exaggerated, fed by our fascination with dystopian science fiction. In reality, AI will gradually make inroads into transportation, manufacturing, and agriculture; AI-driven robotics will replace routine tasks, provide health and other services, thus boosting financial growth.

My commentary is for the younger generation considering their career paths, today's industry leaders evaluating investment opportunities for the future, and thought leaders in academia and AI research.

Let us take stock of the current situation in the US and other advanced countries. AI is poised to eliminate a variety of jobs, particularly those involving routine tasks, data analysis, and customer service, while roles requiring human judgement and emotional intelligence are likely to remain safe.

Microsoft developed an "AI applicability score" to measure how well AI can perform the core tasks of various jobs. Jobs with high scores are more likely to be transformed or replaced by AI technologies. Many of these jobs are in domains such as computer and mathematical fields, office and administrative support, and sales.

In a recent article in *The New York Times*, Sal Khan, the Bangladeshi founder of Khan Academy, wrote, "I believe artificial intelligence will displace workers at a scale many people don't yet realize." However, he also calls on business leaders to invest in retraining workers to adapt to new workplace technologies.

such as planting, harvesting, monitoring crop health, and managing livestock, significantly enhancing productivity and efficiency in modern agriculture.

While AI will enable us to work and learn better, there will be a growing need for skilled labour to operate and manage this new technology. The challenge our society, particularly our new generation, faces is adapting to the changing job market

microeconomics, microeconomic theory, and behavioural economics.

Sal Khan advised big companies to invest one percent of their profits in training their own workers to adapt to AI and robotics. He estimates that one percent of the combined profit of a dozen of the world's largest corporations would create a \$10 billion annual fund.

Now, let us turn to retraining the workers

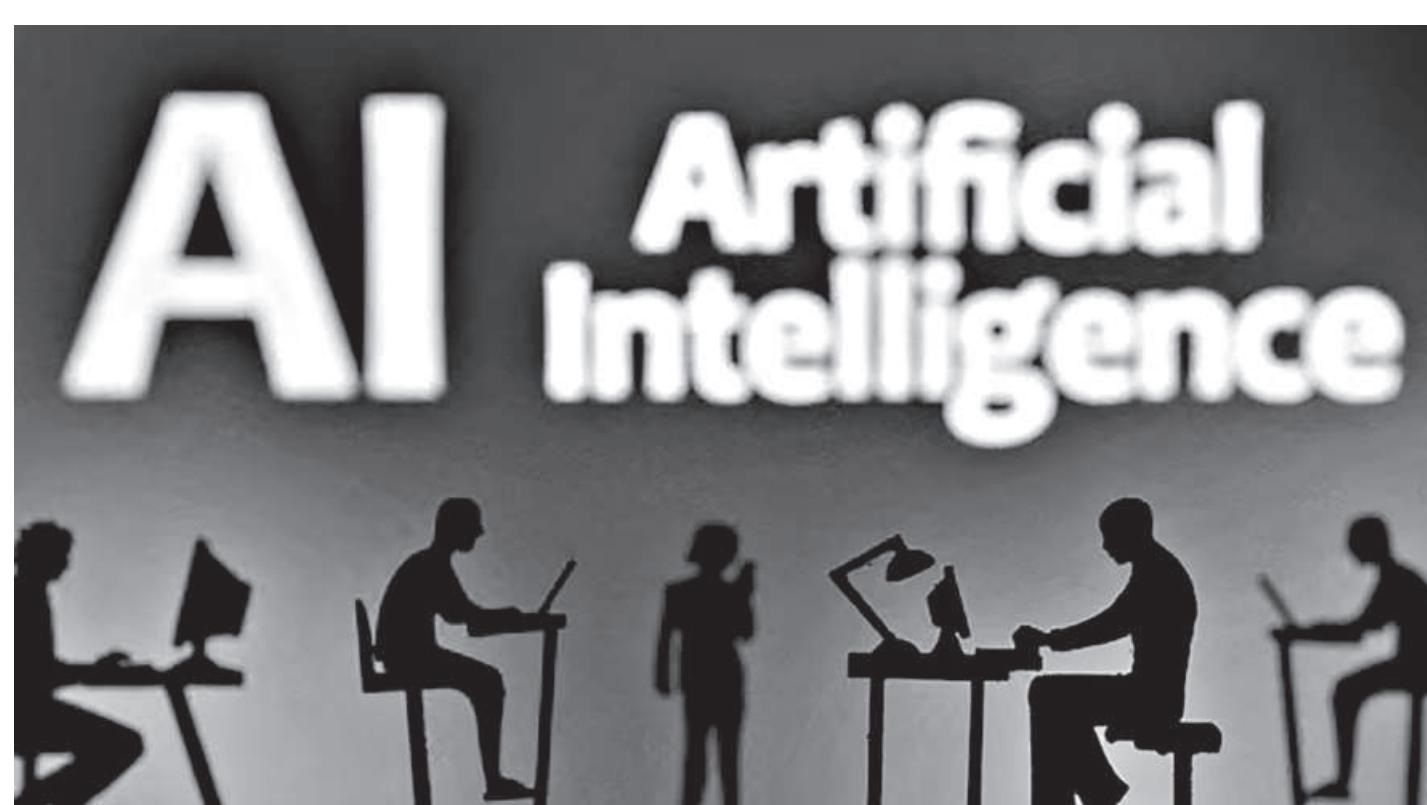
The US Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that nearly two million jobs will open up annually in the healthcare sector during the next decade. UNESCO estimates a global shortage of 44 million teachers by 2030. In the US, the construction industry needs more than 500,000 additional workers annually just to meet demand; meanwhile, openings for electricians and plumbers are growing faster than average. The hospitality and elder care industries—work rooted in empathy and human presence—are expanding, not shrinking.

Our teachers must adapt to the changing times and prepare our students for smart jobs. With advances in AI technology, many jobs will undergo transformation, and some roles will face a significant risk of automation. Workers in knowledge-intensive fields should be proactive in adapting to these changes, seeking opportunities for reskilling and embracing new technologies to remain competitive in the evolving job market.

At the 1 Billion Followers Summit 2026 in Dubai, educators, content creators, and learning designers called for a fundamental shift in how education is delivered. Education must pivot from rote learning to skill-based development (problem-solving, digital literacy) to equip graduates for this evolving landscape, focusing less on degrees and more on practical workplace readiness, as AI displaces some roles while boosting productivity.

Turning to agriculture, it is a sector that is crucial in meeting the food demand for a growing population projected to reach 9.7 billion people by 2050. Robots can operate continuously, performing tasks faster and more accurately than human labour, which is in short supply anyway. While the integration of robotics in agriculture presents numerous advantages, challenges such as high initial costs and the need for skilled operators exist. Any potential job displacement can be addressed by strengthening the skilled crafts and trades required to sustain the AI-driven economy.

The goal of universities should be to move away from a mindset focused solely on producing more graduates and towards a system that equips students with workplace skills. To do that, educational reforms must transition immediately from exam-based assessment to skill-based learning.



FILE VISUAL: REUTERS

AI-enhanced humanoid robots and autonomous machines will be in high demand across warehouses, supply chains, transportation, and agriculture. In Bangladesh, many manual tasks, including irrigation, tilling, and fertiliser application, have seen the intrusion of mechanisation for decades.

Robotics in agriculture, often referred to as "agribots," encompasses a range of automated technologies designed to improve farming practices. These robots perform essential tasks

and economic ecosystem. Universities and industry leaders will now need to have a subcommittee to study and better understand the societal and economic impact of AI.

Microsoft itself is dedicating some energy to understanding the future of the workplace. It is providing considerable funding to graduate students engaged in research, market design, the economics of Artificial Intelligence (AI), economics and computation, social learning, applied

who will undoubtedly be affected by changes in the job market. The revolution brought about by AI and automation is fuelled by chipmakers such as Nvidia. In a recent interview, Jensen Huang, the founder and CEO of Nvidia, said that polls show AI-driven robots will be used for office and administrative support, domestic work, and repetitive tasks. However, robots will not be able to outperform humans in healthcare, classroom teaching, and scores of other jobs.

# 'AATKA': Raba-Nidhi swing at the bleachers

SHARMIN JOYA

Their creative journey began with a professional collaboration on the song *Jao Janina*, and soon they started shaping their work together on the web project *Khob Kachheri Keu* released last year. Raba Khan and Arafat Mohsin Nidhi not only share a personal bond, but their professional connection has grown even stronger over time. The real-life couple has been collaborating creatively for many years.

Last year, their debut web film, *Khob Kachheri Keu*, was highly appreciated by fans of the romantic genre. This time, they reunited for another project—a web series—marking their second collaboration with Chorki. The six-episode horror-comedy series, titled *Aatka*, was written by Raba and directed by Arafat, and released on January 15 on Chorki. The production features a star-studded cast including Abul Hayat, Rosey Siddiqui, Mousomi Nag, Sunerah Binte Kamal, Arosh Khan, and Shohel Mondol.

In conversation with The Daily Star, the duo shared their experiences, memories, and upcoming plans.

Raba begins, "The reason I wanted to make this web series is that it's a story I've had in my head for many years. When I read the full script, I realised I had managed to write something so substantial. Interestingly, during pre-production, when the first draft was printed to share with the costume and art departments, I saw how thick it had become. I usually write on my phone, so until it was printed, I hadn't realised its full size. Seeing it like a book made me feel a mix of disbelief and pride—wow."

Arafat adds, "The experience was incredible. Unlike a standard 100- or 110-minute film, a series allows the story to breathe, to explore multiple characters. In this one, we had eleven prominent artistes—a true star cast—and working with them was eye-opening. Watching them bring Raba's writing to life, especially senior artistes performing their first major scenes, was a masterclass in itself. Each episode felt like a complete experience, not just a sequence of shots."

Raba continues, "This is probably my sixth fully written script, dialogues included. The story had lived in my head for years—I'd never actually written it down before. I'd discussed it countless times with Arafat and my brother Fahad, and I knew this project would require a big budget and full commitment from everyone—it had to be a web series. Each character has a special bond with me, and every scene carries a memory. On set, everything felt seamless. Even shooting the climax on day one felt completely natural. We were all so emotional—literally in tears. Special thanks to Arafat for creating the background score live while we shot the scene. Challenging, yes, but beautifully executed—I was utterly happy."

Arafat emphasises the importance of having the writer on set. "Contemporary writers staying on set is invaluable. A writer ensures the original intent of the character is maintained during dialogue delivery. There's no need to improvise because the writer can instantly rewrite if a scene is missing or the story flow isn't working. During *Aatka*, Raba rewrote entire scenes on the back of the script to maintain narrative flow. She can explain the characters better than a director can, often at a much deeper level."



working for many, many years. If you ask who's the bossy one, it's definitely me, but he's far more of a collaborator than I am. Our connection is intuitive. In fact, the title *Aatka* came from our shared vocabulary. Both our families are from Old Dhaka and Mymensingh, and it's a word we often use to describe something getting stuck. It perfectly fits the story—a family drama with comedy, horror, and

He adds, "Working with veterans like Abul Hayat taught me what it means to stay grounded as an artiste, to remain humble. Every rehearsal, every interaction, was a lesson. And collaborating with artistes I grew up admiring—people like Saberi Apa, Arosh, and Mousomi—was surreal. It's rare to get such an aligned ensemble where everyone truly understands the story and characters."

