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## 421 aspirants back in race

EC disposes of 645 appeals; loan defaulters among reinstated candidates

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With campaigning set to begin on January 22, the Election Commission yesterday reinstated the candidacies of 421 aspirants who had appealed the cancellation of their nominations.

Nearly two thirds of the appellants were reinstated after the EC heard 645 appeals between January 10 and yesterday – a higher proportion than in the previous two elections.

Speaking to reporters after finishing the hearings last night, Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin said, "We will need your [all stakeholders'] cooperation to ensure the voting can be conducted smoothly. This is not the end.... Many people will criticise us."

Explaining that concessions had been made for independent candidates, he said, "You've seen how we relaxed the requirement of one percent of voter signatures – because we want the election to be participatory. We want everyone to take part in a fair election."

On the issue of many loan defaulters getting their candidacies back, Election Commissioner Abul Fazal Md Sanaullah said, "We granted

We granted exemptions to loan defaulters with a heavy heart – only because the law permitted so.



Election Commissioner Abul Fazal Md Sanaullah

exemptions to loan defaulters with a heavy heart – only because the law permitted so."

On the final day of hearings against the returning officers' decisions yesterday, 63 appeals were heard. Of these, 23 appellants got their candidacies back, 35 were rejected, one was left pending, three appeals were withdrawn and one appellant was absent.

Yesterday, although BNP's Aslam Chowdhury retained his candidacy in Chattogram-4, the nomination of another party aspirant, Sarwar Alamgir, was cancelled in Chattogram-2.

Aslam's nomination paper had been declared valid by the RO, but an appeal was filed against him with the EC. During the hearing, the appeal was rejected, thereby upholding the RO's decision.

In Chattogram-2, Sarwar's nomination paper was also initially declared valid by the RO. However, Jamaat-e-Islami candidate

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BNP raises alarm over EC 'bias'

Fakhrul urges action on code violations by parties

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Just days before the formal launching of election campaigning, the BNP yesterday accused the Election Commission of questionable conduct on several issues, including its "bias towards a certain party".

At a meeting with Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin at the EC office in the capital's Agargaon, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir also alleged that leaders of various parties, including key figures, are violating the electoral code of conduct by starting campaigning ahead of the scheduled time.

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'Some DCs, SPs acting partially'

Jamaat tells Yunus at Jamuna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami Nayeb-e-Ameer Syed Abdullah Mohammad Taher yesterday said the party has informed the chief adviser that the conduct of some superintendents of police (SPs) and deputy commissioners (DCs) at the field level appears "biased".

A Jamaat delegation, led by the party's Ameer Shafiqur Rahman, met Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus at the state guest house Jamuna yesterday evening.

Jamaat Secretary General Mia Golam Porwar and Assistant Secretary General

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PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN  
In Godagari upazila of Rajshahi, traders buy green tomatoes from farmers at Tk 1,000–1,200 per maund, ripen them with toxic chemicals, and sell them in retail markets at Tk 60–80 per kg. The photo was taken on Saturday.

## OVERSEAS MANPOWER RECRUITMENT Approval for 252 agencies raises red flags

MD ABBAS

Bangladesh has approved licences for 252 new overseas recruiting agencies, bringing the total to a record 2,646, even as experts warn that the sector is already buckling under systemic corruption and inadequate oversight.

The expansion that comes under the oversight of the Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment adviser, Asif Nazrul, makes the country's migration network the largest in South Asia.

The decision directly contradicts recommendations from a government-commissioned White Paper on the economy released in December 2024, which urged a "reasonable" reduction in the number of agencies to curb exploitation and financial irregularities.

"Many old recruiting agencies are unfit and involved in corruption. We suggested reviewing and filtering them through a re-registration process," said economist Debapriya Bhattacharya, who led the experts'

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COUNTRY	RECRUITING AGENCIES
Bangladesh	2,646
Pakistan	2,537
India	1,988
Nepal	1,041
Sri Lanka	857
Bhutan	31

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MY DHAKA

# Dhaka's enduring love affair with TRADE FAIR

RBR

Why is Dhaka obsessed with trade fairs, export fairs or duty-free shopping? I am yet to find an answer to our everlasting euphoria for these fairs.

My family's annual ritual was to go to the trade fair with a gang of aunts, uncles and cousins at the Sher-e-Bangla fairgrounds. We would stand in line, brave the January chill, risk a dust attack, and be in awe of the lights and the humongous entry gate. We never missed a trade fair.

I proudly own my mother's blue porcelain tea set from People's Ceramic, bought at one such fair. A nostalgic antique now, their dinnerware sets, one in blue and one in red, both in the same maple leaf design, were a big hit, and almost every family in Dhaka



seemed to own them. I remember that in the 70s they even had circuses at the fairgrounds. Watching a motorbike spin round in a circular cage, and acrobats on a trapeze, was pure thrill.

If you go back to the mid-seventies,



the Dacca Trade Fair marked the beginning of organised trade promotion in independent Bangladesh, preceding the formal Dhaka International Trade Fair (DITF) that began later in 1995.

Trade fairs are close to the heart of Dhaka people. Every year we go there ritually, to eat kebabs and buy things we need, or pretend to need.

As you enter the gate, the first stall you see is Kiam Metal Industries Ltd. It is my all-time favourite because its base is in Kushtia, my hometown, and because it is the largest kitchenware manufacturer in Bangladesh.

I will always go to Kiam. This time, I found my dream tea-brewing pot. I had always been on the lookout for a pot or

kettle where I could brew the perfect cup of tea. I wanted it to look like a mug with a lid and a sturdy handle. I tried many versions of that idea but never found the right one, until I visited the Kiam stall this year.

For obvious reasons, there was a rush, as everyone went for the different sizes of non-stick pots and pans. This year, honeycomb non-stick fry pans in contemporary designs that reduce oil consumption and suit Asian-style cooking were much in demand. Along with induction cookers, kitchenware from Kiam was selling like hotcakes.

If you do not buy a tin of assorted biscuits from Nabisco Biscuit & Bread Factory Ltd, then your visit to the trade

fair remains incomplete. It has been an annual tradition in my family to visit the Nabisco stall and buy a big tin of cookies and lozenges. The biscuit-baking scent of this local factory is the smell of Dhaka. I got some pineapple cream biscuits, and they tasted just as they used to, bringing back so many childhood memories. Their trademark glucose biscuits in the shocking pink wrapper were what school tiffin meant.

I was thrilled to see a grand stall of Savoy Ice Cream selling their bestsellers, Discone, cakes and mango sticks, with many special offers. Local snacks and drinks were also getting their share of limelight at the fair.

RFL Plastics, with its wide range of premium-quality products, kitchenware, cleaning items, food containers, baby ware and plastic furniture, had an excellent product line. When you enter their stall, you feel like yes, I think I need this, I think I need that, and you end up filling your basket with cute but unnecessary stuff.

Pakistani, Indian, Turkish and Iranian stores drew large crowds, but if you look beyond that international meena bazar, you will see thriving local businesses and industries: Bangladeshi tea, handicrafts and food.

So yeah, that's the 2026 trade fair in a nutshell. And I haven't even written about the food court and play zones. The fair has donned a new look in its new venue at Purbachal. Some old-timers feel lost, some like the organised buzz, and die-hard fans just love it all, from 1974 till today.

## 421 aspirants back in race

FROM PAGE 1

Mohammad Nurul Amin from the same constituency appealed to the EC, seeking cancellation of Sarwar's candidacy.

In Feni-3, BNP candidate Abdul Awal Mintoo regained his candidature after Jamaat candidate Mohammad Fakhruddin filed an appeal against the validation of his nomination.

In Tangail-4, Abdul Latif Siddique, a four-time lawmaker and a former Awami League leader, regained his candidature. His nomination was challenged by Jatiya Party leader Md Liakat Ali.

In Cumilla-10, BNP candidate Abdul Gafur Bhuiyan lost his candidature after his nomination was challenged by Bangladeshi Shangskritik Muktiote candidate Kazi Nur E Alam Siddique.

The EC cancelled the candidacy of BNP aspirant for Brahmanbaria-1 Syed AK Ekramuzzana after he was found to be a fugitive, following an appeal by a rival candidate.

Jamaat candidate from Cox's Bazar-2 AHM Hamidur Rahman Azad regained his nomination after it was cancelled during scrutiny. The EC also cleared Tasnim Jara, an independent candidate for Dhaka-9.

Jara, who recently resigned from the National Citizen Party, was rejected by the RO due to a mismatch in the signatures from one percent of voters during scrutiny.

## BNP raises alarm over EC 'bias'

FROM PAGE 1

"We urged the authorities to take urgent measures in this regard," he told reporters after the meeting.

He also said returning officers, assistant returning officers, police superintendents, and other officials in some constituencies were working in favour of one party.

"We have brought these matters to the commission's attention and urged their withdrawal after investigation, in the interest of a free, fair, and acceptable election."

The Election Commission is engaging in questionable conduct on several issues, with the postal ballots for expatriate Bangladeshi being the most prominent and unresolved one."

Fakhrul added that his party has already submitted complaints to the EC in this regard, adding that ballots sent to registered expatriate voters and the printing of the papers remain "problematic".

"We believe these ballots are not correct. There was some bias here, and there were attempts to give undue advantage to a particular party. We've urged the Election Commission to fix this."

He added that the BNP has demanded postal ballots inside the country be distributed only after

The EC also reinstated the candidacy of July uprising frontliner and NCP leader Hasnat Abdullah for Cumilla-4.

Hasnat objected to the candidacy of BNP nominee Manjurul Ahsan Munshi in the same constituency.

Following Hasnat's appeal, the EC cancelled Munshi's candidacy, citing allegations that he was a loan defaulter and had concealed the information.

Munshi filed a 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.

The EC also upheld the candidacy of BNP-nominated Sabira Sultana in Jashore-2.

In Pirojpur-1, Jamaat candidate Masud Saidi filed an appeal against BNP candidate Alamgir Hossain. The EC rejected it.

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

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

The commission declared the nomination of Chattogram-9 Jamaat candidate AKM Fazlul Haque invalid

over dual citizenship issues, as he had US citizenship.

The EC did not reinstate the candidacy of Jatiya Party faction leader Anisul Islam Mamhud.

The EC declared valid the nomination of AHM Kaim (Hasnat Kaim), an independent candidate from Kishorganj-5 (Nikli Bajitpur), despite his application lacking at least one percent voters' signatures.

Others who regained their candidacies include Gono Forum General Secretary Mizanur Rahman (Magura-1) and three Jamaat candidates: Md Abdul Momin (Chandpur-2), Md Mosleh Uddin Farid (Jashore 2), and Md Mujibur Rahman Azadi (Jamalpur-3).

Of the 2,568 nomination papers submitted, returning officers initially accepted 1,842 and rejected 723 after scrutiny.

According to the parliamentary election schedule, candidates have time to withdraw their nominations until tomorrow after the appeal hearings. After that, the final number of candidates contesting in the election will be determined.

Ahead of the 2024 polls, around half of 560 aspirants, who appealed against nomination cancellations by returning officers, were successful in regaining their candidacies. In contrast, only 39 percent of 543 appellants were successful in the 2018 polls.

electoral symbols are allocated. These postal ballots, he said, must be arranged in the same manner as regular ballots that are used on polling day.

Fakhrul further alleged that Jamaat-e-Islami activists are violating the electoral code of conduct by collecting NID copies, bKash and mobile numbers from households. "This breaches personal privacy and is a criminal offense. We have already submitted objections over this violation and urged urgent action."

Emphasising his party's commitment to a level playing field for the 13th parliamentary election scheduled for February 12, he said their Chairperson Tarique Rahman had even cancelled personal trips to uphold fairness.

"But leaders of many parties, including key figures, are repeatedly conducting campaigns, violating the code of conduct."

He added, "Another issue we consider extremely important is that, in various constituencies of Dhaka city, a party has resorted to unethical tactics to ensure victory for its nominated candidates by transferring large numbers of voters from different parts of the country

On whether the BNP believes a level playing field exists, he said, "We think it does, though there are minor flaws. We believe those can be fixed."

Asked about nomination hearings inside the EC and simultaneous protests by the BNP's student wing outside, Fakhrul said, "The student movement is theirs to explain. But we learned that a university election was halted, and the EC later allowed it again. We believe this was wrong. The EC should reconsider the decision; otherwise, it will be questionable."

"We believe these ballots are not correct. There was some bias here, and there were attempts to give undue advantage to a particular party. We've urged the Election Commission to fix this."

He added that the BNP has demanded postal ballots inside the country be distributed only after

into Dhaka constituencies."

Fakhrul said the BNP has urgently requested details of voter transfers to Dhaka, including how many were moved, from which areas to which constituencies, when they were moved and the reasons behind the transfers.

"We have also received complaints that several senior EC officials are working for a particular party. We've requested that measures be taken against them."

About whether a fair election is possible under this EC, he said, "We've always believed it is possible, provided the problems are resolved and the issues we raised are addressed."

On whether the BNP believes a level playing field exists, he said, "We think it does, though there are minor flaws. We believe those can be fixed."

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Taher also said some advisers around the chief adviser are trying to mislead him. "We have drawn his attention to that."

He further said the party raised another issue with the chief adviser.

Taher claimed the government has gone "overboard" regarding the chief of a particular party by providing "excessive" security and extra protocol, saying that it

FROM PAGE 1

panel that prepared the White Paper.

"I am surprised that instead of cleaning up the mess, the authorities have raised the number of agencies," he told The Daily Star.

The government must take responsibility for the approvals, which will likely clutter the system. This is a real concern, he added.

According to the White Paper, Bangladeshi workers pay the highest migration cost in South Asia. Over the past decade, 19 percent of workers, who paid agents in advance, failed to migrate, resulting in a financial loss of around Tk 31,660 crore each year.

Despite repeated attempts, this correspondent could not reach Adviser Asif over his mobile phone. He also did not respond to text messages.

When contacted, Niamat Ullah Bhuiyan, senior secretary at the expatriates' welfare ministry, said that having more agencies reduces the possibility of manipulation by syndicates.

"If each agency sends even one worker, the total number of migrant workers will increase significantly. Having a large number of agencies won't create any problem as long as they maintain ethical standards."

Referring to violations of rules by recruitment agencies, he said legal measures are in place to control them. Harsh punishment is meted out to dishonest agencies, and no one is given any special favour.

Over the years, complaints of fraud and manipulation against recruiting agencies have remained high.

Data from the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) shows that 2,213 complaints were filed in 2024; 2,380 in 2023; 1,240 in 2022; 582 in 2021; and 905 in 2020.

The number of recruiting agencies has seen a steady rise since 2009, when it hovered around 900. The figure stood at about 2,300 before the ouster of the Awami League government in August 2024.

The list of the newly approved agencies was published by the expatriates' welfare and overseas employment ministry on

November 4 last year.

Bangladesh now has the highest number of recruitment agencies in South Asia, compared to 1,988 in India; 2,537 in Pakistan; 1,041 in Nepal; 857 in Sri Lanka; and 31 in Bhutan.

Fakhrul Islam, former joint secretary of Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (BAIRA), said the approval of new recruiting agencies has both positive and negative sides to it.

The move is positive in the sense that it will allow new firms to operate in compliance with government regulations, he said.

Fakhrul, however, warned that the outlook for the current labour market situation is weak.

### BANGLADESH'S MANPOWER EXPORT OVER THE YEARS

YEAR	MIGRANT WORKERS
2025	11,31,113
2024	10,11,969
2023	13,05,453
2022	11,35,873
2021	6,17,000

"The new agencies, which have to bear high monthly expenses, may not survive unless new labour markets open. The sector could face a serious crisis if that does not happen," he said.

Shariful Hasan, associate director of the BRAC Migration Programme, said that issuing more licences will not help reduce migration costs or the suffering of migrants.

