

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



PHOTO: STAR

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

KEY OBSERVATIONS

- Formulating code of conduct for journalists, editors and owners proposed
- Stalled reforms, non-enactment of law to protect journalists frustrating amid continued insecurity
- Threat is constant, protection is minimal for journalists outside Dhaka as past attacks remain unpunished
- 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.

a building on fire while staffers were still inside, and then prevented the fire service from intervening.

"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."

Ahmed Noor, editor of the local daily Sylhet Mirror, questioned the government's role during the mob attacks on media houses.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

'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), Kiyan (1st Grandson) & Farzan (2nd Grandson)



The second part of The Daily Star's 35th anniversary supplement 2026,

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গ্রাহক একাউন্ট

এক যুগ ধরে গড়ে ওঠা
৭৫ লক্ষ জীবনের আশ্বাস 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

MINNESOTA PROTESTS US judge restricts federal agents

REUTERS, Minneapolis

A federal judge in Minnesota on Friday ordered that US immigration agents deployed en masse to Minneapolis be restricted in some of the tactics they have taken against peaceful demonstrators and observers, including arrests and tear gassing. Handing a victory to local activists in Minnesota’s most populous city, US District Judge Kate Menendez issued an injunction barring federal agents from retaliating against individuals engaged in non-violent, unobstructive protest activity. The ruling was in response to a lawsuit filed against the US Department of Homeland Security and other federal agencies on December 17, three weeks before an immigration agent fatally shot Renee Good, a 37-year-old woman in Minneapolis, spawning waves of protests. The 83-page order explicitly prohibits federal officers from detaining people who are peacefully protesting or merely observing the officers, unless there is reasonable suspicion that they are interfering with law enforcement or have committed a crime. Federal agents also are banned from using pepper spray, tear gas or other crowd-control munitions against peaceful demonstrators or bystanders observing and recording the immigration enforcement operations. Stopping or detaining drivers and passengers in vehicles when there is no reason to believe they are forcibly obstructing or interfering with federal agents is likewise prohibited, according to the court order.

‘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 will 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 Søren 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 Witkoff 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

A landmark global treaty to safeguard biodiversity in the high seas came into effect yesterday, providing countries with a legally binding framework to tackle threats such as overfishing and meet a target to protect 30 percent of the ocean environment by 2030. The UN treaty, also known as Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ), was finalised in March 2023 after 15 years of negotiations, and will allow the creation of a global network of “marine protected areas” in vast and previously unregulated ocean ecosystems lying in international waters. “It’s two-thirds of the ocean, (and) it’s half the surface of the planet that for the first time will have a comprehensive legal regime,” said Adam McCarthy, first assistant secretary at the Australian foreign ministry and a co-chair of the treaty’s preparatory committee, speaking at a media briefing. The treaty reached the threshold of 60 national ratifications on September 19 last year, meaning that it would go formally into operation within 120 days. The number of ratifications has since risen to more than 80, with China, Brazil and Japan adding their names to the list. Others, including Britain and Australia, are expected to follow soon. The United States signed the treaty during the previous administration but

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.”



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



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

‘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

Iran regime will fall

Says shah’s son, calls for surgical strikes on Revolutionary Guards

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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‘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, freeness, 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 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.

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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 at a non-profit fiscal intermediary in Boston, US. He previously worked for the World Bank and Harvard University.