Discussing their creative partnership as a couple, Raba laughs,

fun elements."

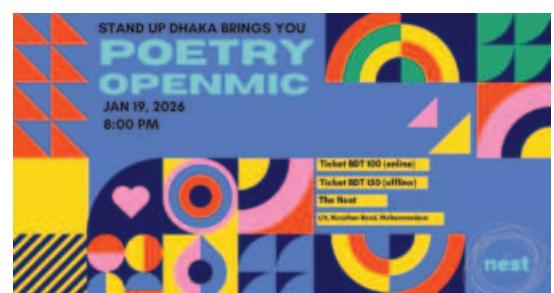
Raba also expresses excitement about Arafat's transition from music to filmmaking while acknowledging his musical legacy: "While I love musician Arafat, and he has an established body of work as a musician, I am really looking forward to Director Arafat and the special theme he composed for this project."

Arafat concludes, "For me, *Aatka* isn't just a series—it's the magic of collaboration. From Raba's writing to the ensemble cast and my music, every element has been an opportunity to learn, experiment, and grow. The care and craft we put into it, I hope, will resonate with the audience too."

Sharing his upcoming projects, Arafat revealed that he is composing background scores and songs for Eid films including *Prince, Rakkhosh*, and later Raithan Rafi's *Andhar*.



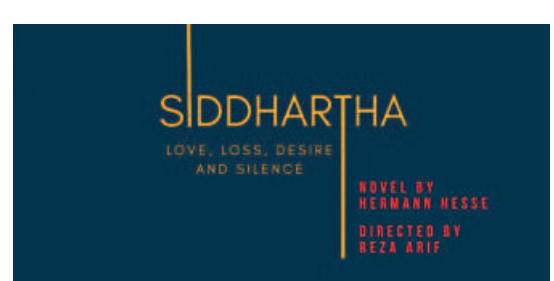
## OUT AND ABOUT IN DHAKA



'Poetry Open Mic'  
Jan 19 | 8 pm onwards  
The Nest



'Café de Volte'  
Jan 23 | 5 pm onwards  
Studio Theatre Hall, BSA



'Siddhartha'  
Jan 24 | 7 pm onwards  
Experimental Theatre Hall, BSA

## WHAT'S PLAYING

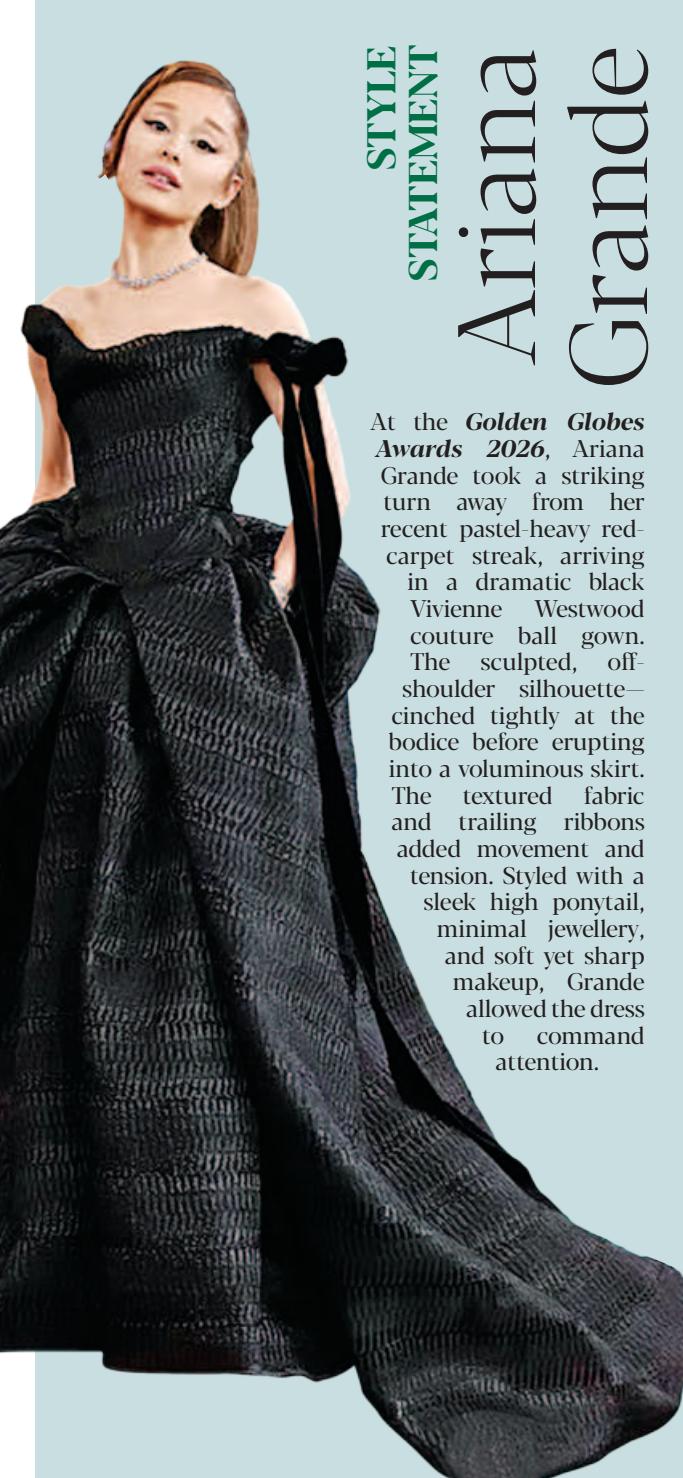


## 'Golden' by KPop Demon Hunters

**Golden** emerges as the sonic heartbeat of KPop Demon Hunters, fusing glossy K pop maximalism with a cinematic, shadow-tinted edge. Built on soaring hooks and razor-sharp beats, the track mirrors the film's central tension—the dazzling allure of idol stardom colliding with a hidden world of supernatural warfare.

What makes **Golden** stand out is its sense of scale. The production is polished and stadium-ready. Vocals glide between confidence and vulnerability, reinforcing the song's themes of resilience, unity, and power reclaimed.

As both a pop anthem and a narrative device, **Golden** works effortlessly beyond the screen.



**STYLE STATEMENT**  
Ariana Grande

At the **Golden Globes Awards 2026**, Ariana Grande took a striking turn away from her recent pastel-heavy red-carpet streak, arriving in a dramatic black Vivienne Westwood couture ball gown. The sculpted, off-shoulder silhouette—cinched tightly at the bodice before erupting into a voluminous skirt. The textured fabric and trailing ribbons added movement and tension. Styled with a sleek high ponytail, minimal jewellery, and soft yet sharp makeup, Grande allowed the dress to command attention.



## TV TALKIES

### His & Hers

**His & Hers** is a sharp and engaging TV drama that blends journalism, crime, and emotional tension. Released on Netflix in 2026, the thriller follows two estranged spouses, a detective and a news reporter, who are drawn into the same murder case, each suspecting the other. The series keeps the pace tight, the twists effective, and the emotions raw. With its layered storytelling and gripping suspense, **His & Hers** quickly climbed into Netflix's Top 10, proving its strong audience appeal.

## RENDY STREAMS

### Netflix

Agatha Christie's Seven Dials



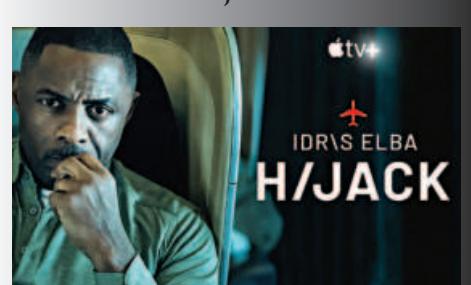
### Hulu

Tell Me Lies



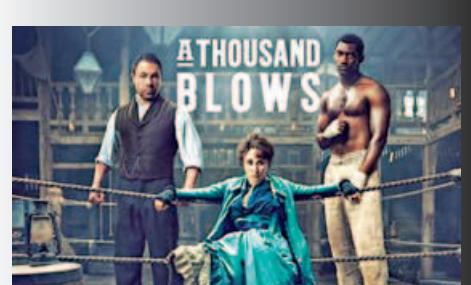
### Apple TV+

Hijack



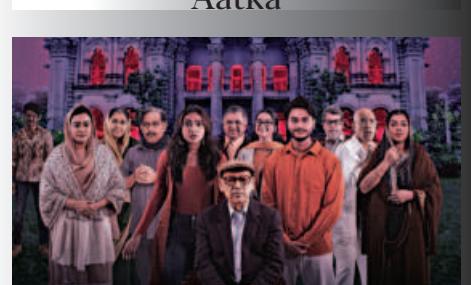
### Hulu

A Thousand Blows



### Chorki

Aatka





A straw-laden three-wheeler moves along a busy regional highway in Kishoreganj, posing a serious safety hazard. The operation of such light vehicles on highways is illegal, yet they continue to ply. The photo was taken at Piripur in Bajitpur upazila recently.

PHOTO: TAFSILUL AZIZ

**Bangladesh backs rules-based order, collective action**  
**Says Touhid**

UNB, Dhaka

Foreign Affairs Adviser Md Touhid Hossain yesterday said Bangladesh, as a responsible neighbour and an active member of the UN and other international bodies, advocates a rules-based international order and collective action in addressing global economic challenges.

"We support active engagement to promote dialogue, confidence-building, and cooperative solutions to shared concerns," he said while speaking at the inaugural session of the SAFA (South Asian Federation of Accountants) International Conference in Dhaka.

Chairperson of Bangladesh Competition Commission AHM Ahsan and Financial Reporting Council Bangladesh Chairman Dr Sajid Hossain Bhuiyan attended the conference as special guests.

## Supporter of BNP rebel candidate stabbed to death

**Two held in Mymensingh**

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A supporter of a BNP rebel candidate from Mymensingh-1 was stabbed to death in the district's Dhabaura upazila on Friday evening.

Police have detained two people in connection with the murder that took place at Ershad Bazar in Dhabaura around 6:00pm.

The deceased -- Nazrul Islam, 40, -- was a supporter of independent candidate Salman Omar Rubel from Mymensingh-1 (Haluaghata-Dhabaura) constituency, said Additional Superintendent of Police (Administration and Finance) Md Abdullah Al Mamun.

Quoting locals, the police official said the election office of Salman was inaugurated at Ershad Bazar. While leaving the venue after the inauguration, an altercation broke out between two groups, which later turned into a clash.

During the clash, Nazrul was critically injured after being stabbed. He died at Dhabaura Upazila Health Complex, the ASP said.