"I don't think the 252 new licences will improve the migration system or ease hardships of migrant workers... What matters is transparency, accountability, and proper management," he told this newspaper.

The gradual shrinking of legal migration opportunities has led to a rise in irregular migration.

According to the Displacement Tracking Matrix of the International Organisation for Migration, Bangladesh ranked first in terms of irregular sea crossings to Europe last year, with 22,145 people entering through unsafe routes, up from 15,304 the previous year.

Young migrants often rely on brokers and fall prey to human trafficking.

Data from the home ministry's Public Security Division show that 4,546 cases were filed against 19,280 people over human trafficking from January 2019 to January 2025. Of them, 157 were convicted.

Taher also questioned the role of the Election Commission in scrutinising nomination papers. "We are already seeing some discrepancies. That is why we drew the chief adviser's attention to that so that this can be remedied."

"We are hearing that attempts are being made by a particular party to exert pressure on the Election Commission so that nominations which should be cancelled due to these faults are not cancelled."

If such conduct continues, he warned, "doubts and despair" may grow among the people regarding the prospect of a

## Zia's 90th birth anniversary today

UNB, Dhaka

The BNP is set to observe the 90th birth anniversary of its founder and former president of Bangladesh Ziaur Rahman today with due solemnity.

Born on January 19, 1936, in Bogra's Bagbari, Ziaur Rahman was

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## Independent media source of truth when institutions fail

Says Mahfuz Anam; 10 DU students get Prof Sitara Parvin Award

DU CORRESPONDENT

Independent media is the only reliable source of truthful information for a democratic government when other state pillars fail, said Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, yesterday.

The autonomous and critical functions of both parliament and the judiciary have gradually been curtailed, limiting their ability to keep the government on the right path, he said while speaking as a guest speaker at an award ceremony held in honour of the late Prof Sitara Parvin of the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism at Dhaka University.

The event took place at the Professor Muzaffar Ahmed Chowdhury Auditorium at the Faculty of Social Sciences.

Anam said, "The ruling party and bureaucracy rarely provide the government with the truth it needs

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A total of 10 meritorious students of the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism of Dhaka University were recognised with the Prof Sitara Parvin Award for their outstanding results. The award ceremony, held in honour of the late Professor Sitara Parvin of the department, was held at the Professor Muzaffar Ahmed Chowdhury Auditorium in the Faculty of Social Sciences yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

## Scrap draft energy master plan 13 organisations urge govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As the government moves to approve a 25 year draft Energy and Power Sector Master Plan, civil society organisations have demanded that it be scrapped, alleging it was formulated without democratic processes or transparency.

They said the plan's social and environmental impacts were not adequately considered and public participation was largely ignored during its preparation.

A total of 13 organisations yesterday held a press conference under the banner of Bangladesh Working Group on Ecology and Development (BWGED).

The group said the interim government's role was meant to ensure routine governance, yet it is exceeding its mandate by attempting to impose a long-term, high-risk energy plan with far-reaching consequences.

"Despite directives from the High Court, no meaningful



Reliance on imported liquefied natural gas, coal and oil would remain at 50 after 25 years, posing severe risks to the country's energy security and economy.

KEYNOTE PAPER READ

## 97% battery, 86% pedal rickshaws unregistered

Says study based on data from 384 drivers, 392 passengers, 63 garage owners across Dhaka

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With 97.4 percent of battery-powered rickshaws and 85.94 percent of pedal rickshaws operating outside formal registration systems, rickshaw services in Dhaka remain largely unregulated, according to a recent study.

Battery-powered rickshaws are increasingly attracting younger drivers, with the average age at 38, compared to 42 for pedal rickshaw drivers.

About 75 percent of battery rickshaw drivers are new entrants who had never driven pedal rickshaws before.

The findings were shared at a discussion at the BDDBL Building in Karwan Bazar, where INNOVISION Consulting released its study titled "Urban Mobility Study: Rickshaws



### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Enforce registration, traffic rules
- Set appropriate cap on number of rickshaws
- Improve footpaths, access to public transport
- Tackle roadside obstacles, weak traffic management
- Regulate battery handling, including acid disposal and recycling

in Transition." The research examines the rapid shift from pedal-driven to battery-powered rickshaws in Dhaka.

The study comes amid growing debate over battery-powered rickshaws – popularly known as "Bangla Teslas" – regarding traffic congestion, road safety, informal employment, and regulation.

Recently, Dhaka North and South City Corporations launched a pilot project with Buet-approved battery rickshaws, underscoring the need for evidence-based policy decisions.

INNOVISION Managing Director Rubaiyat Sarwar presented the findings, based on primary data from 384 rickshaw drivers, 392 passengers and 63 garage owners across Dhaka.

According to the study, battery

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

## Move beyond the rhetoric on minority inclusion Speakers urge parties at CGS seminar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Democracy risks turning into a mere numbers game if minority rights and political representation are not ensured, speakers said at a seminar held at the capital's CIRDAP Auditorium yesterday.

The seminar, titled "Democracy for All: Minority Rights, Representation and National Elections," was organised by the Centre for Governance Studies (CGS), where representatives from minority communities stressed that inclusive democracy is impossible without genuine political will and accountability.

Rights activist Khushi Kabir said democracy should guarantee equal and fair opportunities for everyone, but the current model is confined to power, money and the majority.

She alleged that political parties routinely violate the requirement of a minimum five percent female representation. Referring to Jamaat-e-Islami, she said, "They retain female members to maintain registration but do not truly believe in women's leadership."

Pallab Chakma, a representative from the CHT, said, "Political parties often mention minority and indigenous issues in their election manifestos, but they rarely engage in direct dialogue with these communities."

Referring to the BNP's 31-point reform outline, SEE PAGE 13 COL 1

## 'Campus not a male-only space'

Female DU students stage BBQ protest over 5:00pm field entry curbs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Female students of Dhaka University organised a BBQ party at the university's central field last evening to protest an order restricting their entry to the field after 5:00pm.

Organisers said the event was a symbolic act to challenge the restriction and draw attention to concerns over equal access to campus spaces.

They presented five demands to the university authorities.

They demanded an end to harassment and discriminatory restrictions imposed on female students under the pretext of "special security".

They also demanded the immediate reconstitution and activation of the university's Sexual Harassment Prevention Cell.

Their other demands include repairing the non-functional women's toilet at the TSC and ensuring safe, adequate and usable toilet facilities across

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

# CRM

ডাচ-বাংলা ব্যাংক-এর সকল  
শাখা ও ফাস্ট ট্র্যাকে CRM রয়েছে

CRM-এ টাকা উত্তোলন ছাড়াও বিঘ্নে টাইমে  
টাকা জমা ও পাঠানো যায়



ডাচ-বাংলা ব্যাংক  
আপনার বিশ্বস্ত সহযোগী





## POST-WAR GAZA

US 'wants nations to pay \$1bn to stay on peace board'

AGENCIES

A draft charter sent to about 60 countries by the US administration calls for members to contribute \$1 billion in cash if they want their membership to last more than three years, according to the document seen by Reuters.

"Each Member State shall serve a term of no more than three years from this Charter's entry into force, subject to renewal by the Chairman," the document, first reported by Bloomberg News, shows.

The three-year membership term shall not apply to Member States that contribute more than USD \$1,000,000,000 in cash funds to the Board of Peace within the first year of the Charter's entry into force."

US President Donald Trump would serve as its inaugural chairman and each member state shall serve a term of no more than three years from this



charter's entry into force, subject to renewal by the chairman, the report said.

The panel, known as the Gaza executive board, notably includes Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan and a Qatari official and was announced by the White House on Friday.

The Board of Peace began to take shape on Saturday as the leaders of Egypt, Turkey, Argentina, Canada, Pakistan were asked to join.

The White House called the report "misleading" and said there is no minimum membership fee to join the "Board of Peace".

"This simply offers permanent membership to partner countries who demonstrate deep commitment to peace, security, and prosperity," the White House said on X.

The US State Department responded to Reuters' question on the matter by referring to previous social media posts about the board by Trump and his special envoy Steve Witkoff.

Jordan's foreign ministry said yesterday that King Abdullah received an invitation from President Trump to join the board. Pakistan has been invited to be a part of the "Board of Peace", the Foreign Office said yesterday.



A demonstrator is detained in front of the Bishop Henry Whipple Federal Building during a protest in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on Saturday, more than a week after a US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent fatally shot Renee Nicole Good.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## 'We will continue to stand united'

Eight European nations back Denmark, Greenland amid Trump tariff threat

AGENCIES

Eight European nations in a joint statement yesterday said they stood in solidarity with the Kingdom of Denmark and the people of Greenland following US President Donald Trump's threat to annex the Arctic island.

"As members of Nato, we are committed to strengthening Arctic security as a shared transatlantic interest," Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Britain said in the statement.

"Tariff threats undermine transatlantic relations and risk a dangerous downward spiral," the statement said.

In a post on his platform, Truth Social, on Saturday, Trump said 10 percent tariffs would come into effect on February 1 for Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

He added that these tariffs would rise to 25 percent on June

1 and continue until an agreement is reached for the US to buy Greenland, reports AFP.

Trump indicated in his lengthy social media post that the tariffs were being imposed in retaliation for trips the countries' representatives took to Greenland "for purposes unknown". He

French Agriculture Minister Annie Genevard told broadcasters Europe 1 and CNews, adding any US takeover of the autonomous Danish territory would be "unacceptable".

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said a US invasion of Greenland "would make Putin



accused all eight of playing a "very dangerous game" in opposing US control over the territory.

The United States will also suffer if President Donald Trump implements threats to impose tariffs on European countries opposing his plans to acquire Greenland, a French minister said yesterday.

"In this escalation of tariffs, he has a lot to lose as well, as do his own farmers and industrialists,"

the happiest man on earth" in a newspaper interview published yesterday.

Sanchez said any military action by the US against Denmark's vast Arctic island would damage Nato and legitimise the invasion of Ukraine by Russia.

The UK's position on Greenland is "non-negotiable", Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy said yesterday.

Russia pounds Ukraine with drone blitz

Two killed, dozens injured

REUTERS, Kyiv

Two people were killed and dozens more wounded in a mass Russian drone attack across Ukraine overnight, President Volodymyr Zelensky said yesterday, as US and Ukrainian negotiators hashed out a post-war plan in the latest round of peace talks.

Moscow has stepped up a winter campaign of strikes on the Ukrainian energy system while also waging a battlefield offensive as Kyiv faces US pressure to secure peace in the nearly four-year-old war.

Zelensky said the Sumy, Kharkiv, Dnipro, Zaporizhzhia, Khmelnytskyi and Odesa regions were targeted in an attack that included over 200 drones. The military said 30 strikes had been recorded across 15 locations.

One person was killed in the second-largest city of Kharkiv, said mayor Ihor Terekhov, who in recent days has reported significant damage to local energy facilities as a result of Russian strikes.

It was not immediately clear where the second person had died. Major cities including the capital Kyiv have faced blackouts and cuts to heating.

## Syrian forces seize major oil, gas fields

Security sources say Kurdish-led forces withdraw from Deir Zor province

REUTERS

Syrian troops fighting US-backed Kurdish-led forces seized the Omar oil field, the country's largest, and the Conoco gas field in the eastern Deir Zor province as allied Arab tribal forces advanced in the oil-rich area along the border with Iraq, officials and security sources said yesterday.

The takeover of the oil fields that lie east of the Euphrates River — a main source of revenue for the Kurdish-led forces — was a major blow to the group, which officials said had deprived the state of resources used by the militia.

The Syrian army pressed ahead into predominantly Arab-populated areas of northeast Syria controlled by the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), despite US calls to halt its advance.

A government source said Kurdish-led forces were overcome after advances led by the Arab tribal fighters, allowing the government and its tribal allies to move into a stretch of territory of more than 150 km along the eastern bank of the Euphrates stretching from Baghuz near the Iraqi border towards key towns including al-Shuhail and Busayra.

## Portugal votes in tight presidential race

Far right poised to reach runoff

REUTERS, Lisbon

Portuguese voters queued at polling stations yesterday to elect a new president, with opinion surveys showing three candidates, including the leader of the far-right Cheap party, nearly tied for a spot in a likely top-two runoff.

In the five decades since Portugal threw off its fascist dictatorship, a presidential election has only once before — in 1986 — required a runoff, highlighting how fragmented the political landscape has become with the rise of the far right and voter disenchantment with mainstream parties.

The presidency is a largely ceremonial role in Portugal but wields some key powers, including in some circumstances to dissolve parliament, to call a snap parliamentary election, and to veto legislation.

Around 11 million voters are eligible to cast ballots. Polling stations were due to close at 7:00 pm (1900 GMT), with exit polls expected at 8:00 pm and results released during the night.

The last pre-election opinion survey released on Friday by Pitagorica pollsters put Socialist Antonio Jose Segundo on 25.1 percent, followed by Cheap leader Andre Ventura on 23 percent, and Jiao Cot rim de Figurehead, a member of the European Parliament from the right-wing, pro-business Liberal Initiative party, on 22.3 percent.

Last May, the anti-immigration Cheap, founded just about seven years ago, became the main opposition party in a parliamentary election, winning 22.8 percent of the vote.

## Massive fire kills 6 in Karachi

Shopping centre destroyed

REUTERS, Karachi

Firefighters in Pakistan's largest city were fighting to extinguish a massive blaze yesterday that has killed six people and reduced parts of a shopping mall to rubble in Karachi's historic downtown.

Videos showed flames rising from the building as firefighters laboured through the night to stop the fire from spreading in the dense business district. The fire erupted on Saturday night, with rescue services receiving a call at 10:38 pm (1738 GMT) reporting that ground floor shops at Gul Plaza were ablaze.

"When we arrived, the fire from the ground floor had spread to the upper floors, and almost the entire building was already engulfed in flames," Rescue 1122 spokesperson Hassanul Haseeb Khan told Reuters.

## Indonesia finds wreckage of missing plane

Body of one victim found in ravine; rescuers search for nine more

REUTERS, Jakarta

Indonesian authorities said yesterday they had located the wreckage of a fisheries surveillance plane that went missing in South Sulawesi province on the slope of a fog-covered mountain and had recovered the body of one of the 10 people on board.

The ATR 42-500 turboprop owned by aviation group Indonesia Air Transport lost contact with air traffic control on Saturday at about 1:30 pm local time (0530 GMT) around the Maros region in South Sulawesi.

There were seven crew members and three passengers on board the plane, which was chartered by Indonesia's Marine Affairs and Fisheries Ministry to conduct air surveillance on fisheries. The passengers were ministry staff members.

Authorities had initially said eight crew members were on board but later revised the figure. The plane was flying to Makassar, the capital of South Sulawesi, from Yogyakarta before losing contact.

Yesterday morning, local rescuers found the wreckage in different locations around Mount Bulusarang in the Maros region, said Andi Sultan, an official at South Sulawesi's rescue agency. The mountain is roughly 1,500 km (930 miles) northeast of the sprawling island nation's capital, Jakarta.