ABDULLAH SHIBLI

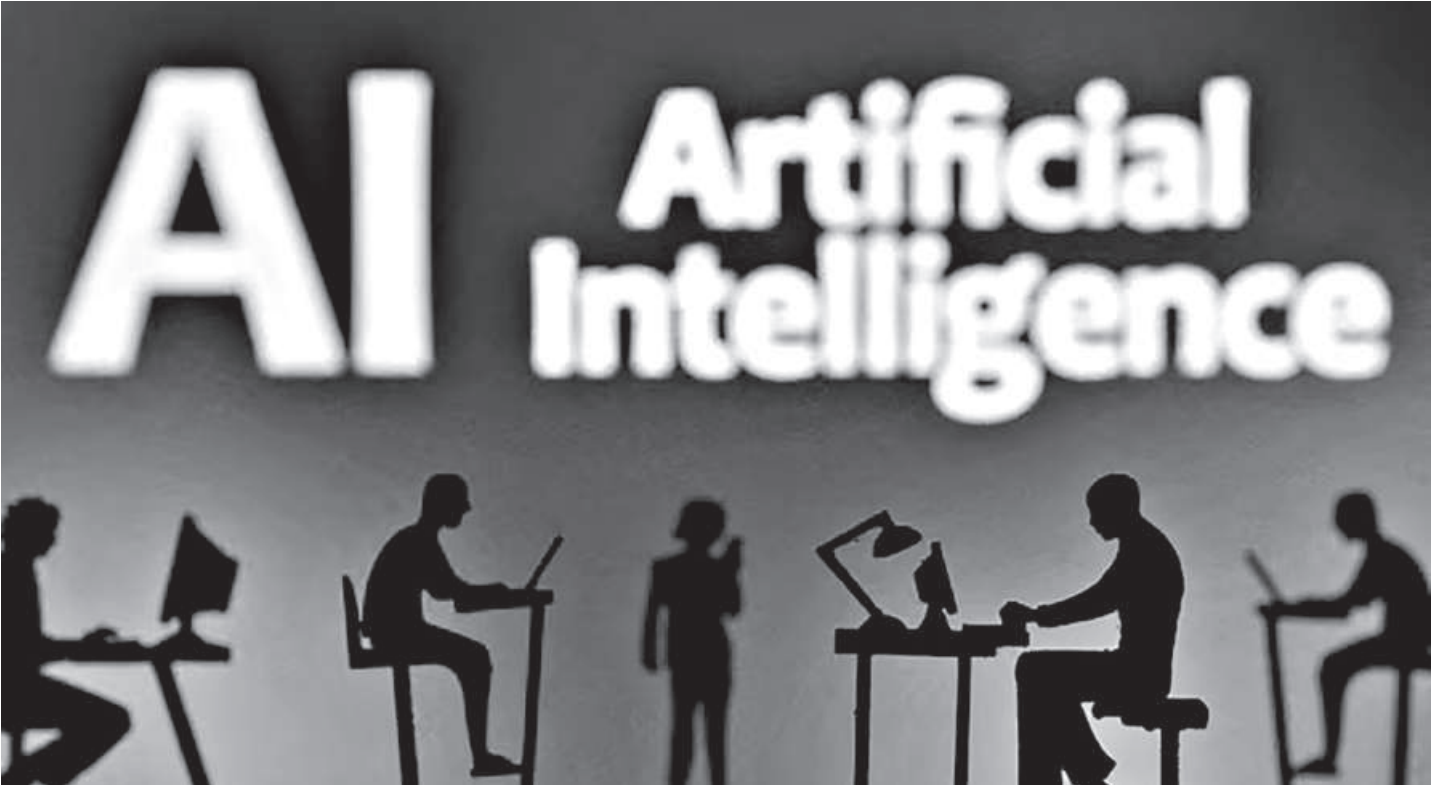
There is a widespread fear across US campuses, businesses, and industries that the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) and its rapid integration into all spheres of our lives will lead to job losses and a lifestyle where robots control our daily routines. However, further exploration of this notion 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.



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

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 reform must transition immediately from exam-based assessment to skill-based learning.

‘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 *Khub 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, *Khub 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.”



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, “We’ve been

working together 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

fun elements.”