Salman alleged, "A planned attack was carried out whilst my activists were leaving after the inauguration of the office. My supporter, Nazrul Islam, was



Nazrul Islam

stabbed to death. The attackers are activists of the BNP nominee. We demand immediate arrest of those involved."

Denying his activists' involvement in the killing, BNP nominee and party's Joint Secretary General Syed Emran Saleh Prince said, "If my activists are involved in such a heinous crime, police should arrest them to bring them to book. I have zero tolerance over such incidents."

Dhabaura Police Station OC Shafiqul Islam said, "The killing occurred during a clash between two factions of BNP. Legal proceedings are underway."

No written complaint was filed as of yesterday, he said.

ASP Al Mamun said two people have been arrested in connection with the incident, but their identities have not yet been disclosed as verification is underway.

Meanwhile, agitated BNP supporters, led by Salman, brought out a procession with Nazrul's body at Dhabaura upazila headquarters yesterday afternoon, demanding immediate arrest of those involved in the killing.

Later, the body was buried at his family graveyard following a namaz-e-janaza after Isha prayers.

## Bhasan Char Sandwip's, not Hatiya's

FROM PAGE 3  
a gazette notification placing Bhasan Char under the jurisdiction of Hatiya, sparking social movements and protests among Sandwip residents.

Following the Awami League government's ouster in 2024, the executive branch took steps to resolve the issue as per court directives. An 18-member technical committee was formed, comprising government officials and professionals from both Chattogram and Noakhali districts.

The committee reached its conclusion after an extensive review of historical documents, CS (cadastral survey) and RS (revisional survey) records, and analysis of satellite imagery, said officials of the Chattogram Divisional Commissioner's office.

The inter-district technical team conducted a field visit to Bhasan Char on November 19 last year and collected precise coordinate data using GPS the following day.

To ensure accuracy,

the committee used Georeferencing to superimpose the Lat-Long (latitude and longitude) data from the CS maps of Chattogram's Sandwip upazila onto modern Google satellite imagery. This digital mapping clearly demonstrated that all six mouzas of Bhasan Char geographically align with the historical boundaries of Sandwip.

Dr Md Ziauddin, divisional commissioner of Chattogram, confirmed that the committee

submitted its final report to the ministry in the first week of December.

After reviewing the report, the land ministry made the decision and issued directives accordingly.

**PRAYER TIMING**  
JANUARY 18

Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha  
AZAN 5:30 12:45 4:15 5:40 7:00  
JAMAT 6:05 1:15 4:30 5:44 7:30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

## Pushed towards

FROM PAGE 4  
maximise the chances of reunification with their mothers," he said, highlighting the need for capacity building within the Forest Department.

As short-term mitigation measures, he also recommended installing protective net fencing around fish ponds and duck farms near waterbodies, clearing surrounding vegetation and installing light posts.

Aziz criticised the Forest Department's practice of releasing rescued fishing cats deep inside forests, noting that the species prefers bushes near human settlements and wetlands and should be released at or near conflict sites, which are often their natural habitats.

However, he stressed that awareness campaigns must be carried out among people living in conflict hotspots.

## 4 killed, 18 hurt

FROM PAGE 4  
Suman Chowdhury, officer-in-charge of Jaikalash Highway Police Station, said the bus fell into a roadside ditch.

In Chattogram, a motorcycle rider was killed and another injured in a collision with a car, locally known as Chander Gari, on Khiram-Nanupur in Lombatila area of Fatikchhari upazila.

Mohammad Shakil, 41, from Mogkata village in Khiram area, died on the spot, said police.

The injured -- Alauddin Talukder from Anwara upazila, who was on the bike -- was taken to Chattogram Medical College Hospital.

The accident might have occurred due to poor visibility amid dense fog in the morning, said police.

## Mob culture pushing

FROM PAGE 3  
"If I have to constantly worry about facing an online mob or demands for my dismissal while teaching sociology or transitional justice, then academic freedom does not exist," she said.

She also criticised changing textbooks and history with every change of government.

On justice, she said expectations for accountability for the July killings remain unmet.

"Instead of justice, a culture of revenge is prevailing. Filing vague cases against thousands of people has become a tool for extortion," she added.

Writer Firoz Ahmed warned that without job creation and social diversity, unrest could turn into long-term instability. He said continued discontent could push Bangladesh toward a situation where no government can complete a full term.

Supreme Court lawyer Manzur-Al Matin said the rule of law is being replaced by "viral justice".

He said public trust in institutions has collapsed, pushing people to seek action through social media campaigns. The interim government has stepped back from reforms out of fear of online mobs, he added.

Prof Sayeed Ferdous of Jahangirnagar University said the administration appears fearful and submissive to powerful forces, and that the promised "new settlement" has not emerged.

Instead, he said, the government is repeating the old system of partisanship and revenge.

Economist Prof Rashed Al Mahmud Titumir said although the previous regime's misinformation networks have collapsed, the risk of violence remains.

## RMG worker

FROM PAGE 4  
house for the preparations.

On Thursday night, a group of local men came to the house, brought allegation of "illicit relationship" against them and demanded Tk 2 lakh. They threatened to hand the couple over to police or even kill them if the money was not paid.

When the duo failed to pay, the group allegedly forced them out of the house around midnight on Thursday. Pretending to help the girl board a launch, they detained Sajib and took the victim to an abandoned embankment in Taltoli area.

There, two of the accused -- Alamin and Maksud -- raped her, while others beat Sajib and assisted in the crime, the case statement added.

Md Farid, officer-in-charge of Manpura Police Station, said police are conducting raids to arrest the accused. The victim has been sent to a hospital for medical examination.

## Candidates' names

FROM PAGE 3

Postal ballots for the national election and the constitutional referendum were dispatched by January 8.

The ballots contain 118 symbols of registered political parties and independent candidates. The Awami League's boat symbol does not appear, as the party's registration remains suspended. A "No" vote option is also included.

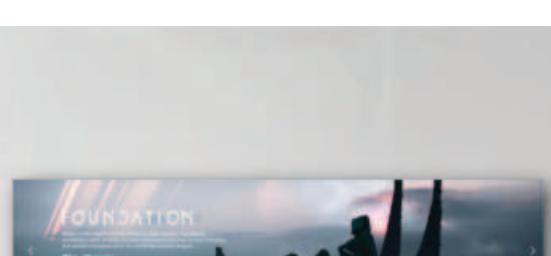
Ahead of the national election and referendum, election symbols will be distributed on January 21. Voters will then be able to cast their ballots digitally by selecting their preferred candidates after reviewing the names and symbols for their constituencies.

From January 22, voters can return completed postal ballots by mail.

Ballots must reach returning officers by 4:30pm on polling day to be counted. EC officials said the dispatch and return process takes between 16 and 28 days, depending on the country.

Meanwhile, on January 16, the BNP filed a complaint alleging that its name and symbol were not clearly visible on postal ballots sent to expatriate voters.

The party claimed its name and symbol were placed in the middle of the ballot, while several other parties' symbols appeared in the first row, raising concerns of bias.



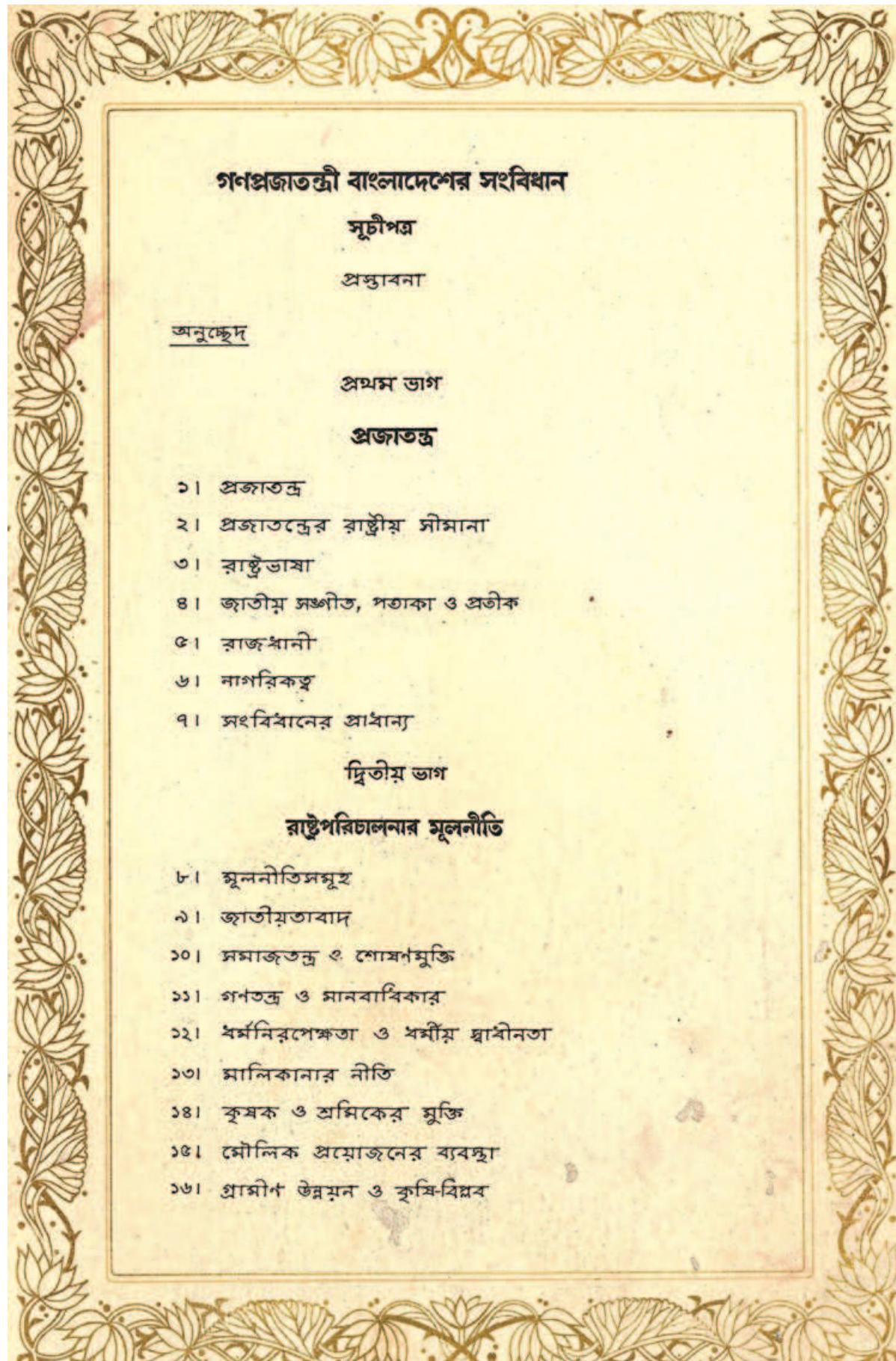
Available at RANGS eMART and Authorized DEALER SHOWROOM



## LAW VISION

# OUR CONSTITUTION

## between resurrection and revolution



MD. IMAMUR RAHMAN

Into the fifty-fourth year of the Constitution's commencement, the mood in Bangladesh is less about celebration and more about its forensic post-mortem. We stand in the shadow of the July Uprising of 2024, a seismic event that did not merely topple an autocratic regime but shattered the illusion of constitutional continuity. For over a decade, we witnessed what is termed 'autocratic legalism': the weaponisation of the law to dismantle the rule of law. Today, as an interim government navigates the turbulent waters of the 'July Charter' and the Supreme Court resurfaces the caretaker government system, we must ask a discomforting question: Is the Constitution of 1972 still the supreme law of the Republic, or have the events of the last eighteen months rendered it a 'zombie' document: walking, but spiritually dead?