A person walks in front of a burning building as fire and smoke rise from a forest fire in the Biobio region where, according to local media, multiple wildfires prompted emergency evacuations, in Concepcion, Chile, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS





## Striving for Workers' Safety, Voice, and Just Transition

**A roundtable titled "Social Sustainability in the Industrial Sector: Current Issues and the Way Forward" was held on 19 November 2025, at The Daily Star Centre, Dhaka. Jointly organised by Centre for Policy Dialogue, Embassy of Denmark in Dhaka, the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE), United Federation of Danish Workers (3F), Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS), and The Daily Star, the event brought together policymakers from the country's industrial sector, representatives from labour authorities, and leaders from the business sector. The discussion aimed to forge a collective path forward for Bangladesh's industrial sector, focusing on occupational safety, just transition, and enhancing social dialogue mechanisms.**



**ANDERS KARLSEN**  
Deputy Head of Mission  
Embassy of Denmark, Bangladesh

Congratulations are in order for the amended Labour Law and the ratification of key ILO conventions, an important step forward over the past year. Our partnership with Bangladesh on social sustainability, particularly since Rana Plaza, has focused on social dialogue, just transition, and workplace safety, in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Employment, trade unions, and employers. We have learned from workers, unions, and inspectors that while listening has improved and training is effective, widespread insecurity remains. To move forward, we must expand transparent social dialogue across sectors and at the national level, including clear and credible criteria for selecting representatives to tripartite bodies. We must also protect the right to strike so collective bargaining has real meaning, and safeguard tripartite processes from political interference so both employers and workers are genuinely represented. Furthermore, recruiting more labour inspectors and ensuring inspections lead to meaningful change is essential for systemic progress. While the labour market parties should lead this dialogue, government has a crucial role in regulatory support.



**OLE ROSENBOORG JUSTESEN**  
Sector Advisor  
Embassy of Denmark, Bangladesh

Social sustainability in Bangladesh is about tackling core challenges related to issues such as workplace safety, workers' voice, and adapting to climate change and automation. This matters morally, given tragedies like Rana Plaza and recent factory fires, and strategically, as it is often directly linked to market access. Our Danish-Bangladesh cooperation has trained DIFE inspectors, strengthened union capacity, and integrated issues like heat stress into collective agreements. However, these successes are limited to a few factories. Three key lessons from our collaboration with Bangladesh emerge: institutional capacity in bodies like DIFE is vital for lasting change; genuine worker participation is non-negotiable; and



from giants like Nvidia, will massively impact production. Our industries cannot remain outside this shift. We must proactively plan for the management of our labour force. In fully automated factories, there will be no labour; we must discuss where new jobs will be created and how to preserve workers' rights during this transition. Failure to address this will create severe economic and social disparity, diverting resources and leaving technically disadvantaged countries like ours in a precarious position. Proactive decision-making from today's discussion is vital.



**SYED SULTAN UDDIN AHMED**  
Executive Director  
Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies

While we have healthy debates here, true social dialogue in Bangladesh remains informal, inconsistent, and not institutionalised. The amended labour law's provision for a social dialogue forum is a positive institutional step. However, the amendment itself is not forward-looking; it lacks guidance on preserving jobs during automation or ensuring timely wage payments. For dialogue to work, we need genuine representation, institutional support, and a shift in understanding. It must follow ILO indicators: sharing information and documents, identifying gaps, and leading to collective bargaining not just discussion. We must address why our factories don't receive the same costs or policy support as Cambodia's, or why our workers earn less than China's or Vietnam's. Our priority should be establishing a national minimum labour standard through consistent, outcome-based dialogue involving all stakeholders.



**ABUL KALAM AZAD**  
President  
Tannery Workers Union

The most important thing for any person is the security of their life. The Rana Plaza tragedy showed how severely weak worker safety was in Bangladesh, almost non-existent. While we have tried to recover from that massive disaster through collective efforts, safety at the factory level remains weak, with continuous accidents, from Hashem Foods to chemical fires. I will concentrate on the leather sector, which is the most hazardous and vulnerable. The chemicals used cause severe long-term health issues, like cancer, even after workers leave. A major problem is the total absence of a responsible role from many entrepreneurs. Furthermore, DIFE's supervision and monitoring remain very weak. There is hope that the government will ratify the OSH-related conventions, but ratification alone is not enough. We have many ratified conventions where poor implementation means the crisis continues. My request is that today's discussion ensures authorities play their proper role in implementation.



**SHAH ABDUL TARIK**  
Additional Director  
General  
Department of Labour

My focus is Just Transition regarding climate change and automation. The responsibility for creating a safe environment is collective, not just for workers, employers, or the government. Our fundamental issue is a lack of good governance and a genuine sense of duty. Meanwhile, the Fourth Industrial Revolution, driven by trillion-dollar investments

less visible but dangerous. Although DIFE's capacity has improved, it remains inadequate for the growing industry. Initiatives like LIMA have stalled and are not fully operational. A major challenge is unreliable data; DIFE's reports do not match figures from private researchers or other agencies like the Fire Brigade. For effective action, we need concrete data. Future challenges include climate-induced heat stress and the overlooked issue of workers' mental health and harassment in factories.



**SHAKIL AKHTER CHOWDHURY**  
General Secretary  
Bangladesh Labour Federation

Occupational safety in Bangladesh is governed by the Labour Law and OSH policy, yet major incidents continue. The critical issue is the informal sector, which constitutes 85 per cent of the workforce and remains largely unaccounted for in our statistics. While the recent labour law amendment is a step forward, its rules must be crafted carefully to avoid regression. The real problem is weak implementation. DIFE, despite its mandate, has not driven sufficient change. Ratifying ILO conventions C155 and C187 is positive, but ratification alone is meaningless without translation into law and ground-level implementation. True social dialogue requires collective bargaining, which is impossible without unions. Very few enterprises have unions. We must bring all workers, including informal ones, under legal coverage. Implementing the Labour Reform Commission's report, which addresses these issues holistically, is the key to achieving just transition, OSH, and social dialogue.



**MD. ABDUL AWAL**  
Assistant Inspector  
General - Safety  
Department of  
Inspection for  
Factories and  
Establishments

Post-Rana Plaza, we identified 140,000 safety issues across garment factories. Work since 2014 has led to significant improvement. DIFE has been strengthened with a digital inspection platform and advanced OSH training for workers and managers, supported by Danish partners. Legally, the 2013 Labour Act was upgraded, a National OSH Policy and Action Plan were formed, an Employment Injury Scheme pilot began, and an Industrial Safety Unit was established. Our focus was initially on export-oriented factories, but we are now prioritising other hazardous sectors like shipbreaking and construction. A key ongoing challenge is that many factories operate in shared or rented spaces, requiring multi-stakeholder engagement that slows improvements. We are working to strengthen our digital platforms for more dynamic reporting.



**KALPONA AKTER**  
President  
Bangladesh Garment and Industrial Workers Federation (BGIWF)

Bangladesh is at a critical crossroads. The transition to greener production and automation is inevitable, but will it be just? Currently, workers' voices are excluded from frameworks like the National Adaptation Plan. Workers suffer from heat stress but lack awareness that climate is a factor. Factories and brands set carbon targets without discussing adaptation plans with workers. Automation is wiping out jobs; for instance, when sweater factories adopted new machines, nine out of ten workers lost their jobs, with no framework to track

if they were reskilled. This top-down approach must stop. Brands cannot impose policies without financial contribution. A just transition requires including every stakeholder, especially workers, in the dialogue.



**TASLIMA AKTER LIMA**  
President  
Bangladesh Garments Sramik Sanghati

We need a national action plan and social dialogue for social protection in this transitional period. While training is important, it alone cannot prevent job losses, especially for women workers. To cope with automation and the green transition, we must also ensure state and employer policies that address the structural barriers women face. This includes proper maternity leave, childcare support, and a women-friendly work environment. Without these, women cannot enhance their skills or job efficiency while managing household responsibilities. Ensuring continued employment and skill development depends on guaranteeing wages, safety, and these fundamental protections. Therefore, a holistic approach combining training with strong social protection policies is crucial for a just transition.



**VIDIYA AMRIT KHAN**  
Vice President  
Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA)

The narrative must change from Rana Plaza to recognising our progress. Bangladesh has the world's highest number of green certified factories. However, brands systematically reduce prices while demanding higher standards, and our average 45-50 per cent efficiency faces less scrutiny than China's 90-100 per cent. We work on Just Transition, but buyers must share responsibility. My request is for a guideline for union leaders to ensure harmony and prevent violence. With over 300 factory closures last year, we also need support. A unified code of conduct is necessary to reduce costly, redundant audits. The negative press helps no one; to secure our industry's future, we must promote our story of creating safer workplaces since the Rana Plaza tragedy.



**ASIF IBRAHIM**  
Vice Chairman  
Newage Group of Industries

We must address sustainability for all industrial sectors, not just RMG. Our goals include reducing labour unrest and improving buyer confidence for long-term competitiveness and market access. Observing the exchange here today highlights a persistent trust deficit between owners and labour leaders. Effective social dialogue, grounded in proper data, is essential to bridge this gap. We urgently need comprehensive digitisation to create structured databases and enhance labour court capacity, especially in industrial zones. We must modernise laws and expand the SDIR model with partners like the ILO. Crucially, the core issue is the unfair pricing from buyers such as the "five-dollar conundrum." When a USD 25 shirt earns us only USD 3, paid after 120 days, it ties everyone's hands. Brands must be included in this dialogue for any real progress.



**NEERAN RAMJUTHAN**  
Program Manager - Labour Administration and Working Conditions, ILO

I congratulate the government on gazetting the amended Labour Act

and ratifying ILO conventions C155, C187, and C190, making Bangladesh a leader in South Asia. Effective social dialogue through the TCC made this possible. To strengthen freedom of association, we must simplify trade union registration and protect unions from interference and retaliation. Participation committees must be independent, not managerially nominated, and we need more women in union decision-making roles. Regarding inspections, DIFE must adopt strategic, risk-based labour inspections, prioritising high-risk sectors like construction and shipbreaking over RMG. Crucially, DIFE's dual role in inspection and conciliation is conflictual. Non-payment of wages is a rights violation requiring immediate corrective action, not conciliation. The key recommendation is strategic, risk-based labour inspection.



**MD. ABDUS SAMAD AL AZAD**  
Joint Secretary  
Ministry of Labour and Employment

Effective social dialogue requires transparency and cooperation. Despite consultation on the Labour Act, differences remain. We will convene talks on a National Tripartite Coordination Council and strengthen factory-level Participation Committees. On OSH, we have ratified Conventions 155 and 187 but need a roadmap for implementation. For Just Transition, associations like BGMEA should establish cells to advise the Ministry, and we must collectively demand fair pricing from buyers. We are developing a Social Insurance Strategy for maternity and unemployment benefits. Inspections must shift from numerous, ineffective checks to strategic, high-penalty audits that deter violations. Industrial relations are human-to-human. With political will and an independent tripartite council, we can overcome these challenges.



**AVRA BHATTACHARJEE**  
Additional Director - Dialogue and Outreach Division  
Centre for Policy

### Dialogue (CPD)

Workers' safety remains a fundamental concern in Bangladesh's industrial sector, an urgency made painfully clear by the Rana Plaza collapse. In the aftermath, CPD closely monitored post-Rana Plaza developments and produced a series of Independent Monitoring Reports. Since then, CPD has worked consistently on occupational safety and health (OSH), social dialogue, and just transition. We have conducted research and organised dialogues on workplace safety, promoted discussions on wages, employment, and workers' well-being, and explored pathways for protecting workers as industries adapt to climate change and automation. We are here, in today's roundtable to listen, learn, and exchange views openly, and to identify practical ideas that can inform stronger policies and better practices. We have compiled case studies and video evidence from our outreach, which will be published and broadcast soon.



**TANJIM FERDOUS**  
(Moderator of the Session)  
In-Charge - NGOs & Foreign Missions  
The Daily Star

Today's dialogue is a crucial step in a long journey. We discussed OSH beyond RMG, in construction, transport, and shipbreaking, and must also address the severe risks faced by our migrant workers abroad. On Just Transition, the debate between job loss and upskilling requires strong roles from both employers and workers. For Social Dialogue, we must balance profit with labour well-being. As Bangladesh graduates from LDC status, we face heightened competition. To sustain our industry, we must diversify products, explore new markets, and implement a universal audit mechanism and social well-being schemes through continued collaboration.

### RECOMMENDATIONS AND THE WAY FORWARD

- » Set clear, transparent criteria for social dialogue representatives and protect the right to strike from political interference.
- » Increase labour inspectors and apply risk-based inspections, prioritising high-risk sectors (construction, agriculture, shipbreaking).
- » Enforce existing labour laws, especially in the informal sector, and close legal gaps affecting subcontracted workers.
- » Finalise and implement subcontracting guidelines to ensure minimum safety standards and core labour rights.
- » Scale up upskilling and reskilling for automation and green transition, with targeted support for women workers.
- » Strengthen unions and freedom of association, expanding worker representation in underorganised sectors.
- » Promote inclusive leadership and ensure meaningful participation of women in unions and social dialogue.

job safety, skills, and climate action are inseparable. Today, we must identify what works and, crucially, discuss how to scale these solutions across the wider industry. Our goal is to craft practical recommendations to guide policy and our ongoing dialogue as Bangladesh approaches its LDC graduation.



**SHAH ABDUL TARIK**  
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Department of Labour

My focus is Just Transition regarding climate change and automation. The responsibility for creating a safe environment is collective, not just for workers, employers, or the government. Our fundamental issue is a lack of good governance and a genuine sense of duty. Meanwhile, the Fourth Industrial Revolution, driven by trillion-dollar investments

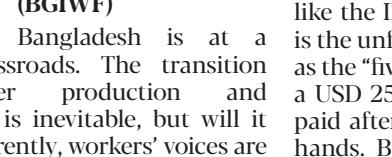
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**TAMIM AHMED**  
Senior Research Associate  
Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)

While we have prevented another Rana Plaza-level disaster in the RMG sector, this success is limited. Our research shows a staggering 25 per cent of factories, mainly informal ones, operate without regular inspections, putting overall progress at risk. Compared to RMG, sectors like transport, construction, and agriculture have higher accident rates. In tanneries, over 60 per cent of workers suffer from occupational diseases like skin allergies, which are

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## No alternative to unity for journalists

Authorities must ensure journalists' safety, uphold press freedom

We share the concerns of media professionals regarding journalists' safety and the persistent threats to press freedom that, unfortunately, did not subside even a year and a half after the July 2024 uprising, as had been expected. At the first edition of the Media Convention on Saturday, journalists from across the country expressed frustration with the government's failure to curb intolerance and prevent attacks on press freedom. Several media personalities also criticised the government's slow response when the offices of *Prothom Alo* and *The Daily Star* were vandalised and set on fire.

The mass uprising, which led to the ousting of Sheikh Hasina's regime that had largely silenced the media through draconian laws, had instilled hope for an environment where press freedom could thrive. Instead, journalists and media houses now face new forms of intimidation from hegemonic groups and social media influencers whose aim seems to be the vilification of the press. Incitement of mobs against media houses has been weaponised, shrinking the space for facts, historical truths, and pluralistic or critical viewpoints. Although the use of draconian laws against journalists is not as rampant as during Hasina's rule, arrests in dubious cases continue. Worse still, certain groups are adopting the same tactics previously employed by regime-backed goons, labelling journalists as enemies of the state or of the July spirit to justify their actions.

As Nurul Kabir, president of the Editors' Council and editor of *The New Age*, pointed out, disagreement with a newspaper's editorial stance does not give anyone the right to vandalise its office or attempt to harm journalists. Also, if other media houses do not speak out against such acts, there is no guarantee that they will not be the next target. That is why unity within the media is essential. Partisan divisions, the practice of treating editorial positions as political appointments, and similar trends have already damaged mainstream media's credibility and weakened the sector.

Therefore, when it comes to journalists' safety and press freedom, the media must stand united regardless of their internal differences, as Matiur Rahman, editor of *Prothom Alo*, has rightly said. He also warned that a new government would not magically resolve problems faced by journalists. There was a general expectation that the current interim government would carry out long awaited reforms as recommended by the media reform commission, but hardly any has been actually implemented. Even the draft journalist protection law, so crucial in the present context of Bangladesh, has yet to see the light of day.