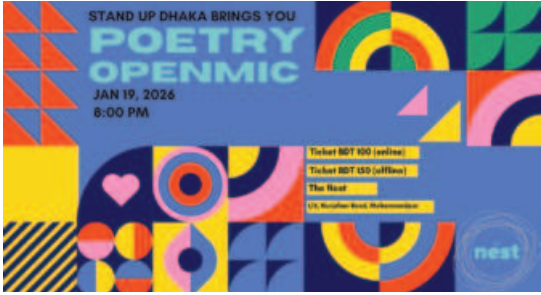
Raba also expresses excitement about Arafat’s transition from music to filmmaking while acknowledging his musical legacy: “While I love musician Arafat, and he has an established body of work as a musician, I am really looking forward to Director Arafat and the special theme he composed for this project.”

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 Raihan Rafi’s *Andhar*.



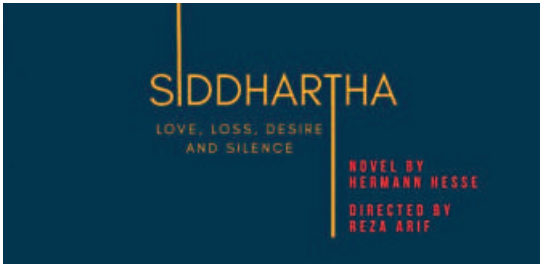
OUT AND ABOUT IN DHAKA



‘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.

TRENDY STREAMS

Netflix

Agatha Christie’s Seven Dials



Hulu

Tell Me Lies



Apple TV+

Hijack



Hulu

A Thousand Blows



Chorki

Aatka



TV TALKIES

His & Hers

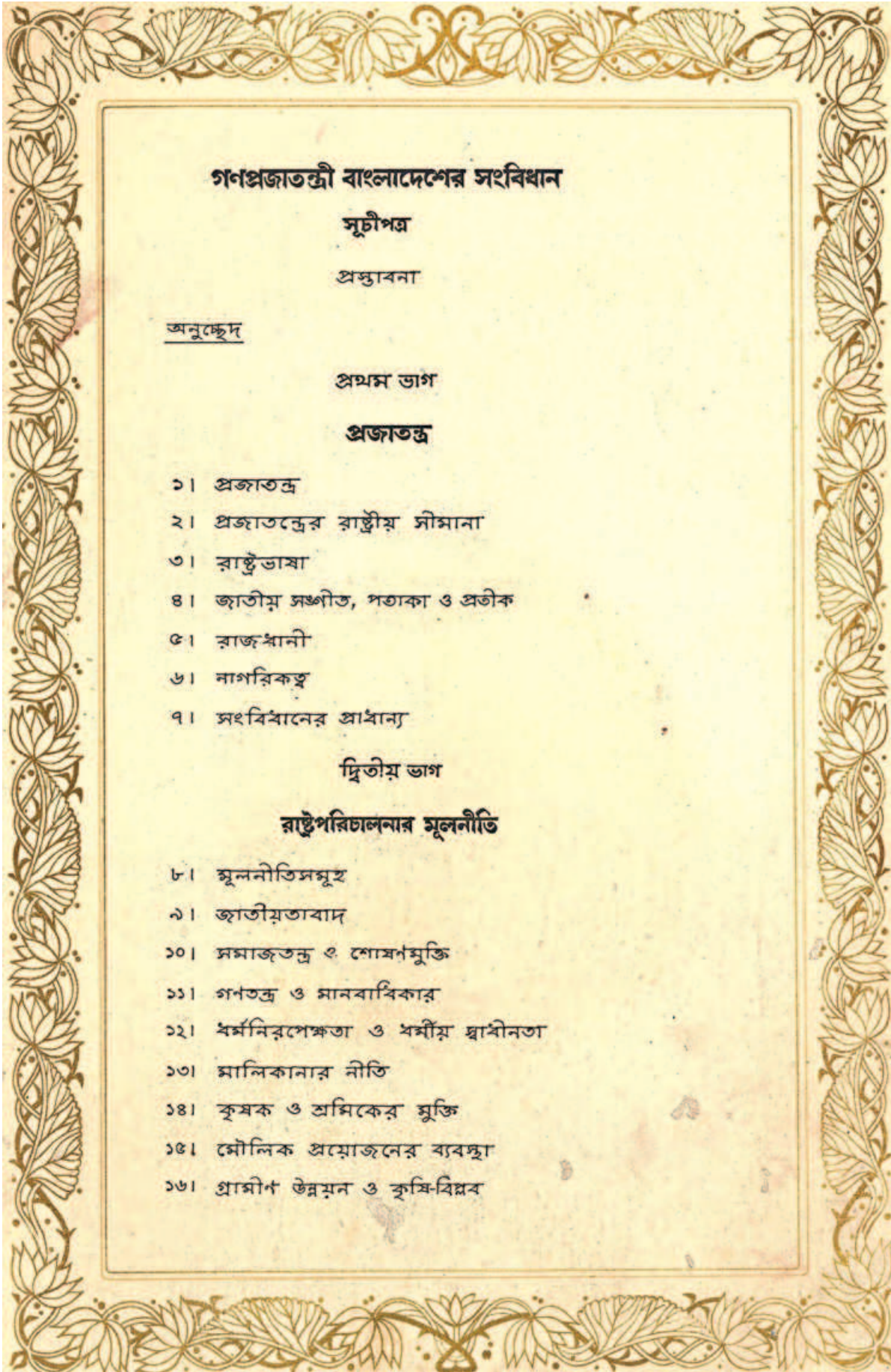
His & Hers is a sharp and engaging TV drama that blends journalism, crime, and emotional tension. Released on Netflix in 2026, the thriller follows two estranged spouses, a detective and a news reporter, who are drawn into the same murder case, each suspecting the other. The series keeps the pace tight, 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.