The conventional narrative has always been one of reverence for the Constitution's 'founding moment' of 1972. Yet, the constitutional reality of 2025 perhaps demands we abandon this fetishism. The 1972 text, for all its transformative promise, failed to prevent the authoritarian slide. It was not suspended by martial law this time; it was hollowed out from within, amendment by amendment. Into the fifty-fourth year now, we are witnessing a unique collision between two jurisprudential forces: the restorative impulse of the judiciary and the reconstructive demand of the people.

The recent judicial activism, specifically the Appellate Division's judgment restoring the Thirteenth Amendment, offers a fascinating case study in 'judicial repentance'. By reviving the non-party caretaker government system, the Court has arguably attempted to correct the 'original sin' of its 2011 judgment, which many argue paved the way for successive uncontested elections. However, this 'resurrection' is fraught with peril. In the *Anwar Hossain Chowdhury* case, the Court famously established the basic structure doctrine to protect the Constitution from legislative vandalism. But for the last decade, this doctrine was dormant when it mattered the most. The sudden revival, while politically popular, raises a profound question of constituent power. Can the judiciary, a constituted power, unilaterally rewrite the political rules to atone for its past silence? This aligns with the theory of 'unconstitutional constitutional amendments', but in reverse. We are witnessing a 'judicial unamendment', where the Court

strips away the accretions of the authoritarian era. While the outcome, fair elections, is desirable, the process entrenches judicial supremacy over a political sphere still in flux.

The elephant in the room is indeed the 'July Charter'. This document, born from the 2024 uprising, represents what legal theorists call a 'constitutional moment'. It is an expression of the residual constituent power: the raw, uncodified sovereignty of the people that emerges when the formal legal order loses legitimacy. The tension between the 1972 Constitution and the July Charter is the defining legal struggle of our time. While the Constitution assumes continuity, the Charter assumes rupture. The recent gazette announcing a referendum on the Charter's provisions frames this explicitly: it is an exercise of 'sovereign will and authority', bypassing the

on 'political constitutionalism', the idea that political checks will correct excesses. Bangladesh, tragically, fell between these two stools. We had neither the robust judicial shield of India nor the political culture of the UK. We had a codified constitution that was manipulated with the ease of a statute. The Commonwealth experience shows that post-authoritarian transitions often fall into the trap of 'isomorphic mimicry', mimicking the forms of democracy without addressing the functions of power. If this anniversary serves only to reinstate the mechanisms of 2008 or 1996, we have learned nothing. The 'residual power' unleashed in 2024 demands structural innovation, not just archival restoration.

As we look to the future, the Constitution at present stands at a bifurcation point. One path leads to a 'restored' 1972 order: a comfortable, nostalgic fiction where we pretend the lack of a sustainable politico-constitutional culture was merely a bad dream. The other path, the harder one, is to accept that the 1972 Constitution, for all its historic weight, was insufficient. This acceptance would require us to formalise the July Charter not as a mere amendment, but as a valid exercise of primary constituent power. It would mean acknowledging that the 'basic structure' of 1972 is negotiable if the people, in a moment of revolutionary clarity, decide to renegotiate it. The danger is that we are trying to pour new wine, the revolutionary mandate, into old wineskins. The restoration of the Supreme Judicial Council and the Caretaker Government are valiant attempts to patch the hull, but the ship itself may be obsolete.

Years ago, the Constitution of Bangladesh was born out of a War of independence. It was a document of hope. Today, it is a document of survival. The task for legal scholars, judges, and the citizenry is not to blindly worship the text of 1972, but to interrogate it. If the July Uprising taught us anything, it is that sovereignty does not reside in the Ramna buildings of the Supreme Court or the *Sangsad Bhaban*; it resides, ultimately and dormant, in the streets. As we mark this day, let us not celebrate the survival of the Constitution, but rather the revival of the constituent power that created it. In this moment, we must confront the paradoxical truth our situation presents: The Constitution is dead; long live the Constitution.

*The writer is Assistant Professor of Law and Chair of the Department of Law at ZH Sikder University of Science and Technology.*

## LAW IN THEORY

# Conceptualising mob justice in post-uprising Bangladesh

MD ASHIFUZZAMAN ANIK

While mob justice is a worldwide concern, its impact in Bangladesh has severely intensified in the post-uprising period. However, the term 'mob justice' cannot be meaningfully analysed without first understanding the concept of 'justice' itself.

Justice is one of the most aspired yet least defined terms in political theory. Philosophers spanning from Plato to Adam Smith have formulated theories of justice that include certain elements. However, in my opinion, these definitions, *per se*, fail to capture the comprehensive domain of justice. For instance, Plato defined justice as the peculiar excellence of mind and injustice as its defect. Although this definition covers a broad area by employing a teleological approach, Plato's tripartite division of society into entrepreneurs (appetite), auxiliaries (spirit), and guardians (reason) can be criticised for promoting a static and hierarchical social order. John Rawls' theory of justice, comprising 'equal liberty principle' (everyone has the same basic rights and freedoms) and 'difference principle' (social and economic inequalities are permissible only if they benefit the least advantaged members of society) show promise. However, it stands weak when it is concerned with legal justice, whether substantive or procedural. Robert Nozick's entitlement theory is confined to property allocation. Hence, a thorough grasp of justice warrants a context-sensitive approach for better understanding. Yet, it is clear that



fairness is a common term underlying all dominant theories.

Contrarily, a typical mob justice scenario involves hostile conflicts and deaths or injuries of the so-called accused. It can be defined as a situation where a crowd of people take the law into their own hands, act as accusers, jury and judge and punish a criminal suspect or an alleged criminal on the spot (Robin et al). In other words, the mob in these cases usurp the role of

the executive to investigate a case, that of the judiciary to try the case, convict and punish the wrongdoer, and that of the legislature to legislate the punishment for the alleged person. By arrogating to themselves the functions of the State, the mob, therefore, strikes at the very foundation of a State built on a social contract. Emphasising the indispensability of an organised State, Thomas Hobbes aptly observed that 'without a common power to

killing or injuring every alleged offender, whether minor, female or the aged, Rawls' equal liberty principle and Nozick's entitlement theory are beats of a distant drum. Evidently, no theory of justice offers a synthesis in the Hegelian dialectics sense to harmonise 'mob justice' with 'justice'. Therefore, the expression 'mob justice' itself is a misnomer, for the actions of a mob negate, rather than uphold, the fundamental values of justice.

Within our constitutional dispensation, Articles 27 (equality before law), 28 (prohibition on discrimination), 31 (right to protection of law) and 32 (right to life and liberty) are necessary concomitants of distributive justice, whereas Articles 33 (safeguards as to arrest and detention) and 35 (protection in respect of trial and punishment) reflect procedural justice. However, the procedural legal justice outlined in Articles 33 and 35 is shattered into pieces when the mob arbitrarily executes punishments.

To conclude, mob justice in Bangladesh has now escalated to an alarming extent, with incidents of accused persons being attacked even on court premises. The recent incident of a Hindu man getting lynched to death over allegations of blasphemy in Bhaluka, Mymensingh bearing the evidence of it. If the continued exposure to so-called 'mob justice' persists, it will inevitably result in a loss of public confidence in the legal system and a blatant erosion of the rule of law.

*The writer is law student at the University of Dhaka.*

## BCB seeks group swap in meeting with ICC

FROM PAGE 16

Apart from these matches, Sri Lanka will host the Group A matches involving Pakistan during the group phase of the upcoming marquee event.

The discussions were conducted in a constructive, cordial and professional manner, with all parties engaging openly on the relevant issues. Among other points, the possibility of moving Bangladesh to a different group as a means of facilitating the matter with minimum logistical adjustments was discussed," a BCB press release stated.

Meanwhile, during the

discussions, the BCB reiterated its formal request to the ICC to relocate Bangladesh's matches to Sri Lanka.

The board also shared the views and concerns of the Bangladesh government regarding the safety and security of the team, Bangladeshi fans, media personnel and other stakeholders, the press release further stated.

The ICC delegation was represented by Gaurav Saxena, General Manager, Events and Corporate Communications, and Andrew Ephgrave, General Manager of the Integrity Unit.

Both the BCB and the

action" if Iran executed protesters, said Tehran's leaders had called off mass hangings.

"I greatly respect the fact that all scheduled hangings, which were to take place yesterday (Over 800 of them), have been cancelled by the leadership of Iran. Thank you!" he posted on social media.

Iran had not announced plans for such executions nor said it had cancelled them.

Iranian media affiliated with the government reported that several "ringleaders" of the unrest, including a woman named Nazanin Baradaran, had been taken into custody following what they

described as "complex intelligence operations".

The reports claimed that Baradaran, operating under the pseudonym Raha Parham on behalf of Reza Pahlavi – the exiled son of Iran's last shah – had played a leading role in organising the unrest. Reuters could not verify the report or her identity.

Alarm has mounted over the reported death toll during the crackdown, as verifying cases remains difficult under severe internet restrictions.

Monitor Netblocks yesterday said that internet connectivity in Iran rose "very" slightly, more than 200 hours into the nationwide internet shutdown.

Rights groups have warned that the blackout has been aimed at concealing the extent of the violence during the crackdown.

Norway-based rights group Iran Human Rights (IHR) says 3,428 protesters have been verified to have been killed by security forces, but warns the actual toll could be several times higher.

Other estimates place the death toll at more than 5,000 – and possibly as high as 20,000, IHR said.

The opposition Iran International channel based outside the country has said at least 12,000 people were killed during the protests, citing senior government and security sources.

## Trump 'guilty of Iran casualties'

FROM PAGE 16

Trump, accusing him of being "guilty for the casualties, damages and accusations he has levelled against the Iranian nation".

"This was an American conspiracy," he said, adding that "America's goal is to swallow Iran... the goal is to put Iran back under military, political and economic domination".

While Washington has appeared to have stepped back, Trump has said he has not ruled out military options and made clear he was keeping a close eye on whether any protesters were executed.

Trump, who had threatened "very strong

## Jamaat to take most vacant seats

FROM PAGE 16

"We have always said that our door is open to everyone. That has always been our message, and that message still stands," Zubair told reporters at the party office in Mughbazar yesterday.

On Thursday, top leaders of 10 parties under Jamaat's leadership announced at a press conference that the seat-sharing deal had been finalised for 253 constituencies, with 47 left vacant for Islami Andolan.

In the seat sharing arrangement announced in Islami Andolan's absence, Jamaat alone took 179 seats.