In such circumstances, one can only hope that a democratically elected government will take concrete action to enact the journalist protection law and implement the commission's other recommendations. This is why a return to the democratic process through the upcoming election is essential, allowing the media to hold those in power accountable and operate freely without fear for journalists' safety.

## Prioritise health sector reforms

Affordable, quality healthcare must be on the next government's agenda

Our health sector is in a fragile state, marked by service disruptions, weak governance, shortages of manpower, and high costs of care. People continue to suffer from limited access to quality services, particularly at the primary level, while preventable illnesses and systemic inefficiencies take a heavy toll on ordinary people. This has resulted from decades of neglect by successive governments. With the election less than a month away, we hope to see clear commitment from political parties in their manifestos to ensure affordable, accessible and quality healthcare for all.

Years of underinvestment, weak governance, shortages of skilled health workers, and policy inconsistency have left millions of people in Bangladesh without reliable access to healthcare. Out-of-pocket health expenditure remains among the highest in the region, pushing countless families into poverty or forcing many to avoid treatment altogether. The recent rise in the total fertility rate, the first in five decades, has further exposed setbacks in preventive and reproductive healthcare. At the core of these failures lies inadequate primary healthcare. Despite being the most cost-effective way to protect households from catastrophic medical costs, primary care remains weak and underfunded, particularly in urban areas. Experts emphasise that primary healthcare must be prioritised everywhere, with doctor-led teams serving defined populations to ensure no one is excluded. Equally important is the integration of health into all government policies.

The Health Sector Reform Commission's recommendations offer a clear roadmap out of this crisis. Declaring primary healthcare a constitutional obligation, providing services free at the point of use, and reorganising the system under separate clinical, academic, and public and primary healthcare directorates could improve coordination, accountability, and service delivery. However, political commitment and timely implementation of these recommendations are essential for real change.

Finance is also a major challenge to this end, with experts calling for increasing health spending to at least 15 percent of the national budget or five percent of gross national income. Ensuring full and efficient utilisation of allocated funds is just as crucial, and so is reducing out-of-pocket expenditure. Public hospitals must be made fully functional by improving governance and manpower planning, while private facilities should be brought under effective accreditation and oversight. We urge the political parties to prioritise these issues in their election manifestos and call on the next government to act decisively on these proposals to ensure quality, affordable healthcare for all.

# EDITORIAL

## Party nominations and the systemic exclusion of women



### A CLOSER LOOK

Tasneem Tayeb  
is a columnist for The Daily Star. Her X handle is @tasneem\_tayeb.

TASNEEM TAYEB

Bangladesh is not unfamiliar with the image of women in power. In fact, two women have governed this country for nearly the entirety of its democratic era. Their names are etched into national history and public memory alike. And yet, when the arena shifts from symbolism to competition, women almost disappear.

In the upcoming parliamentary election, only a small fraction of candidates are women. The figure—just over four percent of all candidates—is not merely disappointing; it is an alarming political diagnosis that sheds light on how power is still organised, circulated, and protected even after a bloody uprising that was supposed to usher in change in our political system.

The lack of women candidates has nothing to do with women's competence or willingness to lead, but everything to do with systemic design and failure.

The paradox here has become normalised by now: a nation comfortable with women at the helm of authority but consistently unwilling to open the ladders below. Visibility at the top has not translated into proper access at the base. Representation has remained symbolic, while power has remained structurally guarded.

Political theory has long warned us that formal equality can coexist with deep injustice. Iris Marion Young's work on structural inequality is instructive here. Exclusion, she argued, often operates not through overt discrimination but through systems that appear neutral while reproducing inequality as a matter of routine. When institutions are built around the resources, risks, and norms of a dominant group, others are filtered out without anyone needing to explicitly bar the door.

This is precisely how our politics now functions.

On paper, women are free to contest. In practice, nominations are shaped by patronage, money, informal loyalty networks, and a political culture in which intimidation and risk are not incidental, but embedded. These are not gender-neutral conditions; they privilege those already embedded in male-dominated circuits of influence and capital.

Yes, reserved seats still exist, and they matter, but they have also led to presence without parity, and visibility without fair competition. Too often, they become a substitute for mainstream inclusion rather than a bridge into it. Sadaf Saaz, executive director of Naripokkho, captured this dissonance with precision when

she observed that even parties born out of the mass movements, where women played central roles, now treat women's nominations as peripheral. Jesmin Tuli, a member of the Electoral Reform Commission, was more direct: "Elections are not women friendly," she said, noting that major parties nominate very few women while smaller parties simply follow their lead.

When political competition is designed in ways that systematically disadvantage women, low representation is all but inevitable.

Politics, by contrast, continues to treat women's participation as a gesture, renegotiated before each election and forgotten immediately after. But if institutions responsible for global capital can systematically expand women's leadership, institutions responsible for democratic legitimacy can do no less. The question is who should do it.

The primary responsibility rests with political parties, of course. They are the true gatekeepers of power. They control nominations, internal hierarchies, access to resources, and



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

This matters not only because it is unjust but also because it weakens democracy itself. Representation is not a matter of optics. It shapes whose experiences enter policy debates, whose priorities are discussed, and whose vulnerabilities are addressed. When half the population is structurally excluded from contesting politically, democratic choice becomes thinner, and legitimacy becomes fragile.

We often frame women's participation as a social development concern, adjacent to "real" politics. That is a mistake. This is actually a governance problem.

And it is neither novel nor complex. Other large, power-holding institutions have already learned this lesson. In many multinational corporations, women's leadership is no longer left to goodwill; it is structurally and systematically governed. Clear short-, medium-, and long-term targets are set. Internal pipelines are

political legitimacy at the constituency level. It is within party offices, not polling stations, that exclusion is most efficiently produced. Without structured, time-bound programmes for developing and promoting women's political careers—through mentorship, leadership roles, financial backing, and transparent selection criteria—rhetoric will continue to substitute for reform, and commitment will remain performatory.

The Election Commission's role in this is as important as that of political parties. Speakers at a recent event have rightly demanded accountability of both political parties and the Election Commission for the former's failure to honour their pledge in the July National Charter to nominate women for at least five percent of parliamentary seats in the upcoming election. Worse, 30 of the 51 contesting parties have not nominated a single woman candidate, and the EC let it happen without question,

are reshaped to redistribute political opportunity, representation will remain procedural and power will remain concentrated.

There is a deeper irony here that our political culture rarely confronts. Bangladesh was born through collective struggle, and much of that struggle was carried, quietly and visibly, by women whose courage and endurance were never fully institutionalised into the power structure. We remember them in stories, in slogans, in anniversaries, but we have never quite learned how to build systems that carry their legacy forward. Our democracy has learned to honour women in memory, but not to accommodate them in formal structure.

The question is no longer whether women can lead. That has been answered, repeatedly. The question is whether our democracy is capable of making room for them, and that is not a women's issue. It is a test of our democratic maturity.

## The gender gap in our banking revolution



Md Mahmudul Hasan  
is a digital banking and fintech strategist  
focused on financial inclusion, literacy,  
innovation, and platform strategy.

MD MAHMUDUL HASAN

There are stories we encounter in passing, and then there are stories that stay with us. Some of them quietly reveal the invisible architecture holding an economy together, even when the formal system chooses not to see it. The journey of Shazan Sultana is one such story, but it is also the story of thousands of women across Bangladesh who build businesses from imagination, grit, and digital communities.

Shazan returned from the United Kingdom with a degree and ambition. Motherhood intervened, and society expected her to step back. However, she chose reinvention. She launched a digital boutique rooted in hand-painted textiles, determined to retain economic agency. What began as a modest experiment now employs 10 women. Yet beneath the vibrant fabrics lies a truth many overlook: Shazan did not get help from any bank. Her business survived because of Facebook—not because any bank believed in her potential.

I met her during a winter fair in the city. The hall was alive with energy. There were rows of women operating businesses from living rooms and kitchen tables. As I travelled across Khulna, Rajshahi, Sylhet, and

Narayanganj, I encountered a similar rhythm. These gatherings reveal that the demand is real, the market is large, and the ecosystem of women-led micro-enterprises has outgrown traditional finance.

If Shazan is the protagonist, the antagonist is a paradigm—a banking mindset that evaluates entrepreneurs through documents and collateral they will not own. Bangladesh spends over Tk 20,000 crore annually on cash management. Over one crore women make savings through bKash and Nagad. Mobile financial services (MFS) processed Tk 17.37 lakh crore in 2024, but the very women driving this digital revolution remain locked out of formal banking.

Women's MFS participation has grown significantly, with 42 percent of the 23.93 crore registered MFS accounts now owned by women, 54 percent of whom live in rural areas. The reason is simple: MFS offers privacy, autonomy, and control. Banks demand formal income statements and trade licenses—metrics that rarely align with home-based businesses.

In Bangladesh, only 7.35 percent of Cottage, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (CMSME) loans go to

women-led firms, despite their proven repayment discipline. Alternative, data-driven credit scoring has become an economic necessity. However, a recent report from Bangladesh Bank shows a significant rise in financial inclusion of the rural population, especially women, in several sectors, including agent banking, deposit, CMSME, and cooperatives.

Critics argue that banks cannot lend on Facebook likes, citing risks around fraud and compliance. That concern is valid but incomplete; exclusion relocates it outside the regulated system. Every year that women-led enterprises remain unbanked, their cash flows migrate to non-bank platforms. The cost is the compounding loss of deposits and lifetime customers. In a market where mobile financial services already mediate trust at scale, insisting on paper-based proof is self-sabotage.

The regulatory concern is real but solvable. Bangladesh Bank's ongoing digital identity initiatives—linking NID with mobile wallets—already create the infrastructure for compliant low-friction Know Your Customer (KYC). What's needed is permission: regulatory sandboxes that allow banks to test alternative scoring models with defined risk caps, learning what works before scaling system-wide.

This is how platform economies scale worldwide. In Brazil, Nubank built 100 million customers by prioritising behavioural signals. In Kenya, M-Pesa transformed financial inclusion through mobile transaction histories. Bangladesh has the ingredients needed to replicate this success.

What we need is intelligent integration. Banks could partner with entrepreneur networks using seasonal fairs as onboarding grounds. Mobile teams could open digital accounts on the spot, offer micro-DPS plans starting at Tk 500 monthly, and provide small working capital loans based on digital transaction patterns. QR-based purchases would create transparency, allowing banks to capture real-time data while entrepreneurs build verifiable financial identities. These entrepreneurs represent Tk 500-800 crore in untapped deposit potential annually, and their proven repayment discipline makes them lower-risk than many traditional CMSME borrowers.

Once trust is established through digital history, banks could introduce graduation pathways—digital credit cards, logistics financing, even home loans tailored to women's seasonal earnings patterns.

Women entrepreneurs are not merely economic participants; they are multipliers of social transformation. When a woman earns, household nutrition improves. When she saves, children's education advances. When she leads, she widens the horizon of possibilities for entire generations.

The future of Bangladesh's financial sector will not be written in boardrooms alone. It will be co-authored in living rooms, winter fairs, online shops, and the determination of women who refuse to pause their dreams. If we truly seek a prosperous, inclusive Bangladesh, our banks must evolve—from gatekeepers to enablers, from documentation-obsessed institutions to data-intelligent partners.

## THE REFERENDUM TEST

## Yes vote, state neutrality, and fair process



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KAZI ASM NURUL HUDA

On February 12, 2026, alongside the 13th parliamentary election, Bangladesh will also hold a referendum on the implementation of reforms proposed in the July National Charter. While public discussion around the election has been intense of late, the referendum has attracted comparatively little visible campaigning or civic engagement. Although most political parties profess support for reform, few have undertaken any serious effort to explain the referendum or mobilise voters around it.

The interim government has stepped into this vacuum, promoting the referendum through television and social media and, somewhat controversially, through grassroots outreach involving mosque imams and field-level officials from various government departments. At the same time, the government has openly advocated a "Yes" vote. Since many of the officials involved in referendum-related outreach are also likely to play roles in election administration, this has raised a question: can the government and its officials campaign for one side of a referendum without compromising the neutrality and credibility of the process?

I want to make a clear but carefully qualified claim. The interim government is not wrong, in principle, to favour a "Yes" outcome. But it risks undermining the referendum's legitimacy if it pursues that outcome through methods that blur the line between political advocacy and administrative power.

The moral and political logic behind the government's position is not difficult to see. An interim that emerged from a mass uprising is not merely a caretaker body tasked with routine administration. It exists to stabilise a rupture and to prevent a return to the political conditions that made that rupture inevitable. The present interim government was sworn in on August 8, 2024, following the fall of the Awami League government. After prolonged consultations with political parties, and on the basis of 84 proposals produced by the reform commissions, the July National Charter was prepared in October last year. Of these, constitutional reform proposals have been placed before the public in the form of a referendum, organised into four thematic questions.

Seen in this light, the government's support

for a "Yes" vote can be understood as a form of accountability rather than partisanship. The government is effectively saying: we were entrusted with the task of reform; here is the reform package we propose; and now we seek popular authorisation to proceed. This is not an alien idea in democratic practice; governments frequently advocate for constitutional or institutional reforms they believe are necessary for the future of their countries.

Comparative experience bears this out. In Turkey's 2017 constitutional referendum, the government openly campaigned for a "Yes" vote in support of constitutional change. In Colombia's 2016 referendum on the peace agreement with the FARC, the government explicitly urged citizens to vote "Yes," framing the decision as a choice between peace and continued conflict. Similarly, in Ireland's 2015 referendum on same-sex marriage, the government took a clear and public stance in favour of a "Yes" vote. In none of these cases did governments pretend neutrality about outcomes. Rather, the legitimacy of those referendums depended on whether the process itself was perceived as fair, transparent and trustworthy.

There is also a political reality that cannot be ignored. The interim government's legitimacy does not rest on electoral victory but on performance. Its authority derives from its capacity to deliver a credible transition, including meaningful reform. A failed referendum would not merely defeat a policy agenda but also weaken the government's public justification for its continued role in the transition.

Hence, the case for government advocacy is defensible so far. The problem arises when advocacy shades into the use of state power to shape consent.

A referendum is not validated by the outcome the government prefers. It is validated by the conditions under which the citizens decide. Democratic acceptability depends on transparent voting and counting, the political neutrality of the administration and law enforcement agencies, and citizens' ability to express their views freely, without fear or unequal pressure. These are procedural standards, not outcome-based ones.

This is why the method of campaigning

matters as much as the message. When advisers or political figures argue publicly for a "Yes" vote, they are engaging in ordinary political speech. But when field-level officials, especially those with administrative or electoral responsibilities, are mobilised to promote a particular outcome, the state itself begins to appear partisan. Even in the absence of explicit coercion, the perception of administrative pressure is difficult to avoid. If

infer that support for the referendum is linked to support for whichever political parties those religious figures are understood to be aligned with in the parliamentary election. In this way, referendum mobilisation risks producing spillover effects into the election—not by design, but by association. Even where the government's intention is limited to securing approval for reform, the appearance of indirect electoral signalling can undermine

implication. The interim government should confine its referendum advocacy to public-facing communication: plain-language explanations of the proposals, careful presentation of what would change under a "Yes" vote and what would remain under a "No" vote, and reasoned arguments for its preferred option. Such persuasion does not undermine citizens' freedom of choice.

That freedom is undermined when



VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

such perceptions take hold, legal challenges and post-referendum disputes may become a reality.

A related, though distinct, concern arises from the reported involvement of religious preachers in referendum advocacy. The issue here is not religion or belief, but authority and perception. In Bangladesh's political landscape, mosque imams often operate within social and communal networks that are widely perceived as having political affiliations. Unlike civil servants, they are not subject to formal state oversight, nor should they be. Religious autonomy is itself a democratic value. Yet, precisely because imams are independent of the state and embedded in morally authoritative community roles, their mobilisation in support of a "Yes" vote risks entangling referendum advocacy with partisan electoral agendas.

