



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

## SUNDARBANS 52 hostages rescued in one year: coastguards

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh Coast Guard's (BCG) anti-robbery drives in the Sundarbans over the past year have led to dozens of weapons being recovered and more than 50 hostages being rescued.

In 2025, the Coast Guard recovered 38 firearms, two hand bombs, 74 locally made weapons, arms manufacturing equipment, and 448 rounds of ammunition from the forest and surrounding waterways.

Lt Commander Siam-ul-Haq, media officer of the BCG, disclosed the update in a statement yesterday.

The operations also led to the arrest of 49 members of robber gangs and the rescue of 52 people who had been held hostage, said Siam. He said the coast guard conducted 27 anti-robbery operations in the Sundarbans over the last year.

The drives also rescued many fishers from captivity and returned them to their families.

As a recent example, the statement cited an incident on January 2 this year, when members of a long-running robbery gang allegedly took hostage the owner of Golkanon Resort and two tourists during a boat trip near Kanur Khal, spreading fear in the tourism sector.

## Bangladesh backs rules-based order, collective action: Touhid

UNB, Dhaka

Foreign Affairs Adviser Md Touhid Hossain yesterday said Bangladesh, as a responsible neighbour and an active member of the United Nations 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 (FRC) Bangladesh Chairman Dr Md Sajid Hossain Bhuiyan attended the conference as special guests.

Organised by the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Bangladesh (ICAB), the conference

was themed "Next Generation Profession: Converging Ethical AI and Sustainability Reporting."

For Bangladesh, the adviser said, the proposed convergence of technology and sustainability is particularly significant.

"Our pursuit of economic growth and deeper global integration requires that our professionals remain not only technically proficient, but also ethically grounded and socially responsible," he said.

He said platforms such as the conference play a vital role in facilitating the exchange of knowledge, sharing best practices, and fostering meaningful collaborations.

"Such engagements can steer both the region and the global community toward a sustainable, inclusive, and technologically advanced future," he added.

The keynote speech was delivered by Adeeb Hossain Khan, past president of ICAB and senior partner at Rahman Rahman Huq, Chartered Accountants.



## 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	
5:30	12:45	4:15	5:40	7:00	

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

AZAN 5:30 12:45 4:15 5:40 7:00  
JAMAT 6:05 1:15 4:30 5:44 7:30

## 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 "mob politics" could become a permanent tool to silence opponents.

He also criticised the interim administration for continuing bureaucratic secrecy, citing opaque dealings over the Chittagong Port lease.

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.

Prof Bulbul Siddiqi of North South University, columnist Nahid Hasan, and veteran journalist Chinmoy Mutusuddi also spoke at the programme.

## 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.

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.

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