Among the partners, the NCP received 30 seats, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis 20, Khelafat Majlis 10, LDP seven, Amar Bangladesh Party (AB Party) three, Bangladesh Nizame-Islam Party two and Bangladesh Development Party two.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh

Khelafat Andolan and the Jatiya Ganatantrik Party (Jagpa) announced they would not field candidates this time, citing Jamaat's assurance of "due consideration" after the election.

On Friday, Islami Andolan declared at a press conference at its central office in Old Paltan that it would contest the election independently, stating that it had been ignored and disrespected by Jamaat.

With the alliance now failing to reach a consensus, preparations are underway to field candidates in the vacant seats.

A senior leader of the Jamaat-led alliance, speaking on condition of anonymity, said, "There is really no time left now for all parties to sit together and discuss what to do with the vacant seats. A section of the top leaders will sit and

finalise it. Essentially, these 47 seats will be distributed among Jamaat, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis and the NCP. The larger share will go to Jamaat."

Asked how many seats each party might get, he said, "It is not final yet. As per the preliminary discussions, Jamaat may take 37 to 38 seats. The remaining ones will be divided between the NCP and Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis."

NCP leaders, seeking anonymity, told The Daily Star that they have asked to be allocated at least 10 more seats while discussions continue.

Monira Sharmin, joint convener and general secretary of the Election Management Committee, said, "The NCP has already confirmed 30 seats, although 27 of them have been publicly announced. We are now trying to secure a few more."

In early February, whichever party is ahead will be supported by the others."

Meanwhile, Khelafat Majlis Secretary General Ahmad Abdul Qader, whose party received 10 seats in the initial deal, said they are now seeking four to five more.

AB Party Chairman Mojibur Rahman Monju, whose party was allotted three seats, said yesterday afternoon, "We have requested Jamaat to allocate another five seats for us."

Munshi also filed a

## 'We'll always stand by you'

FROM PAGE 16

uncompromising stand against injustice through conspiracy or propaganda."

Tarique also said the only way for families of victims to receive justice under the country's laws is to establish a democratic government that reflects the aspirations of the people.

Urging all to remain vigilant against any attempts by certain quarters to obstruct the country's democratic transition, he said his party intends to keep showing restraint despite what he described as the Election Commission's recent controversial positions.

"Those who are trying, using various pretexts, to create controversy and once again ruin the democratic path must not be allowed to succeed."

Speaking at the event, BNP Standing Committee member Salahuddin Ahmed recalled his own experience of enforced disappearance and said the families of the victims have one clear demand that his party will fulfill.

"If Allah brings the BNP to power, justice will be delivered in all the cases of enforced disappearances and killings."

Stating that Tarique's northern region tour was postponed at the EC's request, he said, "The Election Commission and a political party thought this was our weakness. But no, this is our decency. I am saying it again – the way a certain political party is not a crime..."

Safa, whose father Sohel was also a Chhatra Dal leader who went missing on December 2, 2013, said she was only two months old when he was taken away. "I have no memory of him... My life feels incomplete

without him." She is now 13.

Shahriar Kabir Ratul, son of missing BNP leader Humayun Kabir, said nearly 12 years have passed without any trace of him. "We have searched everywhere. Where is my father?"

Lamia Akter Mim was only three years old when her father, BNP activist Kausar Hossain, disappeared from Bashundhara Residential Area on December 4, 2013. "I don't even know what it's like to have a father. If I had known I would lose him, I would have held him close..."

Shammi Akter, wife of BNP activist Khalid Hasan, said it is unbearable to walk the streets carrying her husband's photograph. "We only want to know where he is and to see justice done."

Chhatra Dal leader Mazarul Islam Russell's sister Nusrat Jahan Laboni said her family has repeatedly faced harassment because of their political identity.

As Russell's mother embraced Tarique and spoke, he listened in silence and offered comfort.

Missing BNP leader Ilias Ali's wife Tahsina Rushdil Luna called for the rehabilitation of families destroyed by enforced disappearances.

Ilias was the organising secretary of Sylhet division BNP when he was forcibly disappeared from Dhaka on the night of April 17, 2012.

## Jamaat-IAB split a blow

FROM PAGE 16

Mohiuddin Ahmad, a political analyst and writer.

However, it would be an overstatement to say that Jamaat is in serious trouble.

"Jamaat will now have to stand on its own strength. And through this election, Jamaat's own capacity will be tested. This is because the party is contesting an election without its long-term ally BNP," he said.

With the Awami League

barred from participating in the 13th parliamentary election, the main fight on February 12 is set to be between the BNP and the Jamaat-led 10-party alliance.

Jamaat, for instance, follows the Maududi line, while IAB is rooted in the Deobandi tradition.

In terms of votes, naturally, things will get a bit messy."

IAB will now look to mobilise votes from Jamaat's base. In so doing, the party will suffer in the lower house but benefit in the upper house, he added.

Jamaat's best performance came in 1991, when it won 18 seats with

12.13 percent of the popular vote, followed by 17 seats in 2001.

The party boycotted the 2014 and 2024 elections and contested the 2018 polls under the BNP's paddy sheaf symbol as part of the BNP-led alliance. Its registration was cancelled in 2013 following a High Court verdict, but restored along with its symbol in June last year.

It managed three seats in the 1996 polls, 17 in the 2001 polls as part of a four-party alliance and two in the 2008 polls.

Since the 1991 polls, Islami Oikajote won one seat each in the 1991 and June 1996 polls, and two in the 2001 polls. No other Islamic party has won a seat since the 1991 polls.

## Trump names Blair, Rubio

FROM PAGE 16

Trump's son in law who has partnered with Witoff for months on the issue.

In Canada, a senior aide to Prime Minister Mark Carney said he intended to accept Trump's invitation, while in Turkey, a spokesman for President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said he had been asked to become a "founding member" of the board.

Egypt's Foreign Minister Badr Abdely said Cairo was "studying" a request for President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi to join.

Sharing an image of the invitation letter, Argentine President Javier Milei wrote on X that it would be "an honor" to participate in the initiative.

In a statement sent to AFP, Blair said: "I thank President Trump for his leadership in establishing the Board of Peace and am honored to be appointed to its Executive Board."

Blair is a controversial figure in the Middle East because of his role in the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Trump himself said last year that he wanted to make sure Blair was an "acceptable choice to everybody."

Blair spent years focused on the Israeli-Palestinian issue as representative of the "Middle East Quartet" – the United Nations, European Union, United States and Russia – after leaving Downing Street in 2007.

On the eighth day of hearings, the EC heard a total of 112 appeals and declared 45 valid.

It rejected 37 appeals as invalid: 13 were rejected against the cancellation of nomination papers and 24 were rejected against the acceptance of nomination papers.

During the hearing, nine appeals were withdrawn, while two appellants were absent. The EC also kept 19 appeals pending.

On the seventh day of hearings on Friday, Sherpur-2 voter Yazdayin

– who sought cancellation of BNP candidate Munjur Ahsan Munshi while it upheld the candidacy of NCP's Hasnat following two separate hearings against nomination cancellation decisions by the returning officers.

Munshi lost his candidacy after the EC accepted Hasnat's appeal, which alleged that the BNP candidate was a loan defaulter and had concealed loan information.

Earlier, the returning officer of Cumilla-4 had declared Munshi's nomination valid after scrutiny. In response, Hasnat challenged the decision.

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counter-appeal against Hasnat's nomination, claiming his affidavit lacked income and expenditure details. The EC, however, rejected Munshi's appeal and upheld Hasnat's candidacy.

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Hasnat also

## VAPING, SMOKING AND TEENAGE WELLBEING: Understanding a growing mental health concern



Tobacco use and mental health are closely linked, and this relationship is particularly significant during adolescence – a formative stage when habits are established and emotional wellbeing can be especially vulnerable. In recent years, many young people in the UK and the US have experienced rising levels of anxiety, low mood and emotional distress. One contributing factor is the changing pattern of tobacco use, with increasing uptake of e-cigarettes and other nicotine products that are often perceived as less harmful.

Recent research published in PLOS Mental Health highlights a clear association between tobacco use in teenagers and poorer mental health. Adolescents who use e-cigarettes or other tobacco products are more likely to report symptoms linked to depression and anxiety than those who do not use tobacco at all. The risk appears to be highest among young people who use both vaping products and other forms of tobacco, suggesting that multiple types of use may intensify mental health challenges.

Although the findings do not show that tobacco use directly causes mental health problems, they point to an important pattern that parents, teachers, healthcare professionals and young people themselves should not ignore. Tobacco use may both signal existing emotional difficulties and contribute to worsening mental wellbeing, creating a cycle that can be difficult to break without appropriate support.

Overall, this research reinforces the need for early mental health awareness and prevention. Promoting emotional wellbeing, encouraging healthy coping strategies, and tackling all forms of tobacco use together – rather than separately – could help reduce long-term harm. Open conversations, tailored support and accessible mental health resources remain vital in protecting adolescent health in an increasingly complex environment.

RAISA MEHZABEEN

As winter arrives, many people notice a familiar discomfort: bloating after meals, constipation, reduced appetite, or a lingering heaviness in the stomach. While these symptoms are often brushed off as seasonal inconveniences, science offers clear explanations for why digestion tends to slow down during colder months.

At its core, digestion is an energy-intensive process that relies on adequate blood flow, muscle contractions, enzymes, hormones, hydration, and physical activity. Winter alters several of these factors simultaneously, creating a perfect storm for sluggish digestion.

**Reduced blood flow to the gut:** One of the body's primary responses to cold is vasoconstriction, the narrowing of blood vessels. This helps conserve heat by prioritizing blood flow to vital organs such as the heart and brain. As a result, peripheral areas, including the gastrointestinal tract, may receive comparatively less blood. Reduced blood flow can slow gastric emptying and intestinal movement, leading to feelings of fullness, indigestion, and constipation.

**Lower physical activity levels:** Physical activity plays a crucial role in stimulating gut motility, the rhythmic contraction of intestinal muscles that move food along the digestive tract. In winter, people tend to move less due to shorter daylight hours, colder temperatures, and lifestyle changes. Even a modest reduction in daily walking can affect digestive efficiency.

**Changes in hydration status:** Cold weather often suppresses thirst signals. People drink less water in winter compared to summer, even though the body continues to lose fluids through breathing and urine. Inadequate hydration leads to harder stools and slower intestinal transit. The colon absorbs more water from stool when fluid intake is low, making bowel movements infrequent and uncomfortable.

**Dietary shifts and fibre intake:** Seasonal eating patterns also influence digestion. Winter diets often include more refined carbohydrates, fried foods, meat-heavy dishes, and fewer raw fruits and vegetables. While warm, energy-dense foods provide comfort, they are often low in dietary fibre.

**Hormonal and circadian influences:** Winter affects circadian rhythms due to reduced sunlight exposure. Disruption of the body's internal clock can influence digestive hormones such as melatonin, cortisol, and serotonin. The gut-brain axis, an intricate communication system between the digestive system and the nervous

integrity, supporting beneficial gut bacteria, and regulating inflammation. Although research is ongoing, inadequate vitamin D may contribute to digestive discomfort and altered gut motility.