At the grassroots level, voters may reasonably

confidence in both the referendum and the broader electoral process.

The lesson is not that governments must be silent during referendums. It is that the state must remain restrained.

Some will argue that an interim government must be strictly impartial. That claim is too blunt. When the stakes involve fundamental constitutional architecture, a government may reasonably defend the reforms it believes will prevent regression into authoritarianism. What is required is not neutrality of belief, but neutrality of the rules and of the referees. The distinction is crucial. The government may argue for a "Yes" vote, but the state must guarantee a process in which citizens can say "No" without intimidation, disadvantage or fear. This requires a strict separation between the government as advocate and the state as guarantor of a fair and neutral process.

That distinction yields a clear practical

government employees involved in election administration are enlisted in advocacy, which may be experienced as administrative pressure, and when religious figures are engaged, given their widely recognised social and political associations at the grassroots level. In these contexts, referendum advocacy risks being received not merely as guidance on the reform question, but as either pressure from the state or implicit electoral signalling in favour of particular political parties in the concurrent parliamentary election.

The core principle, then, is simple: a government may have a view, but it must not rig, tilt or even appear to tilt the conditions under which citizens decide whether that view deserves endorsement. In a transitional moment, this discipline is not optional. It is the difference between reform as democratic consolidation and reform as a new form of managed politics.

## Rebutting again: The wrong lens for our interim economy



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ABDULLAH A DEWAN

Economics is not a museum of immortal models. It is a diagnostic discipline whose tools must match the condition of the economy under examination.

Dr Birupaksha Paul's January 8 response to my earlier rebuttal, dated January 4, clarifies his attachment to the Phillips curve and its expectations augmented variants. That clarification is welcome. Yet it also confirms that our disagreement is neither, as he suggests, about whether the Phillips curve exists in the abstract, nor about whether it has evolved. The disagreement concerns whether invoking that framework is an appropriate diagnostic tool for evaluating Bangladesh's interim government under conditions of deep institutional breakdown.

At no point did my rebuttal claim that the Phillips curve has been "abolished," nor did it deny its historical importance, its theoretical refinements, or its occasional empirical reappearance. Invoking Samuelson, Solow, Friedman, Lucas, Phelps, Akerlof, Mankiw, or Krugman does not settle the

issue at hand. The question is not whether the Phillips curve can be rehabilitated in carefully specified empirical settings, but whether it meaningfully explains inflation and unemployment outcomes in a crisis-ridden economy where policy transmission itself is impaired.

Dr Paul argues that I "slaughtered" the Phillips curve to credit the interim government. This imputes a motive that does not exist. My critique was not a defence of the interim by theoretical fiat; it was a warning against attributing macroeconomic outcomes to policy failure when the underlying mechanisms required for those policies to operate were structurally compromised.

One may praise or criticise the interim government, but such judgment must rest on an accurate diagnosis of constraints, not on the persistence of familiar theoretical instruments.

The core problem with Dr Paul's rejoinder is that it conflates the existence of a theoretical relationship with its applicability

as a performance metric. Yes, modern macroeconomics has augmented the Phillips curve with expectations, supply shocks, and price rather than wage inflation. But those augmentations presuppose functioning institutions: a credible monetary authority, enforceable contracts, competitive markets, reliable data, and reasonably intact financial intermediation. In Bangladesh, these were precisely what the interim government did not inherit.

Dr Paul correctly notes that he mentioned extortion, mob violence, fiscal weakness, and loan recovery failures in his original article. But acknowledging institutional failure is not the same as integrating them analytically. If inflation is driven primarily by cartelised supply chains, administered pricing, exchange rate pass-through, and speculative hoarding, then the inflation-unemployment trade-off ceases to be the binding constraint. In such a setting, high interest rates can coexist with persistent inflation and rising unemployment without implying policy incoherence. That coexistence reflects structural dislocation, not the collapse or resurrection of a curve.

Much of Dr Paul's defence rests on the claim that the Phillips curve "reappears" once expectations, shocks, and data choices are handled correctly. That may be true in economies where monetary transmission is impaired only at the margin. Bangladesh's problem has been deeper. When banks are burdened with politically protected non-performing loans, when liquidity circulates

outside productive channels, and when regulatory credibility is thin, monetary policy becomes blunt. Tightening discourages formal credit without disciplining informal market power. Easing risks fuelling rent-seeking without stimulating investment. In such circumstances, debating the slope of the Phillips curve risks mistaking noise for signal.

Dr Paul invokes the Lucas supply function and the psychology of wage bargaining to argue that the Phillips curve is rooted in human behaviour rather than statistical accident. That observation is well taken, but incomplete. Human psychology does not operate in a vacuum. When labour markets are segmented, informality is dominant, union bargaining is weak, and wage indexation is absent or politicised, the behavioural foundations of the curve weaken. Bangladesh's labour market is not a textbook arena of marginal productivity bargaining; it is shaped by informality, migration, remittances, and political mediation. Psychological regularities alone cannot rescue a model whose institutional scaffolding is missing.

The reference to the re-steepening of the Phillips curve in the post-Covid United States further illustrates the problem of misplaced analogy. The US reencountered a Phillips-type relationship after unprecedented fiscal stimulus, intact financial plumbing, and rapid labour market recovery. Bangladesh entered the interim period with depleted trust, distorted credit allocation, and weakened enforcement. One cannot infer from one

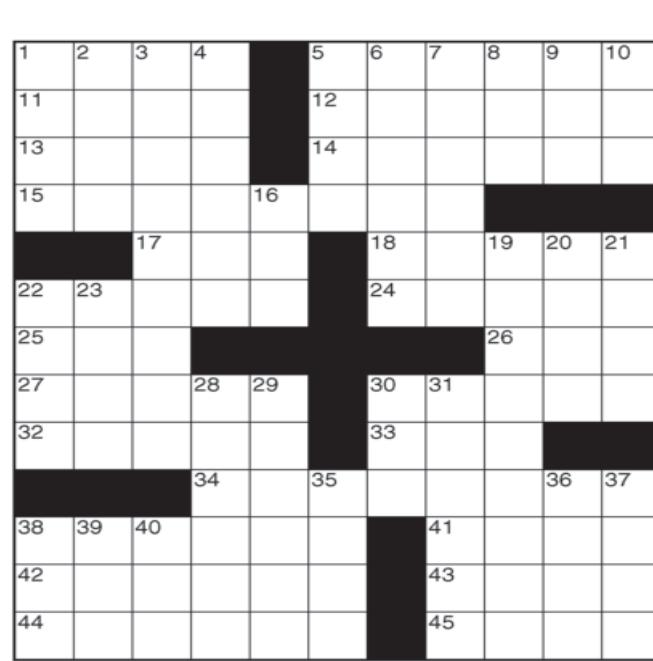
context to the other without committing precisely the abstraction error my rebuttal cautioned against.

Finally, Dr Paul suggests that my argument seeks to lower the bar for accountability by redefining success as mere stabilisation. This misreads the point. Interim governments are not absolved of responsibility, but they must be evaluated against crisis-appropriate benchmarks. Arresting deterioration, restoring minimal discipline, and repairing transmission mechanisms are prerequisites for any subsequent optimisation. Judging short-horizon outcomes as if those prerequisites already existed confuses lagged structural damage with contemporaneous failure.

This debate, therefore, is not about defending or discarding the Phillips curve. It is about choosing the right diagnostic lens for the patient in front of us. Economics is not a museum of immortal models; it is a toolkit whose instruments must be matched to conditions. When institutional realism is absent, even elegant theory can mislead. My rebuttal argued precisely that—not that the curve is dead, but that it was the wrong instrument for diagnosing Bangladesh's interim moment.

A serious public discourse should move beyond defending favourite frameworks and instead ask harder questions: what constraints bind, which channels are broken, and what benchmarks are appropriate to the phase of governance being assessed. On that ground, the disagreement remains analytical, not ideological, and it remains unresolved.

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38 "Dynamite" K-pop group  
39 Workout unit  
40 Singer Rita





## Tahsan returns with 'Family Feud Bangladesh: Season 2'

Putting an end to viewers' long wait, the popular family game show *Family Feud Bangladesh* is set to return to television, once again hosted by musician and actor Tahsan Khan.

Produced by Bongo, the second season will begin airing from today, with episodes broadcast every Monday at 9:30pm on NTV and repeat telecasts on the same channel every Wednesday at 10pm. Fans can also enjoy the show anytime, free of charge, on the Bongo app and website. Updates and special moments will be shared on the official Family Feud Bangladesh Facebook page.

Following the success of the first season, Bongo has announced that Season 2 will be even more thrilling and exciting. Last season, the show recorded over 1 billion views across all platforms and awarded more than Tk 30 lakh in prizes. This season promises bigger prizes, greater excitement, and a fresh dimension to family entertainment.

Speaking about the new season, Tahsan Khan said, "This season has truly come alive. The most remarkable aspect of this large-scale production is that the survey for this season's questions was conducted across all 64 districts of Bangladesh. This is what makes each episode even more lively and engaging."

RAKSHANDA RAHMAN MISHA

After days of celebrating cinema across multiple venues, the 24th Dhaka International Film Festival (DIFF) concluded yesterday, January 18, by recognising both emerging and established filmmakers from around the world, whose works resonated with audiences and festival juries alike.

Cultural Affairs Adviser Mostafa Sarwar Farooki was scheduled to attend the closing ceremony as the chief guest but could not be present due to unforeseen circumstances. The event began at 4:00pm at the National Museum, with Jalal Ahmed, chairman of the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission, presiding over the ceremony.



Director Erke Dzhumakmatova (R) accepts the Best Film award for 'Kurak'

Following the announcement of the winners, a special musical programme was held, where director and singer-songwriter Ahmed Hasan Sunny performed a soulful set. The closing ceremony also featured a special screening of the festival's Best Film,



'The University of Chankarphul' cast members pose with the award

in the Bangladesh Panorama Section when *The University of Chankarphul*, directed by Monirul Haque, won the FIPRESCI Award for Best Full-Length Feature Film. Although the director could not attend the ceremony due to traffic congestion, members of the cast accepted the award on his behalf.

Addressing the audience, they said, "We received the award on behalf of our director. This means a lot to us because we worked extremely hard on the film. When it premiered during the festival, the response was overwhelming; some audience members even had to sit on the floor to watch it."

In the Talent Section, Tanha Tabassum's *What If* won the FIPRESCI Award for Best Short Film. *Dhet*, directed by Ummid Ashraf, was named first runner-up, while *Ishpote*, directed by Abir Ferdous Mukhar, secured the second runner-up position.

In the Women Filmmakers Section, *Sa Likod Ng Tsapa (Beneath the Badge)*, directed by Editha Caduya of the Philippines, received a Special Mention Award. The Spiritual Film Section also gave a Special Mention to *I Lay for You to Sleep*, directed by Ali Al Hajri of Qatar.

The Audience Award went to *Drained by Dreams*, directed by Shekh Al Mamun, a Bangladesh-South Korea co-production. The Special Audience Award was presented to *Shi Jie Ri Chu Shi (All Quiet at Sunrise)*, directed by Xin Zhu of China.

In the Children's Film Section, the Best Children's Film Badal Rahman Award was given to *Qingtong & Kuihua*, directed by Chen Kunhou of China.

## BAKHTIAR HOSSAIN announces exit from Bay of Bengal



Bakhtiar Hossain, the lead vocalist of Bay of Bengal, has announced his exit from the band, bringing a 15 year musical journey with the group to an end. The announcement was made through an emotional post on his official Facebook account.

In the post, Bakhtiar wrote, "On the 20th, I will be standing on stage with Bay of Bengal for the last time. This final chapter with the band is being written in Chattogram—the city that taught me how to become an artiste, where I wrote my first song and dreamed my first dreams."

Reflecting on his long association with the band, Bakhtiar described Bay of Bengal as his constant companion for 15 years, a journey that has left a lasting imprint on his life.

# NEWS

## 2 bodies found in abandoned building

FROM PAGE 16

Speaking to reporters at the scene last night, Md Kamrul Islam, sub-inspector of the CID's Crime Scene Unit, said, "From our preliminary findings, we believe one of the bodies may be that of a teenage girl."

Following the recovery of the third body in December last year, CCTV cameras were installed there.

"Authorities have also been urged to renovate and reopen the building, as its abandonment has led to increased opportunities for misuse," he added.

Earlier on August 29 last year, an unidentified youth was found dead inside the abandoned building with his hands and feet tied.

The bodies of a woman and a man were recovered from the same

building on October 11 and December 19 last year, respectively.

The identities of these victims remain unconfirmed, and no arrests have been made in connection with these cases.

The recovery of five bodies from the same location has caused panic among local residents.

"We are passing days amid insecurity. We want a proper investigation into it and the trial of the killers immediately," said Md Shaheen Bhuiyan, a resident of the Savar municipality.

Constructed between 2001 and 2006, the community centre was operational for only a short period before a legal dispute over ownership left it abandoned for more than 15 years.

Sarwar Tushar for Narasingdi-2, and Mazedul Islam for Munshiganj-2.

The party also named candidates for various districts across the country. The list includes Mahbub Alam for Lakshmpur-1, SM Saif Mostafiz for Sirajganj-6, SM Suja Uddin for Bandarban, Maulana Ashraf Mahdi for Brahmanbaria-2, and Mohammad Ataullah for Brahmanbaria-3.

Besides, Jobairul Hasan Arif will run for Chattogram-8, Sultan Muhammad Zakaria for Noakhali-2, Md Abdul Ahad for Dinajpur-5, Atiq Mujahid for Kurigram-2, Zahidul Islam for Mymensingh-11, Saifullah Haider for Tangail-3, Shamim Hamidi for Pirojpur-3, and SM Jarjis Kadir for Natore-3.

The announcement follows a press conference held on Thursday by the 10-party electoral combine, where a consensus on 253 seats was declared.

## Unlock women's power, unlock the economy

FROM PAGE 16

Chairman Tarique Rahman, in her keynote speech, said if Bangladesh wants real progress — not symbolic success stories, but sustained national development — then empowerment cannot stop only in classrooms, offices or policies.

"They must reach our homes, our institutions and our mindsets. Policies and access alone do not create equality. You can expand education, pass laws and set national targets, but if social norms, daily expectations and mindsets remain unequal, empowerment remains fragile."

Gender equality is not a women's issue but an economic and national one, she said, while pointing out that when women shoulder most unpaid work and household responsibilities, their participation in the formal economy declines.

In Bangladesh, women still perform around 85 percent of unpaid household and care work, spending over seven times as many hours as men on this labour each day. This work, valued at nearly 19 percent of GDP, remains largely invisible in economic planning and national decision-making, said Zaima, also a barrister.

"If systems and expectations continue to rely on women's sacrifice as the default, inequality continues comfortably."

Fahmida Khatun, executive director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, underscored access to finance as the biggest barrier to developing women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh, despite the country having sufficient liquidity in its banking system.

"Many women do not have collateral or mortgages, and often even family members — including husbands — are unwilling to provide guarantees. This becomes a major barrier."

Explaining the need for

entrepreneurship, she said Bangladesh's labour market is limited, with over two million new entrants every year but few jobs available.

"Until investment increases, entrepreneurship is necessary to create employment. Small entrepreneurs already contribute around 25 percent of GDP and must form the backbone of our economy, especially for women."

Khatun also pointed to a lack of information, noting that many small women entrepreneurs outside Dhaka are unaware of government incentives or support programmes.

"Post-financing guidance — on profitable sectors and marketing — is equally crucial. Large policies alone will not work. Implementation at the field level is essential," she said, urging that government and chamber associations expand support beyond Dhaka.

Skills development, technological upgradation and inclusive policies are critical to preventing women from dropping out of the workforce, she added.