LAW VISION

OUR CONSTITUTION

between resurrection and revolution



MD. IMAMUNUR 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 resurrects the caretaker government system, we must ask a discomfoting 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 un-amendment', 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, uncoded 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

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 Constitution's 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.

amendment procedures of Article 142. This brings us to the core of the crisis. If we proceed with the referendum and any subsequent 're-founding', we are effectively admitting that the 1972 Constitution has lost its *grundnorm* status. We are moving from a Kelsenian continuity to a Schmittian decisionism, where the validity of the new order rests not on the old text, but on the political will emanating from July 2024.

Comparing this trajectory with our Commonwealth neighbours is instructive. In India, the *Kesavananda Bharati* judgment created a firewall that has largely held, despite severe political pressure. The Indian Supreme Court's robust application of the basic structure doctrine prevented the kind of 'abusive constitutionalism' that decimated Bangladesh's institutions. Conversely, the UK's uncoded constitution relies

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

If justice is thought to be a thesis, mob justice appears to be the antithesis to the very crux of it. Therefore, the expression 'mob justice' itself is a misnomer, for the actions of a mob negate, rather than uphold, the fundamental values of justice.

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

keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war [...] of every man against every man'.

If justice is thought to be a thesis, mob justice appears to be the *antithesis* to the very crux of it. By usurping the power of the state in whose hands they have no excellence, the mob acts contrary to the Platonian theory of justice. Mob justice also defeats the Aristotelian formulation of distributive justice by indiscriminately

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.

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.

Why does digestion often feel slower in winter?

RAISA MEHZABEEN

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



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.

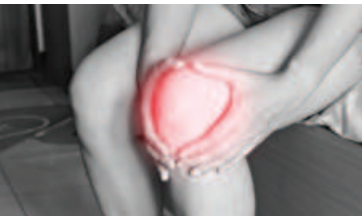
A large new analysis of existing clinical trials suggests that some of the most effective treatments are also among the simplest. Overall, knee braces, water-based therapy and exercise emerged as the most beneficial non-drug options for reducing pain and improving movement in people with knee osteoarthritis.

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