**Psychological stress and winter blues:** Mental health and digestion are deeply interconnected. Seasonal affective symptoms, increased stress, and low mood during winter can activate the body's stress response. Elevated stress hormones such as cortisol can slow digestion by shifting the body into a "fight or flight" mode, where digestion becomes a lower priority.

**What can be done?** While winter-related digestive slowdown



system, plays a role in regulating appetite, motility, and enzyme secretion. Altered sleep patterns and seasonal mood changes can indirectly impair digestive function.

**Reduced exposure to sunlight and vitamin D:** Lower sunlight exposure during winter months can contribute to vitamin D deficiency, which is increasingly being linked to gut health. Emerging research suggests that vitamin D plays a role in maintaining intestinal barrier

is common, it is not inevitable. Maintaining regular physical activity, ensuring adequate water intake, prioritising fiber-rich foods such as vegetables, legumes, and whole grains, and establishing consistent sleep routines can significantly support gut health. Warm meals, herbal teas, and mindful eating may also improve digestive comfort.

The writer is the founder & CEO of Nutrition For Change. E-mail: raisameh20@gmail.com



SOURCE: PLOS ONE

### DID YOU KNOW?

#### We might inhale lung-penetrating microplastics daily!

Microplastics are now so widespread that they have been found almost everywhere we look – including the air inside our homes and cars. New research suggests that everyday indoor environments may expose people to far more tiny, lung-penetrating plastic particles than previously realised, raising fresh concerns about long-term health effects.

Scientists examining indoor air have discovered that most airborne microplastics are extremely small, fine enough to be breathed deep into the lungs without us noticing. Unlike larger particles, these microscopic fragments are invisible to the naked eye and can linger in enclosed spaces such as living rooms and vehicle cabins, where people spend a large proportion of their time.

This matters because inhaled microplastics may not simply stay in the lungs. Researchers are increasingly concerned that these particles could trigger inflammation, interfere with the immune system and carry harmful chemical additives into the bloodstream. While the full health impact is still being investigated, the findings suggest that indoor air could be a major and previously underestimated source of microplastic exposure.

Simple steps such as regular ventilation, reducing synthetic materials where possible, and keeping interiors clean may help limit exposure. More broadly, the study adds to growing evidence that plastic pollution is not just an environmental issue but a potential everyday health concern.

## Which therapy really helps knee arthritis?

Knee osteoarthritis is one of the most common causes of long-term pain and stiffness in older adults, often making everyday activities such as walking, climbing stairs or standing for long periods difficult. Many people rely on anti-inflammatory painkillers to manage symptoms, but these medicines can carry risks to the stomach and heart when used long-term. As a result, there is growing interest in safer, non-drug approaches to managing knee arthritis.

A large new analysis of existing clinical trials suggests that some of the most effective treatments are also among the simplest. Overall, knee braces, water-based therapy and exercise emerged as the most beneficial non-drug options for reducing pain and improving movement in people with knee osteoarthritis.

Knee braces consistently performed well across multiple outcomes. By providing external support and improving joint alignment, braces can reduce strain on the knee, helping to ease pain, stiffness and functional limitations. For many people, they offer a practical, relatively low-cost way to stay mobile while protecting the joint during daily activities.

Water-based therapy, often carried out in warm pools, was

particularly effective for pain relief. Exercising in water reduces the impact on joints while allowing muscles to strengthen and joints to move more freely. This makes hydrotherapy especially appealing for people who find land-based exercise painful or difficult or who are at an earlier stage of rebuilding strength and confidence.

Regular exercise on land also showed clear and consistent benefits. Structured exercise programmes helped reduce pain

and improve physical function, reinforcing long-standing advice that movement, rather than rest, is key to managing knee arthritis. Strengthening the muscles around the knee, improving flexibility and maintaining overall fitness can all help slow functional decline and support independence.

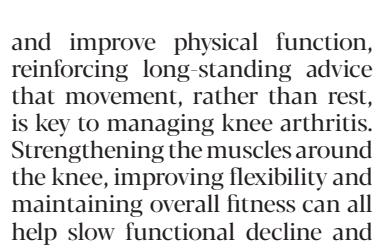
Other non-drug therapies, such as high-intensity laser therapy and shockwave therapy, showed some positive effects, but their benefits were less consistent. Ultrasound therapy, despite being widely

used in some settings, performed poorly overall compared with other options, suggesting it may offer limited value for knee osteoarthritis.

While these findings are encouraging, it is important to recognise that no single approach will work equally well for everyone. Nonetheless, the overall pattern points clearly towards physical and movement-based therapies as the most reliable options.

Managing knee osteoarthritis does not necessarily require high-tech equipment or long-term medication use. Accessible interventions such as wearing a knee brace, exercising regularly and using water-based programmes can make a meaningful difference to pain and mobility, while avoiding the side effects linked to common painkillers. Looking ahead, combining these approaches may offer even greater benefits. Future initiative is expected to explore how different therapies can work together and whether they provide good value for money in everyday healthcare settings. In the meantime, these findings support a shift towards safer, evidence-based treatments that empower people to stay active and protect their joint health over the long term.

SOURCE: PLOS ONE



## Therapy that brings lasting relief for chronic back pain

Chronic low back pain is a common and often frustrating condition, marked by flare-ups that can disrupt daily life for years. Many existing treatments offer only limited or short-term relief, leaving people struggling to stay active and independent. New evidence, however, suggests that a psychological approach known as cognitive functional therapy (CFT) could offer more durable benefits.

CFT is a type of psychotherapy that helps people better understand their pain, challenge unhelpful beliefs about movement, and gradually rebuild confidence in physical activity. Recent findings show that this approach can reduce disability linked to chronic low back pain for several years, making it the first treatment with strong evidence of long-term effectiveness in this area.

People who received CFT were better able to stay physically active over time compared with those receiving standard care. Adding biofeedback – a technique that uses sensors to help individuals become more aware of bodily responses – did not appear to provide meaningful extra benefit, suggesting that CFT on its own may be sufficient for many patients.

Long-term back pain is not just a physical problem but one that can be addressed by changing how pain is understood and managed. With wider access and better training for clinicians, this approach could significantly reduce the long-term impact of chronic back pain and help more people return to an active, fulfilling life.

Source: The Lancet Rheumatology

## Act before birth: The urgent need for early thalassaemia screening in Bangladesh

PROF WAQAR AHMED KHAN (RTD)

Thalassaemia is the most common inherited blood disorder in Bangladesh and poses a growing public health challenge. Studies estimate that 7–13% of the population carries a thalassaemia gene, with an average carrier rate of around 10%. Each year, nearly 14,000 affected children are born in the Bengali population, along with more than 1,500 in tribal communities. These numbers represent not only human suffering but also an enormous economic and healthcare burden.

Children with thalassaemia major require lifelong blood transfusions, often every two to four weeks, while nearly half of those with Hb E-beta thalassaemia also become transfusion-dependent. Treatment costs are very expensive, leaving many families unable to provide adequate care.

Treatment is not limited to regular blood transfusions and iron chelation therapy alone. Patients also require continuous monitoring through regular laboratory investigations, including complete blood counts. In addition, periodic assessment of vital organs – such as the liver, heart, and endocrine system – is essential. Over time, iron overload and disease-related complications can affect these organs, leading to serious conditions such as cardiac failure, diabetes mellitus, and growth retardation.

Approximately 60% of blood donations are spent on these patients. Moreover, the treatment cost of a thalassaemia patient ranges from 23 to 65 times more expensive than the cost of preventing the birth of a thalassaemic child.

Globally, many countries initially attempted to reduce thalassaemia by promoting carrier screening and discouraging marriages between carriers. However, these approaches proved insufficient, particularly in societies where marriage is deeply rooted in social, cultural, and family structures. Bangladesh faces similar challenges. Fear of social stigma often discourages young people from undergoing carrier testing before marriage. As a result, screening is more commonly accepted only after marriage or during pregnancy.

The real success in thalassaemia prevention has come from prenatal diagnosis, supported by national policies. Cyprus reduced thalassaemia births by nearly 96%. Iran achieved an 82.9% prevention rate after permitting abortion for severe genetic disorders before 16 weeks. Turkey, China, and

Pakistan's Punjab province have all reported dramatic declines following the introduction of government-supported prenatal diagnostic programmes. These examples clearly show that premarital screening alone is not enough.

Bangladesh urgently needs a national thalassaemia prevention programme. This should include public awareness campaigns, accessible carrier screening at government hospitals, and the establishment of regional DNA laboratories for prenatal diagnosis. Gynaecologists must be trained to recommend screening in early pregnancy and to collect samples for chorionic villus sampling or amniocentesis. Couples found to be carriers should receive proper counselling and diagnostic support.

From an Islamic perspective, most scholars permit abortion for severe genetic disorders like thalassaemia before 120 days of gestation. A fatwa issued by the Islamic Jurisprudence Council of the Muslim World League supports this position, provided there is medical confirmation and parental consent. Ultimately, the decision must rest with informed parents.

Currently, prenatal DNA testing in Bangladesh is mostly sought by families who already have a thalassaemic child. This reflects awareness born of hardship and underscores the need to reach couples earlier – before tragedy repeats itself.

Prevention is the only sustainable solution. By investing in awareness, screening, prenatal diagnosis, and professional training, Bangladesh can prevent thousands of avoidable births affected by thalassaemia. The time for decisive government action is now.

The writer is the former president of the Dhaka Shishu Hospital Thalassaemia Centre. Email: waqarkind@gmail.com

## Cheaper drinks will see a rise in noncommunicable diseases and injuries!

Sugary drinks and alcoholic beverages had become cheaper in many countries due to consistently low tax rates, contributing to rising levels of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, cancers and injuries, particularly among children and young adults, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO).

In two global reports released in January 2026, WHO warned that weak and poorly designed tax systems were allowing health-harming products to remain affordable, while health systems faced growing pressure from preventable noncommunicable diseases and injuries. WHO emphasised that health taxes were among the most effective tools for reducing harmful



consumption while also generating revenue for essential health services.

The reports showed that although many countries taxed sugary drinks and alcohol, the taxes were often too low, narrowly applied or failed to keep pace with inflation and income growth. As a result, alcohol and sugary drinks had become more affordable over time. Many high-sugar products, such as fruit juices and sweetened milk drinks, remained untaxed, and wine was still

not taxed in a number of countries despite known health risks.

WHO also noted that the global profits generated by these products far exceeded the share captured by governments through health taxes, leaving societies to bear the long-term health and economic costs. Public support for higher taxes was already evident, yet implementation lagged behind.

The organisation called on governments to raise and redesign taxes under its "3 by 35" initiative, aiming to make tobacco, alcohol and sugary drinks less affordable by 2035 to better protect public health.