Tamara Abed, managing director of BRAC Enterprises, said fostering women's entrepreneurship requires a multi-faceted approach and support across various areas.

"Access to finance alone is not enough. Skills are equally important. Often, access to inputs is lacking, and market linkages are a huge factor. Women need to be linked to markets, and various types of support, including legal assistance, are often necessary."

Abed also stressed the importance of structural market linkages and improved infrastructure, such as safe transportation and inclusive procurement policies, to integrate women into the national economy.

Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, BNP standing committee member, highlighted the party's targeted

approach to women's empowerment.

"The majority of the beneficiaries of our policies will be women," he said, citing the party's proposed Family Card initiative.

Every household will receive a Family Card issued in the name of the matriarch.

"Many homemakers work from morning to night without a formal salary, even though they contribute immensely to family and household management. Under this scheme, every woman will receive Tk 2,500. It may not seem like a large amount, but it is a matter of respect and independence. It is her money, and she decides how to spend it."

The budgeting and funding for the scheme have been planned.

"It is not just a promise or a political statement but a concrete, implementable policy."

He also called for a shift away from mega projects towards direct investment in human capital, particularly through education, healthcare and specialised skills training for women.

A central pillar of BNP's strategy is women's empowerment through targeted support, including micro-financing, branding for rural artisans and vocational training in high-growth sectors such as ICT and digital commerce.

The aim is to foster a diversified, modern economy where women can achieve financial independence and pursue varied careers in sports, culture and the arts, he added.

The event was followed by an open discussion, with audience interaction and broader engagement on women's rights and governance issues. The session featured a mixed panel, including Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury and Zaima, focusing on political accountability, women's participation in politics and future policy directions.

## EC not fit for holding credible polls'

FROM PAGE 16

political parties, including the [Jamaat-led] 10 party alliance, and the next course of action will be announced."

He added, "We will continue consultations with all stakeholders and move forward with preparations for both legal action and street protests."

NCP Election Legal Affairs Sub-Committee Chief and Joint Member Secretary Advocate Zahirul Islam Musa also alleged that despite around 20 BNP candidates holding dual citizenship, their nominations were declared valid.

"Had the EC properly followed electoral law, there would have been no scope for this," he said.

Asif further alleged that the EC validated a BNP candidate with dual citizenship by deliberately allowing a mob to create pressure in front of the commission.

Ariful Islam Adeeb has been nominated for Dhaka-18, Dilshana Parul for Dhaka-19, Nabilas Tasnid for Dhaka-20, Jaber Rasin for Dhaka-9, Ali Naser Khan for Gazipur-2, Abdulla Al Amin for Narayanganj-4,

Sarwar Tushar for Narasingdi-2, and Mazedul Islam for Munshiganj-2.

The party also named candidates for various districts across the country. The list includes Mahbub Alam for Lakshmpur-1, SM Saif Mostafiz for Sirajganj-6, SM Suja Uddin for Bandarban, Maulana Ashraf Mahdi for Brahmanbaria-2, and Mohammad Ataullah for Brahmanbaria-3.

Besides, Jobairul Hasan Arif will run for Chattogram-8, Sultan Muhammad Zakaria for Noakhali-2, Md Abdul Ahad for Dinajpur-5, Atiq Mujahid for Kurigram-2, Zahidul Islam for Mymensingh-11, Saifullah Haider for Tangail-3, Shamim Hamidi for Pirojpur-3, and SM Jarjis Kadir for Natore-3.

The announcement follows a press conference held on Thursday by the 10-party electoral combine, where a consensus on 253 seats was declared.

These concerns deserve respectful consideration, said the interim government.

In Bangladesh's current transitional moment, silence would not represent neutrality; it would represent a failure of leadership, said the government.

For Bangladesh at this juncture,

the government said the greater risk lies not in advocacy, but in equivocation.

An interim government that declines to support the reforms it has championed would weaken public confidence, confuse voters, and undermine the coherence of the transition, it said.

## Govt clarifies CA's support for 'Yes' vote

FROM PAGE 16

Recent commentary has raised concerns that the interim government and the chief adviser's open support for a "Yes" vote in Bangladesh's forthcoming referendum on institutional reforms may be inconsistent with the expectations of an interim administration.

## 3 days on, cops yet to rescue abducted man

FROM PAGE 16

On Friday around 3:00pm, Mahbub left his residence. Around 7:00pm, while he was standing in front of a house on Road-12 of Sector 14, a white Toyota Land Cruiser Prado arrived, followed by a Nissan X-Trail and a motorcycle.

As Mahbub opened the Prado's door to let a person get down, four people from the X-Trail and two from the motorcycle got out and attacked him.

One assailant struck Mahbub on the head with a stick, knocking him to the ground, while another hit him on the left side of the jaw with Mahbub's own shotgun, fracturing his jaw.

The attackers then took Mahbub's licensed shotgun and forcibly put the man, who had got down from the Prado,

division, speaking on condition of anonymity, told The Daily Star that the abducted man, assumed to be one Mehedi, had allegedly borrowed money from several people and failed to repay.

"To ensure his personal safety, he had hired Mahbub. The Prado was rented by him," the official said.

He suspected that those seeking repayment may have abducted him.

When contacted, OC Kazi Rafiq said no complaint has yet been lodged by or on behalf of the abducted man.

Meanwhile, Rab-1 Commanding Officer Lt Col Ashikur Rahman told The Daily Star that they recovered Mahbub's shotgun along with four shells during a drive in the Sher-e-Bangla Nagar area early yesterday.



BTI THE DAILY STAR STELLAR WOMEN SEASON 2

## Redefining Boundaries



In recent years, women in Bangladesh have begun to break glass ceilings, giving a new meaning to success through determination, resilience, and sheer hard work. Each of these women has not only worked hard and overcome challenges in their fields, they have persevered to make sure that they could boldly go where no woman has gone before. After celebrating a successful first season of honoring Stellar Women, the bti The Daily Star Stellar Women Season 2 Gala was held on January 10th, 2026, at Kurmitola Golf Club, where these amazing trailblazers were given recognition in twelve different categories. In addition, guests of honor were invited in every different category to award each winner with a few token mementos. Dignitaries from different embassies, high officials of bti and The Daily Star, media personnel and the winners all graced the event to add value and to emphasize the empowerment of women in Bangladesh. The evening also featured a panel discussion moderated by Sarah Iqbal, with Shaila Shahid, Farah Kabir, and Shaheen Anam as participants, offering valuable insights on leadership, inclusion, and women's evolving role in nation-building. There was also a classical poetry recitation accompanied by a choreographed dance.



Winners of "bti The Daily Star Stellar Women 2025" posed for a photo at the Banquet Hall of the Kurmitola Golf Club.

PHOTO COURTESY: STAR



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

MAHFUZ ANAM,  
Editor and Publisher of  
The Daily Star



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

ARSHI HAIDER  
Chairman of bti

### MOURI MORIUM



Mouri Morium stands out as a powerful voice in contemporary Bangladeshi literature, driven by imagination, emotional depth, and an unwavering love for storytelling that began in her teenage years. Inspired by everyday life, her readers, and literary greats such as Humayun Ahmed and Dan Brown, she has crafted stories that resonate deeply with a wide audience, earning her both critical acclaim and devoted readers. What truly defines Mouri is her belief that challenges—personal, creative, or societal—are essential to growth, a philosophy reflected in her writing and her journey as a woman navigating Bangladeshi's literary landscape. For her, success is measured not only by awards, including the prestigious Humayun Ahmed Literary Award, or by bestseller lists, but by the emotional connection she shares with readers who seek out her books with love and loyalty. Through her work and outlook, Mouri Morium continues to inspire aspiring writers, proving that sincerity, perseverance, and passion can transform stories into lasting impact.

### NOMROTA SARKER



Nomrota Sarker, COO and Co-Founder of Saus-Taus, is a compelling example of quiet strength and purposeful leadership, demonstrating how dedication and vision can create meaningful change. Through her work, she has consistently challenged limitations, embraced responsibility, and pursued excellence with integrity, inspiring those around her to believe in their own potential. Her journey reflects resilience, adaptability, and a deep commitment to progress, especially in spaces where women continue to navigate added challenges. By leading with empathy and determination, Nomrota advances her field while serving as a role model for a new generation of women who aspire to make an impact, proving that steady perseverance can be just as powerful as bold ambition.

### ARCHITECT AFSANA LUQMAN



Architect Afsana Luqman is a dedicated and insightful professional whose work reflects a strong balance between creative expression and practical design. With a keen understanding of context, sustainability, and user needs, she approaches architecture as a tool to improve everyday life. Her journey in the field highlights perseverance and thoughtful leadership, as she continues to challenge conventions while maintaining design integrity. Through her commitment to quality and purpose-driven architecture, Afsana Luqman has made meaningful contributions to the built environment and stands as an inspiration for aspiring architects, particularly women seeking to shape spaces with confidence and clarity.

### DR. TAHSIN FERDOUS



Dr. Tahsin Ferdous, Stellar Woman Season 2 winner in Healthcare, is breaking barriers in orthopaedic surgery through resilience, skill, and purpose. Raised in a supportive environment and inspired by mentors who valued ability over gender, she pursued orthopaedics for its precision and impact on restoring mobility. Now a Medical Officer at BIHS General Hospital with advanced training in limb deformity correction, Tahsin is a strong advocate for women in surgery. For her, the Stellar Women initiative represents empowerment, visibility, and a message to aspiring women: they belong in every field they choose.

### ARCHITECT NISHAT AFROSE



Architect Nishat Afrose is a thoughtful and forward-looking design professional whose work reflects a deep sensitivity to context, functionality, and human experience. With a strong commitment to sustainable and inclusive architecture, she approaches each project as an opportunity to create

spaces that are not only aesthetically refined but also socially responsive. Her journey in a traditionally male-dominated field highlights her resilience, precision, and creative confidence, inspiring young architects—especially women—to pursue their vision with courage. Through her practice, Nishat Afrose continues to contribute meaningfully to the built environment, shaping spaces that balance innovation with purpose and leave a lasting impact on the communities they serve.

### PAPIA SARWAR DITHI



Papia Sarwar Dithi is an artist and architect whose creativity was shaped by a childhood rooted in imagination, nature, and early architectural influences. Though trained in architecture, painting remained a constant passion,

leading her to develop an organic, nature-inspired artistic language. Now working as a full-time artist and architect, she creates murals and artworks using natural materials and has represented Bangladesh internationally. Supported by her family, Papia continues to advocate for women's recognition, balance, and self-belief through her art and her journey as a Stellar Woman.

### SHAH ISRAT AZMERY



Shah Israt Azmery, Chairman of the Children Watch Foundation, advocates for children's rights and environmental sustainability, focusing on educating young minds through school-based climate initiatives and eco-awareness programs. Her foundation operates through self and local funding, with support from local collaborators. She values platforms like the bti The Daily Star Stellar Women initiative for amplifying women changemakers and encourages young women to lead with confidence, consistency, and purpose to create lasting impact.

### KYOKO ARANI NASIR BHUIYAN



While her major is in Marketing, Kyoko Arani Nasir Bhuiyan decided to delve into the field of education, making her mark in a field where it will matter, even in the future. Her unique global perspective adds unexpected depth and distinction to everything that she undertakes. With a strong sense of purpose and an ability to bridge cultures, she has carved her own path through dedication, adaptability, and thoughtful leadership.

Her work reflects both precision and passion, driven by a commitment to excellence and meaningful impact. Navigating challenges with quiet confidence, Kyoko Arani continues to inspire by showing how authenticity, perseverance, and vision can come together to create lasting influence and open doors for others to follow.

### NUSRAT NUR MAISHA



Nusrat Nur Maisha is a dedicated engineering professional with expertise spanning Civil, Structural, Water Resource, and MEP disciplines. With a strong technical foundation and a multidisciplinary approach, she contributes to the planning, design, and execution of integrated engineering solutions that prioritize safety, efficiency, and sustainability. Her work reflects a balance of analytical rigor and practical application, enabling seamless coordination across engineering systems. As a woman in a traditionally male-dominated field, Nusrat represents precision, resilience, and forward-thinking leadership in modern engineering practice.

### DR. NASRIN AKTER IVY



Dr. Nasrin Akter Ivy, Professor and Director at Gazipur Agricultural University, is a pioneering agricultural scientist focused on nutritious, high-yield, and farmer-friendly crops. She developed Bangladesh's first zinc- and iron-enriched hybrid aromatic rice and gynodioecious papaya varieties with higher yields and better nutrition. Beyond research, she champions women in agriculture, emphasizing perseverance, mentorship, and impact-driven work, making her a role model for aspiring women leaders.

### SHAILA ABEDIN



Born and raised in Dhaka, Shaila's values were shaped by a nurturing yet disciplined family upbringing that instilled empathy, balance, and quiet strength. Though she studied international relations, she found her

calling in banking, inspired by her mother and driven by perseverance and continuous learning. Supported by her family and inspired by leaders like Indra Nooyi, Shaila leads with integrity and empathy. Her recognition at the bti The Daily Star Stellar Women initiative reflects her purpose-driven journey and belief that true leadership is rooted in balance, courage, and authenticity.



## MUSLIM SAHITYA SAMAJ CENTENARY

## In the light of Shikha: A letter tainted by anachronism

DIPESH CHAKRABARTY

To the late thinker and writer  
Kazi Abdul Wadud

Sri Charaneshu,

You have been resting in eternal sleep for more than fifty years now. You will never read this letter. Memory, conversation, politics, the world itself—these exist only for the living. Why, then, am I writing this one-sided letter to you? I write on the occasion of the centenary of the Muslim Sahitya Samaj. The founding of the *Muslim Sahitya Samaj* and the launch of the journal *Shikha* in 1927 constitute a golden chapter in the history of Bengali intellectual life. Today, that chapter completes one hundred years.

On this occasion, when Morshed Shaiful Hasan invited me to write something for a forthcoming volume, I could not decline his request, despite the endless pressures of professional life. Although I am an interested reader of the history of the *Muslim Sahitya Samaj* and the journal *Shikha*, I am not a researcher of the subject. It is not as though I can add any new factual material to what has already been collected. Yet, while revisiting your debates and, in particular, reading your writings, I found within myself an irrepressible urge to enter into conversation with you. [...]

When I read about the *Muslim Sahitya Samaj* and *Shikha*, a particular quality of your sense of time becomes strikingly clear to me—especially when contrasted with the later period (1937–1947). In the years 1926/27 to 1931, despite the many justified and unjustified grievances that Hindus and Muslims held against one another, Partition was unimaginable. You—and perhaps everyone in the late 1920s and early 1930s—held this historical reality as a given. The absence of the assumption that Partition might offer a solution to Hindu–Muslim antagonism (as Abul Mansur Ahmad or Shyam Prasad Mukherjee would later come to believe) created a space for your thinking that became impossible once Bengali Muslims began to invest themselves in the imagination of “Pakistan”.

You assumed that Muslims and Hindus were historically and territorially bound to live together, and it was within this assumption that you reflected on the problem of modernity for Bengali Muslims. You observed that from Rammohan Roy to Rabindranath Tagore, Bengali Hindu society had pursued modernity and nationalism, yet within their notions of modernity or “nation”, Bengali Muslims remained marginalised, neglected, or in some cases almost entirely forgotten. Nor was this accusation unfounded. Rabindranath himself acknowledged it in various writings and statements. [...]

Around 1940, the Pakistan Movement emerged as a response to this long-standing erasure, opening up the possibility of political sovereignty for Bengali Muslims. One might say that the period from 1947 to 1971 represents a linear history of the unfolding of that sovereignty. If necessary, that journey would begin by letting go of Hindu partnership. Without Partition, such political sovereignty would not have come into the lives of Bengali Muslims—or would have arrived much later. I was born after Partition, and therefore all my thinking inevitably accepts its reality.