Source: World Health Organisation

Source: The Lancet Rheumatology

## Rana does 'what matters most'

SPORTS REPORTER

Following a string of underwhelming outings early in the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) T20, Rangpur Riders fast bowler Nahid Rana finally found his rhythm, producing a match-winning performance against Dhaka Capitals in Mirpur yesterday.

The spell not only brought personal relief for the young pace sensation but also sealed Rangpur's place in the playoffs.

"Obviously, losing three matches in a row can affect the team mentally," Rana said after the match. "But we still had confidence and took that onto the field."

The six foot-five right-armer ripped through Dhaka's middle order at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium, returning figures of three for 11 from four overs as Rangpur clinched an 11-run victory.

Among his scalps, Saif Hassan's dismissal stood out. First ball, Nahid produced a dream delivery, bringing it back in sharply to outplay the batter completely and uproot the stumps, leaving Saif stranded on 12.

He then removed Sabbir Rahman (eight) and Mohammad Mithun (25) to reduce Dhaka to 99 for six while chasing 182, a collapse that virtually sealed the contest. Rana bowled 14 dot balls, conceded no boundaries, and, crucially, maintained his pace throughout while mixing in effective variations.

"I don't really think too much about pace, because it's something that is partly God-gifted," he said, adding that speed without skills is a recipe for disaster.

"At the international level, pace does matter. But as cricket keeps evolving, if you don't develop your skills along with pace, you won't survive for long. So I'm trying to improve my skills even more."

The 23-year-old had hinted at a return to form in Rangpur's previous Sylhet phase match with figures of two for 18 in three overs. Before that, he had taken just two wickets in his first four matches, struggling for consistency despite being economical at times.

"Whether I play for Bangladesh or any franchise, contributing to match-winning performances is what matters most to me."



## RANGPUR REACH PLAYOFFS

Speedster Nahid Rana celebrates one of his three wickets with Litton Das and Tawhid Hridoy during Rangpur Riders' 11-run win against Dhaka Capitals in yesterday's first BPL fixture at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur. Dawid Malan (78 off 49 balls) and Tawhid Hridoy (62 off 46 balls) struck commanding half-centuries and added 126 runs for the second-wicket stand before Rana's sensational bowling spell, as Rangpur, under new skipper Litton, ended a three-match losing streak and earned the fourth and final playoff spot.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



## FAHAD'S FIVE-FOR IN VAIN...

Bangladesh fast bowler Al Fahad claimed a five-wicket haul to bowl India out for 238 in 48.4 overs in their opening ICC Under-19 World Cup match in Bulawayo yesterday, but his brilliant effort proved insufficient as the junior Tigers lost by 18 runs (DLS). The right-arm seamer provided a flying start alongside fellow quick Iqbal Hossain Emon, striking twice in consecutive deliveries in the third over to remove India captain Ayush Mhatre and Vedant Trivedi, before returning at the death to pick up three more wickets, including top-scorer Abhijayan Kundu (80). Rain reduced the match to 49 overs per side and later caused a second interruption in Bangladesh's chase at 90 for two in 17.2 overs. After resumption, the game was cut to 29 overs, with Bangladesh needing 165 to win but they were eventually bundled out for 146 in 28.3 overs. Earlier, the toss saw no handshake -- a move the BCB described as "unintentional" and "a lapse in concentration" by stand-in captain Zawad Abrar, filling in for Azizul Hakim Tamim, who later contributed a 51-run knock.

PHOTO: ICC

## AFCON

## Morocco, Senegal face off in heavyweight final

AGENCIES

Morocco and Senegal meet in a heavyweight Africa Cup of Nations final showdown on Sunday, with the host country hoping a partisan crowd can help them claim a first continental title in half a century. Walid Regragui's Morocco were favourites coming into the competition, having become the first African side ever to reach the World Cup semifinals in 2022 and established themselves as the continent's leading team in the FIFA rankings.

They are unbeaten in two years, since going out of the last AFCON in Ivory Coast in the last 16 to South Africa, and are captained by the current African footballer of the year, the rampaging Paris Saint-Germain full-back Achraf Hakimi. However, all of that has placed enormous pressure on Morocco to deliver since the start of this tournament, the first held in the country since 1988 and the first AFCON to start in one year and end in another.

This pressure comes as Regragui, who has faced regular criticism from an expectant public, is mindful of the country's underwhelming AFCON record, with their only title coming in Ethiopia in 1976.

The hosts face a formidable opponent in Senegal, Africa's second-best side in the rankings and into their third final in four editions of the tournament. After losing to Algeria in 2019, the Lions of Teranga won the title in Yaounde in 2022, beating Egypt on penalties. Knocked out by Ivory Coast in 2024, they bounced back to reach the final here with a Sadio Mane strike that defeated Egypt in the semi-finals.

It is an experienced, ageing Senegal side -- Mane, goalkeeper Edouard Mendy, captain Kalidou Koulibaly, and midfielder Idrissa Gana Gueye are all aged 33-36. Centre-back Koulibaly will miss the final through suspension, a significant blow for a clash between two of Africa's stingiest defences, who have conceded just three goals each in the tournament.

The captains of the ten participating teams, including Bangladesh's Nigar Sultana Joty, pose with the trophy of the ICC Women's T20 World Cup Qualifier, which starts in Nepal today. The teams are competing for the final four spots at this year's 20-over showcase event in England and Wales. The Tigresses will play their opening match against the USA.

PHOTO: BCB

## SHORT CORNER

### Cambodia, East Timor earmarked for friendly before Singapore tie

Bangladesh will play either Cambodia or East Timor in a FIFA international friendly ahead of their final AFC Asian Cup Qualifiers match against Singapore in March. Already out of contention for the Asian Cup, Bangladesh will play their sixth and final qualifier away to Singapore on March 31. Following a meeting of the National Teams Committee on Saturday, it was decided that the national team camp will begin on March 20, with the squad set to depart for Singapore on March 28.

### Shamsunnahar continues goal glut in women's league

Shamsunnahar Jr continued her impressive run in the Bangladesh Women's Football League, once again playing a decisive role for Farashganj. On Saturday, Farashganj secured a narrow 1-0 victory over Bangladesh Army Sports Club, with Shamsunnahar scoring the winning goal. Shamsunnahar Jr has now scored an astonishing 19 goals in five matches in the ongoing league.

### Bangladesh held by Bhutan in women's futsal

Bangladesh fought back from 3-1 down to hold Bhutan to a thrilling 3-3 draw in their second match of the inaugural SAFF Women's Futsal Championship in Bangkok on Saturday. Bangladesh won the opening match against India and they will play their third match against Sri Lanka on January 21.

\*\*Read The Daily Star website for full stories.



Raul Asencio celebrates with Kylian Mbappe after netting Real Madrid's second goal during their 2-0 win over Levante in a LaLiga fixture at Santiago Bernabeu yesterday. The win offered a vital boost for new coach Alvaro Arbeloa, who took charge following a turbulent week that saw Madrid lose a cup final to Barcelona, exit the Copa del Rey to a second-division side, and part ways with Xabi Alonso.

PHOTO: AFP



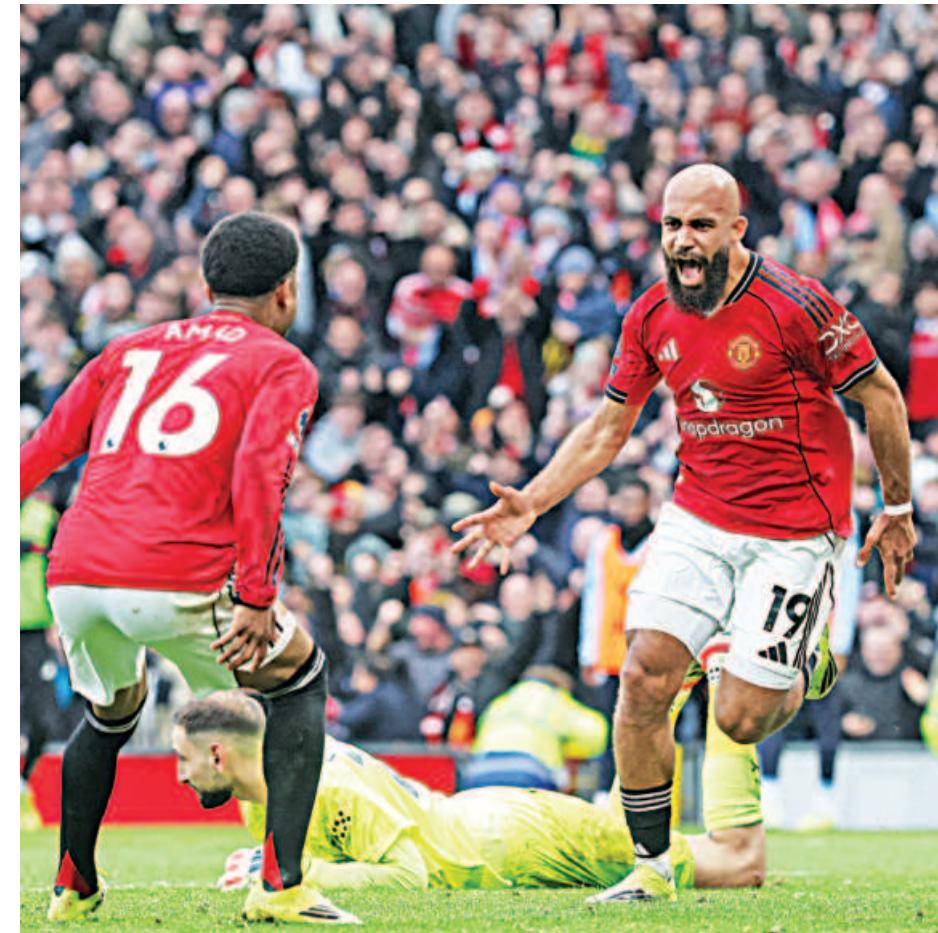
American Madison Keys, currently ranked seventh in the WTA, claimed a thrilling Grand Slam victory last year, defeating Aryna Sabalenka 6-3, 2-6, 7-5.

On the men's side, world number two Jannik Sinner lifted the trophy after a straight-sets win over Alexander Zverev.

This year's prize pool is a record \$111.5 million -- a 16 per cent increase on 2025 -- with the men's and women's singles champions each earning \$4.15 million and runners-up taking home \$2.15 million.

At 38, Novak Djokovic said he still gets a "drug-like" adrenaline rush from tennis and has no plans to retire anytime soon.

Seven-time Grand Slam champion Venus Williams said she is "up for the challenge" as she prepares to become the oldest woman to compete at the Australian Open at age 45.



Bryan Mbeumo roars after opening the scoring as Manchester City goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma looks dejected during Manchester United's 2-0 Premier League derby win at Old Trafford yesterday, giving club legend Michael Carrick a perfect start in charge.

PHOTO: AFP

## All eyes on Alcaraz, Sabalenka as Australian Open begins

AGENCIES

The Australian Open, first Grand Slam tournament of the year, begins in Melbourne on Sunday, with Carlos Alcaraz and Aryna Sabalenka leading the spotlight.