Yet in the years 1926–1931, the conditions shaping your thought were different. Partition still lay beyond imagination. You believed that the pursuit of political and national sovereignty for both Bengali Muslims and Hindus, despite countless grievances and resentments, would have to be undertaken in mutual contact, hand in hand. That is why your thinking was not as directly political as it was cultural. [...]

Thought does not consist of argument alone; it seems to me that thought also possesses a disposition, a temperament, even a character. Since your discussion of Hindu–Muslim antagonism begins from the cultural premise that neither can exist without the other, I discern in your thinking five qualities or traits that help me clarify my own intellectual project as well.

You never imagined that this problem could have a geopolitical solution; nor do I believe—while fully accepting, indeed welcoming, Bangladesh’s political sovereignty—that political division can offer any way of understanding, let alone addressing, the complexities of our shared history. I do not deny that division may, under certain conditions, become necessary. But such division is a contingent arrangement. The deeper question is this: if a genuine dialogue is to be sustained between two contending communities who share the same language and belong to the same cultural tradition, despite their many differences, what might be the conditions of that dialogue?

With this question in mind, I have read a number of your writings from the *Shikha* period (and later as well), and in the character of your thought I find, at least, a constellation of five qualities worth reflecting upon. First, your aversion to intensity; second, the honesty and courage of your thinking; third, your refusal to sever yourself entirely from those whom you criticise; fourth, your constant attentiveness to the idea of the common good—a trait that often found expression in your use of the word *Prem* (love); and fifth, the final disposition of your thinking that I

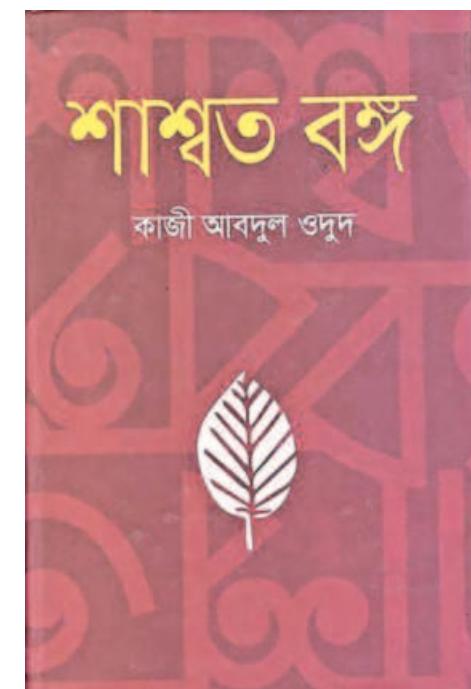
wish to note: your refusal to think from the vantage point of the majority. [...]

Let me now elaborate, in some detail, on those dispositions of your thinking that remain relevant to me even today. [...]

## One. Avoiding intensity in debate

You made this point in a letter written in the month of Kartik, Bengali year 1344 (October, 1937), to your friend “Taslim”, also known as Muhammad Wazed Ali (1896–1954). You wrote, “You have expressed disappointment that you did not find in me a strong enough intensity of attachment to the past.” In articulating the character of your thought, you went on to say: “Your disappointment is not difficult to understand. But it is intensity itself that I fear—and I believe everyone ought to fear it; this, you see, is my conviction.”

A closer reading of your letter makes it clear that by “intensity” you meant one-sidedness, a monocultural mode of judgement. Your friend had argued that “so much debris has become entangled with whatever is good in religion that unless religion is entirely discarded, there can be no human welfare; otherwise, humanity will continue to entangle itself in endless complications.” Your response was: “Good and evil have always coexisted; the seeker, according to necessity, distinguishes between the two and proceeds along the path of life with the aid of



that discernment.”

You further argued: “You will find an example of this even within your scientism—it is evident that alongside it, a fascination with destruction has also found a place of honour in the human mind. Who, then, can separate true scientism from this destructive impulse? No one but humanity’s concern for the common good—that devotion to society which we call moral or religious sensibility.” Otherwise, you wrote, “scientism is nothing more than a purified intellect; ... a clear intellect is merely a powerful instrument, nothing more. With it, mountains and forests may be levelled to create new settlements, and with the same ease, a brother’s throat may be cut.”

In today’s world, amid a global environmental crisis, you might no longer have described the technological capacity to fell mountains and forests as an unqualified good. Yet the logic of your opposition to “intensity” remains easy to grasp. If Muslims and Hindus wish to carry their relationship forward amid their many conflicts, they must avoid this one-sided gaze—whether directed at themselves or at the other. You upheld this argument throughout your life. [...]

## Two. Honesty and courage in thought

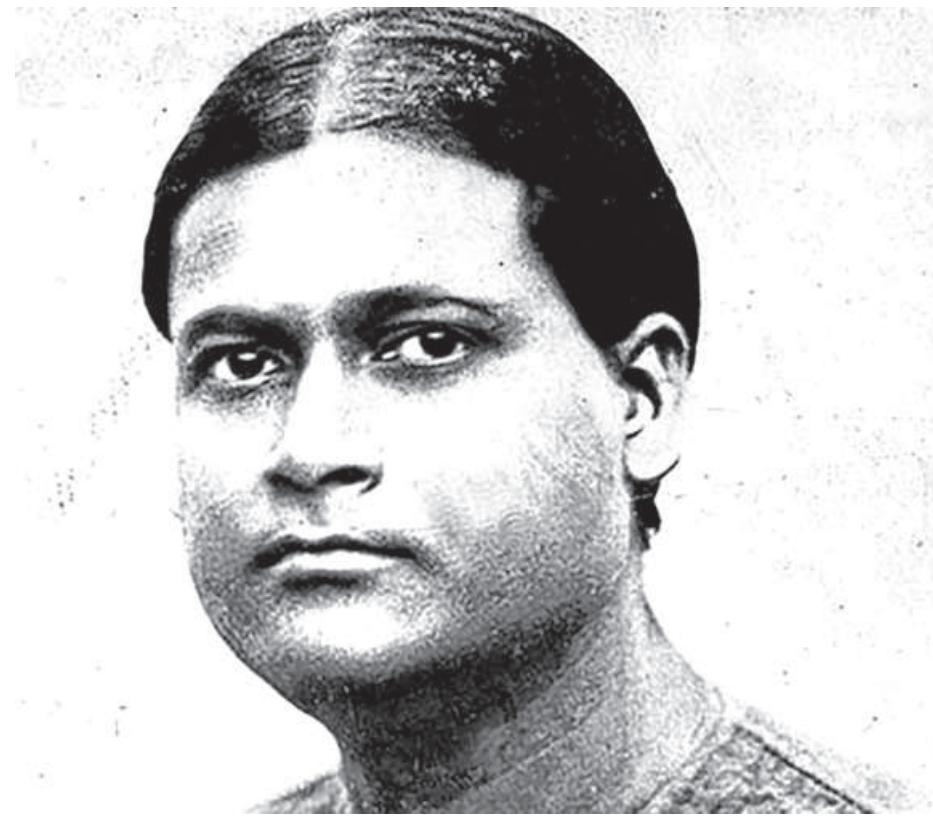
No thinker can avoid one-sidedness of thought without valuing honesty. Yet courage is also required to give expression to that thought. One may be honest in one’s thinking and still, out of fear of public opinion, refrain from articulating the truth one has grasped. You, however, possessed that courage—perhaps because you were willing to endure censure and sharp criticism. From what I have read and understood of you, you maintained this position throughout your life.

It is well known that during the period of *Shikha*, the publication of your essay *Sammohit Musalman* (The Hypnotised Muslim) in *Nabaparyay* provoked the wrath of *Monthly Mohammadi*. And yet, criticising one’s own community is, in a sense, easier; others within the *Shikha* circle did so as well. What is far more difficult is to speak uncomfortable truths about a community with which one is in conflict, especially when one does so at that community’s own invitation.

In India, I have observed that orthodox Marxist Muslim historians have spoken out forcefully against Muslim communalism, while assuming that Hindu Marxists would take responsibility for criticising Hindu communalism. The reasoning behind this is easy enough to understand. But you did not take this convenient path.

Let me return once more to your lecture on *Hindu–Muslimaner Birodh* (Hindu–Muslim Conflict) delivered at Santiniketan. Here, you also enjoyed Rabindranath Tagore’s support and encouragement. Tagore wrote:

“When the mind, overwhelmed by the horrors of Hindu–Muslim conflict in this country, becomes breathless with despair



Kazi Abdul Wadud (1894–1970)

and cannot see where this barbarity will end, one occasionally glimpses, from afar, bridges that embrace the two opposing shores with both arms. When the generosity of Abdul Wadud Saheb’s intellectual disposition appeared to me as one such broad pathway of reconciliation, I bowed to him with renewed hope. Alongside this, I perceived his thoughtfulness, his subtle and impartial faculty of judgement, and the distinctiveness of his expressive power in the Bengali language.”

Tagore was not exaggerating here. I remain struck by the way you could claim, as part of your own heritage and inheritance—through a combination of critique and appreciation—the nineteenth-century Hindu religious movements led by figures such as Rammohan Roy, Debendranath Tagore, Ramakrishna, Keshab Chandra Sen, and Vivekananda, much as you claimed Kabir or Dadu of the Bhakti movement as your own. You wrote:

“This Hindu religious awakening is not merely the pride of Bengal; it is the pride of the whole of India.”

At the same time, you reminded your audience that when the proponents of this movement attempted to argue that “Hindu civilisation is the greatest civilisation in the world”, that Hindu identity assumed a fierce or terrifying



form in the eyes of Muslims. You then offered an observation of remarkable foresight—one that, to my mind, remains true even today:

“There is a striking resemblance between this fierce manifestation of Hinduism and the Wahhabi doctrine within Islam. The origins of both lie in the same source. The Wahhabi reaction arose from the weakness of the Muslim world; likewise, this fierce Hinduism was born out of centuries of weakness and failure among Hindus. ... In the minds of Muslims today, hostility towards Muslims has come to be seen as one of the most prominent identifying features of Hinduism.”

## Three. Your cosmopolitanism

This disposition runs through every page of your writing. Your modern cosmopolitan mind—to borrow, or rather to accept the invitation of, the late Binoy Ghosh’s phrase—seeks to draw what is best from every tradition. I often find myself wondering how your audience responded when, at the fourth annual session of the *Muslim Sahitya Samaj*, you presented a paper on Goethe in the month of Chaitra, 1336 (March, 1930). There is no way of knowing. Yet it is not difficult to see that through Goethe you were shaping your own ethical ideal of life—a process that would continue into your later years through your engagement with Rabindranath Tagore and your translation of the Qur'an.

may sound like a riddle. But in truth, this may well be the law of the world. Ibsen has said: The strongest man is he who stands in the minority of one.”

It goes without saying that Pakistan did not come into being by following your counsel. No community trusted that its welfare could be secured while remaining in a “minority” position. Yet after Partition, you spent your entire life in Kolkata, voluntarily becoming a member of a minority community. You had no desire whatsoever for the “pride of numerical dominance”. In this, I discern a moral summons that is profoundly necessary in our own time.

4 Let me now return to my own time and ask why your thinking—and especially the thinking of your *Shikha* period—continues to draw me so powerfully. It draws me because within your thought I find a standpoint and a method from which to reflect on Bengali history while situated in today’s globalised world. It is not exactly the same standpoint; rather, in your time I glimpse a refracted image of my own—much as in a mirror the left appears as the right. For between the time of *Shikha* and my own lies the trench-like divide carved by the politics of Partition.

As a result, the historical fact that East Bengal is today an independent and sovereign nation state—a state that could not have come into being without 1947, and whose emergence created the possibility of a sovereign national life for Bengali Muslims by displacing what was experienced as “Hindu dominance”—must be acknowledged with respect. Bearing that respect in mind, and with a sense of kinship towards Bengali Muslims, I must nevertheless reflect on Hindu–Muslim antagonism within the broader history of Bengal, and on its possible resolutions—or, if no final resolution is conceivable, on the many small, provisional, everyday settlements that must constantly be reworked and renewed. And I do so while standing within a globalised, planetary world.

Today, Bengalis from both Bangladesh and West Bengal are dispersed across the globe. The solution to Hindu–Muslim antagonism that Partition offered was, fundamentally, geopolitical in nature. It enabled us to bind “place” to “culture”, as Abul Mansur Ahmed once did in his book *Pak-Banglar Culture*. Theories of “Indian domination” or “Calcutta’s dominance” likewise emerged from this coupling of place and culture. Even the pejorative phrase that has recently entered Bangladesh’s political vocabulary—“agents of India”—has been made possible by this imagined spatial division of Bengali-speaking people. Without a political “solution” to Hindu–Muslim conflict, such terms would not have come into being.

It is precisely because of globalisation that this geopolitical solution no longer seems sufficient today. Bengalis on both sides now meet, converse, form friendships, and recognise one another—not only within their respective countries but also across the many parts of the world to which Bengalis have dispersed. Without 1971, would there have been such friendships, such movements back and forth, such rediscoveries of one another? The globalised Bengali today is no longer defined solely by India or Bangladesh; many now hold two or more passports. And yet it would be naïve to assume that old currents of conflict no longer circulate within these new identities.

Indeed, love permeates every layer of your thought. You go on to explain with greater clarity: “Rammohan was well acquainted with the medieval saints. But his great difference from them lies in this: unlike them, he was not a devotee and poet; he was a devotee and a seeker of human welfare—and the aim of that welfare was the enhancement of everyday world life.”

You approached the question of Hindu–Muslim antagonism in similar terms elsewhere: “At the root of our country’s political failure lies the pitiable self-absorption and lovelessness of our educated classes.” What does this lovelessness mean? You explain: “If it is said that at the dawn of political consciousness they worshipped the deity of contentment, and today they worship the deity of discontent, it may sound unpalatable, but it may not be untrue. They have failed to

grasp that the ‘country’ consists of people of many classes and many levels of consciousness, and that service to the country means tireless striving for the improvement of all those lives—this understanding ... could not be conveyed to those who were active in the political sphere.” [...]

5 Five. Rejecting the position of the majority In a letter written to Abdul Qadir, published in the Falgun–Chaitra issue of the year 1337 (February–March, 1931), you wrote that, should elections be held, you would stand not for separate electorates for Muslims but rather with the camp favouring joint electorates. Needless to say, this was still a time when Partition could not yet be imagined. Yet the question of who constituted the majority and who the minority had already been firmly established in public debate. Considered across the whole of India, Muslims were a minority—what you called the “smaller group”—while Hindus were the majority, the “larger group”.

You wrote that “in the realm of politics, it is virtually impossible for the larger group to renounce the desire for dominance”, because it is “intoxicated by the pride of numbers”. “The resolution, therefore, lies in this,” you argued: let that dominance remain, but let it be exercised in a manner as beneficial as possible for all sections of the country. And this can only happen if the smaller group, casting aside the spirit of factionalism, devotes itself to creative endeavour and thereby guides the larger group along the path of the common good. “... To many this

is in this spirit that I have tried to articulate some of what I learn from you, drawing especially on your writings from the *Shikha* period on Hindu–Muslim antagonism. Yet today, as the line goes, “Others abide our question; thou art free.” And so, like the disciple Ekalavya, I have placed you within my mind in the seat of Dronacharya and spoken these words to you.

Yours respectfully,  
Dipesh Chakrabarty  
Chicago, 11 December 2025

Dipesh Chakrabarty is Lawrence A. Kippen Distinguished Service Professor of History, South Asian Languages, and Civilizations at the University of Chicago. Translated by Samia Huda.

This is an abridged version; the full article is available online.

## From orphanage to JUNIOR CHAMPION

ANISUR RAHMAN

When paddler Abul Hashem Hasib should have been under the loving care of his parents at just three years of age, he was instead taken to an orphanage by his single mother and maternal grandfather following his father's death and the family's financial hardship.

That orphanage -- Child Heaven International in Chittagong -- proved a blessing in disguise. The home for parentless, destitute, disabled and underprivileged children supported Hasib for nine years and continues to back his sporting journey by paying his monthly school fees at BKSP. Hasib was admitted to the sports education institute in 2019 through a training camp held in Chittagong and is currently a Grade-12 student.

Years of hardship, patience and perseverance paid off on Friday when Hasib clinched the boys' singles title at the 40th



National Table Tennis Championships, defeating his close rival and BKSP teammate Nafis Iqbal 3-1.

Hasib also won three more titles -- the boys' team and mixed events in the U-19 section, and the mixed event in the senior section. He finished runners-up in both the u-19 boys' doubles and men's doubles, and secured third place in the men's team event.

"I could not have come this far without the support of Child Heaven International," Hasib told The Daily Star yesterday.

Hasib said the orphanage environment helped him cope with his loss. "I never felt the absence of my father because of the surroundings at the orphanage. I wish I could share my success with my father, but instead I share everything with my mother, who supports me a lot," he said.

Winning his maiden national singles title was particularly special for Hasib, although he had previously become junior champion in a ranking tournament last year. "Becoming junior champion at the national championship is a different feeling. Every paddler dreams of winning the singles title," he said. "I targeted it in 2023 but failed. This time, I was determined and trusted the hard work I put in."

### BPL PLAYOFFS

- Eliminator** (Jan 20, 1:00pm)  
Rangpur vs Sylhet
- Qualifier 1** (Jan 20, 6:00pm)  
Rajshahi vs Chattogram
- Qualifier 2** (Jan 21, 6:00pm)  
Winner of Eliminator vs Loser of Qualifier 1
- Final** (Jan 23, 7:00pm)  
TBA

\*\*All matches at SBNCS in Mirpur



## What to WATCH

SONY SPORTS 2 AND 5  
Australian Open  
First round  
Live from 6:30 pm  
STAR SPORTS

SELECT HD1, HD2  
ICC U19 World Cup  
Pakistan vs Scotland  
Live from 1:30 pm  
Ireland vs Sri Lanka  
Live from 1:30 pm

Sharmin Akther's maiden half-century in Women's T20Is -- a 39-ball 63 -- followed by an overall disciplined bowling performance, helped Bangladesh seal a 21-run victory over the USA in their opening Group B encounter of the ICC Women's T20 World Cup Qualifier at the Mulpani Cricket Ground in Kathmandu, Nepal, yesterday. Riding on Sharmin's knock, laced with eight fours and a six, Bangladesh posted 159 for 5, while Nahida Akter starred with the ball, claiming 4 for 24 to restrict the USA to 137 for 9. The Tigresses will face Papua New Guinea in Kirtipur tomorrow.

PHOTO: BCB



## Hridoy urges faith in national openers

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh middle-order batter Tawhid Hridoy has backed the national team's openers to rediscover form despite their struggles in the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League (BPL).

Opener Tanzid Hasan Tamim is averaging just over 18 in this edition of the BPL, with a highest score of 76, while Saif Hassan -- the other opener preferred by the team management -- has endured a difficult campaign, averaging below 15.

Hridoy, meanwhile, registered a superb century on Wednesday, following it up after a knock of 62 the previous day. His 63-ball 109 against Noakhali Express helped Rangpur Riders secure third position in the playoffs.

The hundred propelled Hridoy to the top of the BPL run-getters' list, with 378 runs at an average of 42 and a strike rate of 139.48. His surge up the scoring charts coincided with a change in batting position. In his first six matches, batting at three or four, Hridoy averaged just 17.6 with only one fifty. Following that lean run, he was promoted to open the innings and responded with an unbeaten 97 against Rajshahi Warriors.

With national team openers out of form, Hridoy was asked whether he could be considered for an opening role at international level.

"When the team [Rangpur] gave me this opportunity, I told them I had no problem. I am mentally ready to try to contribute to the



team wherever they deploy me," Hridoy said. "Yes, playing in the top order provides an opportunity to build an innings, whereas in the middle or lower order, you focus on

impact innings of 25 to 50 runs." However, speaking about the national team, Hridoy stressed the importance of backing the existing openers.

"I cannot say much about the national team. There are many top-order batters and they have been doing well in the last one year. I don't think I should be in their place right now; we should trust them and we want them to represent the country well going forward," Hridoy remarked.

Saif, who is also the vice-captain of the T20I side, registered his only notable innings of the tournament with a 73 against Chattogram on Wednesday -- a knock that may offer some relief to the selectors ahead of the World Cup. Hridoy, however, cautioned against directly comparing BPL performances with international cricket.

"At this moment, you cannot compare the BPL with international cricket; they are different. We should pray that everyone does well, because that is good for the country," he added.

Hridoy is expected to slot in at number five for the national team. He revealed that skipper Litton Das had emphasised the importance of his role in the middle order.

"He [Litton] told me, 'You will play in the middle order at the World Cup, so if everything is right, try to practise batting there. It's different and not easy,'" Hridoy said. "He reminded me that impact innings in the middle order also count."

## Arsenal tighten grip at the top



AGENCIES

Arsenal took a seven-point lead at the top of the Premier League after a scoreless draw with Nottingham Forest on Saturday following an exhilarating 2-0 derby victory for Manchester United that dealt a devastating blow to Manchester City's title hopes.

Arsenal could have gone nine points clear with a win at Forest but Sean Dyche's side fought tooth and nail to secure the draw, becoming only the second team to prevent Mikel Arteta's side from scoring in the Premier League this season.

"We tried to at the end find a goal. I don't think we conceded a single shot, again. But that's the margins and we didn't find a way to win it. Credit to them, the manner that they are organised," Arteta said.

Arsenal have 50 points from 22 games with City on 43 from 22.

After lamenting his side's wasteful finishing, Arteta said he was frustrated that they were not awarded a penalty in the 80th minute when the ball struck Ola Aina on the arm, but a VAR review cleared the Forest defender of any wrongdoing.

"A clear penalty in the box that has not been given, so that's the margins," he told broadcaster TNT. "I saw it live, here, and I saw it now again. That is very unnecessary."

## NEW ZEALAND REWRITE HISTORY IN INDIA

New Zealand middle-order batter Daryl Mitchell continued his strong impact against India in ODIs, particularly in Indian conditions. Centuries from Mitchell and Glenn Phillips powered New Zealand to a historic series win in Indore yesterday, after sealing the third ODI by 41 runs.

Mitchell, who scored an unbeaten 131 in the previous ODI in Rajkot, finished the series with 352 runs -- the highest aggregate by any New Zealand batter in a three-match bilateral ODI series.

Mitchell averages 74.1 in ODIs against India -- the highest among players with a minimum of 500 runs against the opponent.



\*\* The 2-1 victory in the three-match series marked New Zealand's first ODI series win against India in India, after losing each of their previous seven bilateral ODI series there.

\*\* Mitchell smashed a 131-ball 137 -- his highest ODI score -- surpassing his previous best of 134, which had also come against India. Phillips, meanwhile, struck 106 off 88 deliveries

as New Zealand posted 337 for eight. In reply, despite a 124-run knock from Virat Kohli, India were bundled out for 296 in 46 overs.

\*\* It was Mitchell's ninth ODI century and his fourth against India. It was also his fourth consecutive fifty-plus score and his second century in back-to-back matches against the same opposition.



## 'A GREAT MOMENT'

Venus Williams fell at the first hurdle but said she was proud of herself after making history as the oldest woman to ever play at the Australian Open on Sunday. The American seven-time Grand Slam champion, 45, was handed a wildcard for Melbourne, five years after she last appeared at the major. She showed she still has what it takes in patches, pushing 24-year-old Serbian Olga Danilovic all the way before losing the last six games to crash out 6-7 (5/7), 6-3, 6-4. "It was such a great game, such a great moment," Williams said.

PHOTO: REUTERS



**BSRM**  
THE ONLY STEEL FACTORY IN BANGLADESH TO RECEIVE THE  
**GREEN FACTORY AWARD 2025**



## 'There should be no more mourning'

**Tarique says people must write the history of victory instead**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



BNP plans to establish a separate department under the Liberation War affairs ministry to support the families of July martyrs and the injured if it comes to power, said party Chairman Tarique Rahman.

He said independence and sovereignty were achieved in 1971 and protected again in 2024 through the mass uprising against fascism.

"July warriors are also considered as freedom fighters," said Tarique during a views exchange event at the Krishibid Institution Bangladesh with the families of those killed in the uprising and those seriously injured.

Listening to the accounts of martyrs' families and injured persons, Tarique appeared visibly emotional, at times breaking down and embracing family members of the victims to offer comfort.

He also came down from the stage, approached the families, listened to the injured, and offered them consolation.

Family members broke down in tears while sharing

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## 'EC not fit for holding credible polls'

**Says NCP; names candidates for 27 seats**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The National Citizen Party spokesperson Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuyain yesterday said his party has lost all confidence in the Election Commission's ability to hold a credible and neutral election.

He said the EC no longer has the capacity to conduct fair polls.

"The Election Commission has legalised candidacies in violation of several existing laws, including those in the constitution and the Representation of the People Order (RPO). This commission will not be able to organise a fair election," he told a press briefing at the party's central office in Banglamotor last night.

He said the EC had been holding hearings on the legality of candidacies until yesterday, and described the commission members' meeting with BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir during verdict delivery as a "warning".

"We believe the verdict is fabricated and predetermined."

Asif, who also serves as chairman of the NCP's Election Management Committee, said, "It is time to reconsider whether the National Citizen Party will participate in the upcoming polls."

"Our political council will decide on the matter after review. At the same time, discussions will be held with other

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## Unlock women's power, unlock the economy

**Say speakers at a policy dialogue**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Unlocking women's underutilised human capital is essential for Bangladesh's economic progress, said speakers at an event yesterday.

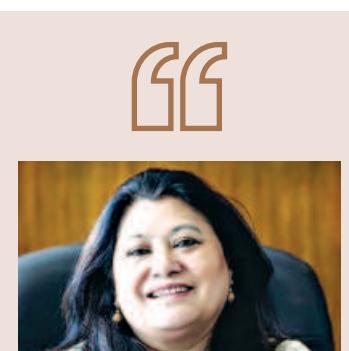
"We must remove barriers, change mindsets and ensure women take their rightful place in the workforce," said Rupali Chowdhury, managing director of Berger Paints Bangladesh, at a policy dialogue styled "Women Shaping the Nation: Policy, Possibility & the Future of Bangladesh" organised by Dhaka Forum Initiative.

Many qualified women do not reach CEO positions partly due to mindset barriers and partly because leadership pipelines remain underdeveloped.

Women often leave work to shoulder family responsibilities and, upon returning, face the challenge of starting anew.

She underscored the importance of maternity leave, daycare facilities and community-based solutions where companies cannot provide them, and psychological and mental support.

"Women must negotiate, lead and participate fully in both corporate and community settings," she said.



**Women must negotiate, lead and participate fully in both corporate and community settings.**

RUPALI CHOWDHURY, MD of Berger Paints Bangladesh

while emphasising the need for policies to ensure women occupy leadership roles, citing her company's requirement that 30 percent of independent directors on the board be women.

Zaima Rahman, daughter of BNP

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## 2 bodies found in abandoned Savar building

**Five bodies recovered from there in six months**

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Savar

Police yesterday recovered charred bodies of two unidentified individuals from an abandoned community centre in Savar upazila of Dhaka district.

With this, a total of five bodies have been recovered from this exact spot over the last six months.

Around 2:00pm yesterday, the two bodies were discovered on the second floor of the abandoned Savar Municipal Community Centre after a call to the 999 hotline, said Arman Ali, officer-in-charge of Savar Model Police Station.

Police believe the two were murdered, possibly in the early hours of yesterday.

One Samrat Hossain, 35, was detained in this connection, said Saidul Islam, OC of Dhaka North Detective Branch (DB) Police.

"Initially, it appears that he may be involved with the killings. We are interrogating him, and further details will be shared later."

However, locals claim the detained man is mentally ill and has long been seen in the area.

Meanwhile, OC Arman Ali claimed the detainee was not mentally ill and could just be faking it.

Later in the day, the Criminal Investigation Department visited the site.

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## Iran protest toll climbs to 5,000 Says official, blames 'terrorists, armed rioters'; judiciary hints at executions

AGENCIES

At least 5,000 people have been killed in protests in Iran, including about 500 security personnel, an Iranian official in the region said yesterday, citing verified figures and accusing "terrorists and armed rioters" of killing "innocent Iranians".

500 security personnel among the dead: official

Heaviest clashes, most deaths in Kurdish northwest

Iran considers 'gradually' restoring internet

The official also told Reuters some of the heaviest clashes and highest number of deaths were in the Iranian Kurdish areas in northwest Iran, a region where Kurdish separatists have been active and where flare-ups have been among the most violent in past periods of unrest.

"The final toll is not expected to increase sharply," the official added.

On Saturday, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said: "We will not drag the country into war, but we will not let domestic or international criminals go unpunished," state media reported. Yesterday, the judiciary indicated that executions may go ahead.

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## Tajul urges caution in using the word 'mob'

**Politicians calls his statement 'a threat'**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

ICT Chief Prosecutor Tajul Islam yesterday commented on the use of the word "mob" as a way to question the uprising and warned everyone to be cautious, a stance that political leaders at a discussion termed a "threat".

He was addressing a policy dialogue titled "Independence of the Judiciary and Rule of Law", organised by the Centre for Governance Studies (CGS) at the capital's Cirdap auditorium.

"You cannot equate the fall of the Bastille with a street mugger's mob. If any quarter attempts to question this revolution of toppling the Gono Bhaban -- or those who carried it out -- by repeatedly using the word 'mob', I would

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Leaders and activists of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal hold a sit-in outside the Election Commission headquarters in Agargaon yesterday, protesting the EC's "biased and controversial" role ahead of the upcoming national election slated for February 12. Story on page 4.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

## 3 days on, cops yet to rescue abducted man

**His critically injured bodyguard at CMH**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three days on, police have yet to rescue a man abducted in Uttara.

His bodyguard was critically injured during the abduction.

The incident occurred on Road-12 in Sector-14 of Uttara around 7:00pm on Friday.

The abducted man remains unidentified, as no family members have come forward or filed a complaint. Law enforcement agencies have yet to trace his family members as well.

The bodyguard, Mahbub Alam, 57, a retired army personnel, is currently undergoing treatment at the Combined Military Hospital (CMH).

Doctors say he suffered a critical head injury.

Mahbub's son Abdullah Azam filed a case with Uttara West Police Station on Saturday.

Uttara West Police Station Officer-in-Charge Kazi Rafiq told The Daily Star that police visited the scene and collected CCTV footage. "We are trying to rescue the abducted man."

According to the case statement, Mahbub Alam lived on Road-13/C in Sector-6 under the Uttara East Police Station. He was employed through a security services company and had a 12 gauge shotgun licensed to his name.

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Govt clarifies CA's support for 'Yes' vote

UNB, Dhaka

The interim government has explained why Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus' support for the "Yes" vote in the referendum is consistent with democratic norms in Bangladesh.

"Professor Muhammad Yunus' support for a 'Yes' vote is consistent with the reformist mandate of the interim government, Bangladesh's urgent need for institutional renewal, established international democratic practice, and transparency and accountability to the electorate," said the Chief Adviser's Press Wing yesterday.

Ultimately, the decision rests with the people of Bangladesh, the interim government said.

"That is the democratic guarantee. Leadership does not negate that choice. It helps clarify it," said the press wing in an explanation.

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