Alcaraz starts his bid for a career Grand Slam, with the Australian Open the only title missing from his collection. The top seed, who faces home player Adam Walton, said: "This is my main goal for this year... I'm just hungry for the title." He has never gone beyond the quarter-finals in Melbourne.

Should the 22-year-old complete the

career Slam, he would join an exclusive club as just the sixth man to win all four major titles after Andre Agassi, Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal, Novak Djokovic and Rod Laver. He would also become the youngest, surpassing Nadal, who was 24 at the time.

But he faces a major roadblock in Italy's Jannik Sinner, the two-time defending champion. Sinner, who beat Alexander Zverev in last year's final, opens against France's Hugo Gaston and could meet Djokovic in the semifinals.

Djokovic, chasing a record 25th major,

begins against Pedro Martinez, while Zverev faces Canadian Gabriel Diallo.

On the women's side, top ranked Sabalenka opens against wildcard Tiansha Rakotomanga Rajaonah. After losing last year's final, she said: "I'm not really focusing on that result... but of course I would like to do just a little bit better." The two-time champion is coming off a Brisbane title win.

Iga Swiatek, Sabalenka's main rival, is also chasing a career Grand Slam in Melbourne, having never gone beyond the semifinals.



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## BCB seeks group swap in meeting with ICC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A possible group change for Bangladesh in the upcoming ICC T20 World Cup was discussed during a meeting between the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and representatives of the International Cricket Council (ICC) on Saturday.

According to a BCB official, who was among the attendees at the meeting, the proposal of group swapping came from the BCB so that the ICC can facilitate the matter with minimum logistical adjustments as the tournament is set to start in just three weeks' time.

Bangladesh are currently placed in Group C of the tournament, scheduled to begin on February 7, where they are set to face England, West Indies, Nepal and Italy. According to the current fixture, all of Bangladesh's group matches are scheduled to be played in India alongside the remaining fixtures of Group C.

In contrast, Group B -- comprising Sri Lanka, Australia, Oman, Ireland and Zimbabwe -- will have all their matches played across different venues in Sri Lanka.

SEE PAGE 13 COL 1



Farmers prepare land for Boro paddy in Terokhada upazila, Khuila, yesterday. The wetlands remain submerged most of the year, allowing cultivation only when water recedes in January.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

## Hasnat regains candidacy, his BNP rival disqualified

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission reinstated the candidacy of July uprising frontliner Hasnat Abdullah, along with 44 others, after the eighth day of hearings, which was punctuated by heated altercations.

Tension and turmoil broke out at the EC auditorium yesterday during the appeal hearing against the validation of Afro Khanam's nomination in Manikganj 3 constituency over dual citizenship.

Earlier, the EC sought explanations from the lawyers concerned. Afterwards, the commission, led by the chief election commissioner, adjourned proceedings for half an hour.

As soon as the commissioners left the stage, lawyers representing both sides of the appeal gathered in front of the dais and engaged in heated arguments.

Also present was BNP vice chairman and Feni-3 candidate Abdul Awal Mintoo, whose nomination appeal over dual citizenship was scheduled for that day.

On the opposite side of the auditorium, Hasnat, who is an aspirant from Cumilla-4 under the National Citizen Party's banner, objected to Mintoo's

SEE PAGE 13 COL 5

## 'Jamaat-IAB split a blow to Islamists' one-box plan'

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR and MAMUNUR RASHID

Islamic Andolan Bangladesh's withdrawal from the Jamaat-led 11-party alliance, which aimed at mobilising Islamist votes, is set to have a negative effect on the alliance's "one box policy".

Islamic-minded voters now have three options: the Jamaat-led electoral alliance, which brings together five Islamist parties, three of which are rooted in the Qawmi madrasa tradition; the Islamic Andolan Bangladesh (IAB), led by the Charmonai Pir; and three Qawmi-based Islamist parties under the BNP-led alliance.

Against this backdrop, the fragmentation of Islamist forces may prove decisive in shaping the outcomes across key constituencies.

In theory, the public will vote for the most capable and respectable candidate, said Salauddin Muhammad Babar, a political analyst.

"People may have a religious attachment to Islamic Andolan, but I can't say for sure how much political attachment there will be in the upcoming election. So I do not think this will have any significant impact on Jamaat's vote,"

SEE PAGE 13 COL 5

## 10-PARTY ALLIANCE Jamaat to take most vacant seats after IAB exit

MAMUNUR RASHID and SHAMIMA RITA

After weeks of drama, the Jamaat-e-Islami-led electoral alliance is now set to redistribute seats following the exit of Islamic Andolan Bangladesh, ahead of the start of campaigning for the 13th parliamentary election.

The development has opened up the possibility of an increase in seat allocations for the National Citizen Party (NCP) and Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis.

Sources said that of the 47 seats that the alliance had kept undecided while "waiting" for Islamic Andolan, Jamaat may now claim at least 37 for itself.

Most of the remaining seats are likely to be shared between the NCP and Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, though several other partners have demanded more allocations.

There is also discussion that a few constituencies may be kept open, as more than one party has taken a rigid stance on those seats.

All these issues are expected to be settled through meetings among top leaders of Jamaat, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, and the NCP.

Jamaat Assistant Secretary General and publicity chief Ahsanul Mahboob Zubair told The Daily Star: "First, the liaison committee formed to discuss seat sharing will prepare a proposal. After the top leaders finalise it, an official announcement will be made."

He added that despite Islamic Andolan announcing it would contest independently, the door remains open for the party to return to the alliance.

SEE PAGE 13 COL 1

## Trump names Blair, Rubio to Gaza 'board of peace'

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump's so-called "Board of Peace" for postwar Gaza began to take shape yesterday, with the leaders of Egypt, Turkey, Argentina and Canada asked to join.

The announcements from those leaders came after the US president named his Secretary of State Marco Rubio, former British prime minister Tony Blair, and senior negotiators Jared Kushner and Steve Witkoff to the panel.

Trump had already declared himself the chair of the body, as he promotes a controversial vision of economic development in the Palestinian territory, which lies in rubble after two-plus years of relentless Israeli bombardment.

The moves came after a Palestinian committee of technocrats meant to govern Gaza held its first meeting in Cairo which was attended by Kushner,

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## গণভোট ও ত্রয়োদশ জাতীয় সংসদ নির্বাচন ২০২৬

আগামী ১২ ফেব্রুয়ারি ২০২৬ গণভোট ও ত্রয়োদশ জাতীয় সংসদ নির্বাচন অনুষ্ঠিত হইবে। "সংসদ নির্বাচনে রাজনৈতিক দল ও প্রার্থীর আচরণ বিধিমালা, ২০২৫" অনুযায়ী নির্বাচন কমিশনে নির্বাচিত কোনো রাজনৈতিক দল কিংবা তৎকর্তৃ মনোনীত প্রার্থী বা স্বতন্ত্র প্রার্থী কিংবা তাহাদের পক্ষে অন্য কোনো ব্যক্তি ভোট প্রদানের দিনের ৩ সপ্তাহ পূর্বে অর্থাৎ ২২ জানুয়ারি ২০২৬ তারিখের পূর্বে কোনো প্রকার নির্বাচন প্রচার শুরু করিতে পারিবেন না।

### সংসদ নির্বাচনে রাজনৈতিক দল ও প্রার্থীর আচরণ বিধিমালা, ২০২৫ প্র বিধি ৪ ও ৫ প্র বলা হইয়াছে-

#### ১। কোনো রাজনৈতিক দল বা প্রার্থী কিংবা তাহার পক্ষ হইতে অন্য কোনো ব্যক্তি বা প্রতিষ্ঠান নির্বাচন-পূর্ব সময়ে উক্ত প্রার্থীর নির্বাচনি এলাকায় বসবসকারী কোনো ব্যক্তি প্রার্থী বা উক্ত এলাকা বা অন্য অবস্থিত কোনো প্রতিষ্ঠানে প্রকাশে বা গোপনে কোনো প্রকার চাঁদা বা অনুদান বা উপস্থিৎ প্রদান করিতে পারিবেন না।

#### ২। কোনো প্রার্থী কোনো প্রতিষ্ঠান বা সমিতি বা সংগঠন হইতে কোনো প্রকার সংবর্ধনা গ্রহণ করিতে পারিবেন না।

#### ৩। কোনো প্রার্থী নির্বাচন পূর্ব সময়ে কোনো সরকারি, আধা-সরকারি ও স্বায়ত্তশাসিত প্রতিষ্ঠানে রাজস্ব বা উভয়ন তহবিলভুক্ত কোনো প্রকরণের অনুমোদন, ঘোষণা বা ভিত্তিপ্রস্তর স্থাপন কিংবা ফলক উন্মোচন করিতে পারিবেন না।

#### ৪। নির্বাচন-পূর্ব সময়ে কোনো সরকারি সুবিধাভোগী অতি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ বাস্তি সরকারি বা আধাসরকারি বা স্বায়ত্তশাসিত প্রতিষ্ঠানের তহবিল হইতে কোনো ব্যক্তি বা গোষ্ঠী বা প্রতিষ্ঠানের অনুকূলে কোনো প্রকার অনুদান ঘোষণা বা বরাদ্দ প্রদান বা অর্থ অবস্থুক করিতে পারিবেন না।

#### ৫। সার্কিট হাউজ, ঢাক-বাংলা, রেস্ট হাউজ, সার্কিট হাউজ বা কোনো সরকারি কার্যালয়কে কোনো রাজনৈতিক দল বা প্রার্থীর পক্ষে বা বিপক্ষে প্রচারে স্থান হিসাবে ব্যবহার করা বা এভন্ডেলশো উহাতে অবস্থান করা যাইবে না।

#### ৬। অন্য কোনো ব্যক্তি বা গোষ্ঠী কোনো প্রকার অনুদান প্রদান করিতে পারিবেন না।

#### ৭। সরকারি ঢাক-বাংলা, রেস্ট হাউজ, সার্কিট হাউজ বা কোনো সরকারি কার্যালয়কে কোনো রাজনৈতিক দল বা প্রার্থীর পক্ষে বা বিপক্ষে প্রচারে স্থান হিসাবে ব্যবহার করা বা এভন্ডেলশো উহাতে অবস্থান করা যাইবে না।

#### ৮। অন্য কোনো ব্যক্তি বা গোষ্ঠী কোনো প্রকার অনুদান প্রদান করিতে পারিবেন না।

#### ৯। সার্কিট হাউজ, ঢাক-বাংলা, রেস্ট হাউজ ও সার্কিট হাউজ ব্যবহারে অভাবিক পাইবেন না।

#### ১০। নির্বাচনি আচরণবিধির লঙ্ঘন শাস্তিযোগ্য অপরাধ

#### নির্বাচনি আচরণবিধি মেনে চলুন, সুষ্ঠু নির্বাচনে সহায়তা করুন



A demonstrator holds a picture of late Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez during a march to demand the release of ousted President Nicolas Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores, following their capture by US forces during US strikes on Venezuela, in Caracas, Venezuela. The photo was taken on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP