

"Incidentally, Denmark has always treated Greenland as a colony and has been quite harsh, if not cruel, towards it."

Russian President Vladimir Putin

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TO KNOW

SECOND EDITION

THE DAILY

Star

ON FRIDAY

DHAKA FRIDAY JANUARY 23, 2026

REGD. NO. DA 781

VOL. XXXVI No. 10

MAGH 9, 1432 BS

www.thedailystar.net

SHABAN 3, 1447 HIJRI

16 PAGES: TK 15.00



# Nation steps into campaign fest

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

With full of promises and hope, the election festivities have finally arrived as the nation prepares for its first truly competitive election since 2008.

Political parties yesterday kicked off their campaigns with rallies, fanfare and door-to-door campaigning. Adversarial rhetoric filled the airwaves as rivals exchanged oblique taunts and barbs from street corners and playgrounds.

Election day is in less than three weeks. Major contenders -- BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami -- launched their campaigns by firing salvos at each other that are

expected to continue as election fever grips the country.

BNP reminded voters of Jamaat's controversial role during the Liberation War, while Jamaat countered by branding BNP a party of "extortionists".

Although parliamentary polls are scheduled every five years, this election comes just two years after the last one, following the fall of the Awami League regime, which had remained in power since 2008.

The 2014 and 2024 elections were condemned as "one sided", while in 2018 ballot boxes were reportedly stuffed

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**Our goal is to ensure that every person can feed and clothe themselves, so that everyone can move safely – that is how we will 'take back Bangladesh'.**

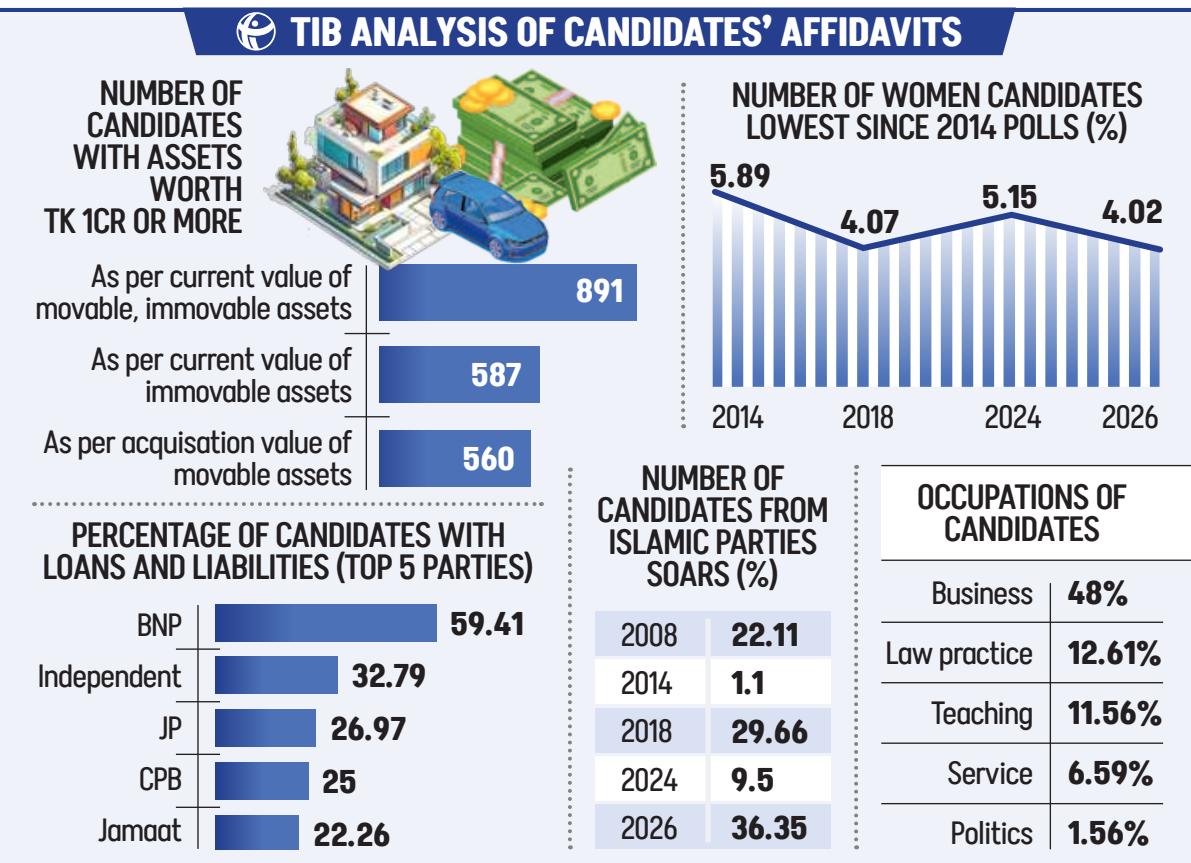
Tarique Rahman,  
BNP chairman

**We have declared that we will not take donations... We will not engage in corruption, and we will not allow anyone else to do so either.**

Shafiqur Rahman,  
ameer, Jamaat-e-Islami

**I seek the prayers and cooperation of the people to establish Islamic values, justice, and good governance.**

Mufti Syed Muhammad Faizul Karim, senior nayeb-e-ameer of Islami Andolan Bangladesh



## Record crore-rich candidates in race

### Finds TIB analysis of affidavits

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The upcoming national election will see participation from the highest number of MP candidates with assets worth Tk 1 crore or more, said Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) yesterday.

The Bangladesh chapter of the global anti-corruption watchdog analysed the latest affidavits of valid candidates and released its findings ahead of the February 12 polls.

TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman and Director of Outreach and Communication Mohammad Tauhidul Islam presented the findings at a press briefing in Dhanmondi.

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Four-day holiday for election

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

People will get to enjoy a four-day consecutive holiday from February 11 to 14, following the declaration of February 11 as a general holiday.

In addition to the public holiday on voting day, February 12, the Advisory Council yesterday approved a proposal to declare February 11 a public holiday to facilitate voter participation and ensure effective law and order management ahead of the polls, reports BSS.

This includes the two weekly holidays on Friday and Saturday, resulting in a continuous four day break around the election.

The council gave the approval at its weekly

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## No scope to send team to India: Asif Nazrul

BCB to continue push for neutral venue

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Youth and Sports Adviser Asif Nazrul yesterday said there was no scope to send the national team to India for next month's ICC Men's T20 World Cup stressing that the decision was taken solely by the government on security grounds.

"There is no scope to change our decision. I believe we did not get justice from ICC. We still hope that the ICC will



deliver justice," he said at a press conference following a meeting with several Bangladesh team cricketers and Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) officials at a city hotel yesterday.

"I want to say one thing very clearly, it was the government's decision not to send the team for the World Cup in India considering security risks. Only the government decides whether there is any security threat for

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বাংলাদেশ সিমেন্ট

কনফিডেন্স সিমেন্ট

পোর্টল কম্পোজিট সিমেন্ট

সিমেন্ট প্রযুক্তি বৃক্ষ প্রযুক্তি

আইএসও ১০০১-২০১৫

বাংলাদেশ তৈরী

উৎপাদন তারিখ: মেজে টার্টী পার্ক

সংস্থাক পুরুষ মিম মু: ৫৫৩৩ ১০০০

# বিশ্বখ্যাত জামান VRM প্রযুক্তি আর A গ্রেড ক্লিংকারের সমন্বয়ে অগ্রগতির পথে আরো এক ধাপ এগিয়ে

সমন্বয়ে উৎপাদিত সর্বোচ্চমানের  
সিমেন্ট নিয়ে আরো একধাপ এগিয়ে-  
কনফিডেন্স সিমেন্ট  
বাংলাদেশের হাদয় জুড়ে

কারখানা, যার সম্মিলিত বার্ষিক বর্তমান উৎপাদন ক্ষমতা  
প্রায় ১৮ কোটি মেট্রিক টন।

সিমেন্ট শিল্পকে আরো এক ধাপ এগিয়ে নিতে  
২০২৬ সালের ২৩ জানুয়ারি নরসিংহনীর পলাশে  
অবস্থিত কনফিডেন্স গ্রুপ-এর দ্বিতীয় সিমেন্ট  
শিল্প থেকে বিশ্বখ্যাত জামান VRM প্রযুক্তি আর  
A গ্রেড ক্লিংকারের সমন্বয়ে উৎপাদিত সর্বোচ্চ  
মানের সিমেন্ট বাংজারজাতকরণ শুরু হয়েছে, যার  
বার্ষিক উৎপাদন ক্ষমতা ১৮ লক্ষ মেট্রিক টন। এই  
শিল্প থেকে A গ্রেড ক্লিংকারে উৎপাদিত সর্বোচ্চ মানের  
সিমেন্ট পৌঁছে যাবে ৫৬,০০০ বর্গমাইলের বাংলাদেশের  
প্রতিটি শহরে ও গ্রামে প্রতিটি জনপদে প্রতিটি প্রান্তেঃ  
বাংলাদেশের হাদয় জুড়ে।





## BUSY FIRST DAY

With electioneering officially kicking off yesterday, political parties had a busy day of campaigning across the country. Clockwise from top left: BNP supporters attend a rally at the Alia Madrasa grounds in Sylhet city. The Jamaat-led 10-party alliance holds a rally at the capital's Mirpur Adarsha School grounds. Islami Andolan Bangladesh Senior Nayeb-e-Ameer Mufti Syed Muhammad Faizul Karim distributes leaflets among voters in Barishal city. Communist Party of Bangladesh leaders pay respect to language martyrs at the Central Shaheed Minar.



PHOTO: STAR, PALASH KHAN, TITU DAS, PRABIR DAS

## Tarique slams 'ticket to heaven' pledge

In campaigns across districts, he vows employment, self-reliance

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

In his maiden election rally yesterday, BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman alleged that a certain party is trying to deceive voters, particularly women, with "tickets to heaven" in exchange for votes.

Addressing a huge gathering at the Alia Madrasa field in Sylhet city, he also criticised the party for its stance against the 1971 Liberation War.

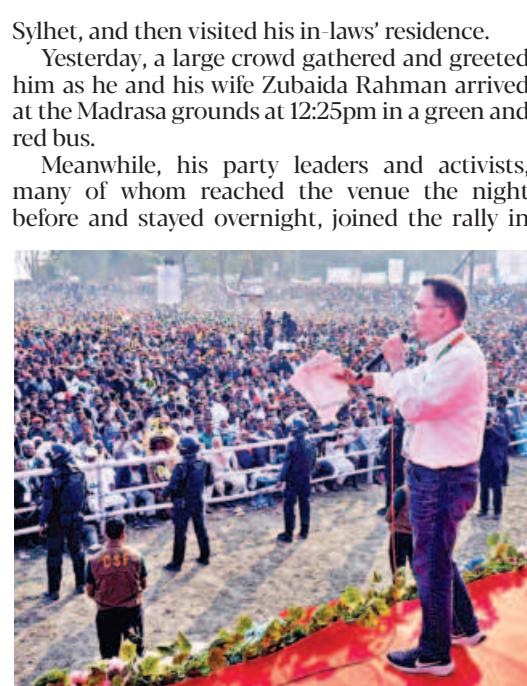
Without mentioning Jamaat-e-Islami's name, he continued, "They are already cheating you. Now think about how they will cheat you after the election... They are not only deceiving the people; they are making Muslims commit 'shirk' [the act of ascribing divinity or worship to others alongside Allah]. Nauzubillah [We seek refuge in Allah]!"

He further warned, "Over the last few days, you have seen in newspapers and on social media how postal ballots sent to different countries, including the Middle East, were robbed.... We must be alert to conspiracies."

Thousands of party leaders, activists and supporters gathered at the venue, applauding as he called on voters to support the "paddy sheaf" -- the BNP's electoral symbol -- for national development.

With the upcoming election being the first Tarique is participating in, he attended multiple rallies across seven districts yesterday.

He reached Sylhet city around 8:00pm on Wednesday and visited the shrines of Hazrat Shahjalal (RA) and Hazrat Shah Paran (RA) in



droves, donning colourful caps and t-shirts.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir spoke as a special guest, while Sylhet district BNP President Abdul Qaiyum Chowdhury presided over the programme. Candidates from Sylhet and Sunamganj also addressed the rally, pledging to work in unity to ensure the party's victory.

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NCP's only goal is to win, form govt

Says Nahid

SATFF CORRESPONDENT

National Citizen Party (NCP) convener Nahid Islam yesterday said the party's sole objective now is to win the upcoming national election and form the government.

"We want the polls to be held on February 12 at any cost. Our only agenda is to win and form the government," he said while launching the party's campaign in the Dhaka University area.

The electioneering began with tributes to three national leaders at Tin Nekar Mazar and prayers at the grave of slain Inqilab Moncho leader Sharif Osman Hadi on the DU campus.

Nahid urged people across Bangladesh to support candidates of the Jamaat-e-Islami-led 10-party alliance and the NCP, whose electoral symbol is Shapla Koli (waterlily bud).

He also raised concerns over the neutrality of the Election Commission.

"We are seeing that a particular party is being

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Won't indulge in graft, nor allow it  
Says Jamaat ameer kicking off party campaign

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami yesterday launched its election campaign, with its ameer warning against the resurgence of fascism and vowing to build a corruption-free country.

Addressing a rally at the Adarsha School ground in Mirpur-10, Shafiqur Rahman, the party's candidate for Dhaka-15, said if fascism reappears wearing a new outfit, it will meet the same fate as before.



Thousands of people gathered at the venue hours ahead of the scheduled time, while leaders and activists of Jamaat and other parties in the 10-party alliance took positions on nearby roads.

The formal programme began at 3:00pm with recitation from the Holy Quran. Saif Khan, son of July martyr Abdul Hannan, delivered the opening speech.

Referring to the last three elections, the Jamaat ameer said people had been unable to cast their votes and described those who deprived them of that right as vote thieves.

"We do not want to see any new vote thieves," he said.

He added, "Those who can restrain their own activists from

SEE PAGE 10 COL 1

IAB promises justice, equal opportunities  
Starts campaign in Barishal

OUR CORRESPONDENT,  
Barishal

Islami Andolan Bangladesh Senior Nayeb-e-Ameer Mufti Syed Muhammad Faizul Karim yesterday said his party, if voted to power, will work to build a new Bangladesh free from corruption, misrule, and discrimination.

"I seek the prayers and cooperation of the people to establish Islamic values, justice, and good governance," he said while launching the party's election campaign at a rally in the Ashwini Kumar Hall area in Barishal city.

"We will ensure equal opportunities for all and establish a welfare-oriented society and state system, where justice and equal rights are guaranteed for every citizen," he added.

Faizul is contesting the Barishal-5 and Barishal-6 constituencies in the 13th national election, scheduled for February 12.

A large number of party leaders and activists joined

SEE PAGE 10 COL 4

## Nation steps into campaign fest

FROM PAGE 1

on the eve of voting, BNP and other opposition parties boycotted the 2014 and 2024 polls. In 2018, BNP contested under the Jatiya Oikyafront banner but faced widespread intimidation and little redress from the Election Commission.

This time, 1,981 candidates are contesting the polls, launching campaigns in village markets, town squares and city centres. Campaign slogans echoed from rural areas to cityscapes as candidates visited voters at their homes.

Candidates will be allowed to campaign until 7:30am on February 10, 48 hours before polls open on February 12.

Most candidates have also taken to social media to announce their campaign launch. They shared updates and engaged with voters, turning the digital space into an extension of the campaign trail and amplifying the festive mood and signalling the return of competitive politics.

Following tradition, BNP Chairperson Tarique Rahman launched his party's campaign from Sylhet with a rally at the Alia Madrasa ground, followed by two more gatherings in Moulvibazar and Habiganj by 7:30pm. He had rallies scheduled all night long in different northeastern districts.

Travelling by road in a red

and green bus, Tarique waved to supporters lining the roads.

This marks the first time he is running for public office and leading a national campaign since returning from exile.

At the Alia Madrasa, Tarique was greeted with thunderous applause and slogans. Thousands of activists from different constituencies gathered at the venue, chanting slogans for the party's Sheaf of Paddy symbol, and for BNP founder Ziaur Rahman and long-time party leader Khaleda Zia.

Many wore caps emblazoned with the symbol and wore party bandanas.

In his speech, Tarique criticised Jamaat, BNP's main rival in the polls with the Awami League's activities banned.

"Bangladesh comes first, not Delhi, not Pindi, not any other country," he declared, adding, "We believe the people of this country are the source of all our political power, and therefore we believe in uplifting their destiny."

Recalling the Liberation War, he said, "Because of their [who opposed independence] actions, countless brothers of this nation were martyred, and countless mothers and sisters suffered indignities. The people of Bangladesh have already seen the role they played."

He concluded by seeking prayers, support and votes for the BNP.

Meanwhile, Jamaat Ameer

Shafiqur Rahman launched his party's campaign with a rally in Dhaka's Mirpur, under the Dhaka-15 constituency from where he is running.

The party boycotted the 2014 and 2024 polls and contested the 2018 election under BNP's symbol as part of the BNP-led alliance.

Its registration was cancelled in 2013 following a High Court verdict but restored along with its symbol in June last year.

From noon, small processions gathered at Mirpur Adarsha High School ground in Mirpur-10.

By 3:00pm, the ground was packed with activists. As Shafiqur arrived, supporters welcomed him with slogans calling for votes for the party's symbol Balancing Scale.

In his speech, Shafiqur said many people had been unable to vote in previous elections and warned against the rise of new "vote robbers".

"People do not want to see extortions," he said. He also criticised BNP's proposed "family card" programme, saying, "We are not making such a pledge. Will Tk 2,000 really solve anything for a family?"

He also introduced the names of party and alliance-backed candidates for five Dhaka seats, including National Citizen Party (NCP) convener Nahid Islam.

Earlier in the day, Nahid and other leaders of NCP, formed by frontliners

of the July mass uprising, launched their campaign by paying tributes at the graves of three national leaders and Sharif Osman Hadi on the Dhaka University campus. Hadi, also a frontline July protester and aspirant for the February polls, was gunned down and killed a day after the election schedule was announced.

Islami Andolan Bangladesh also launched its campaign in a festive atmosphere in Barishal. Senior Nayeb-e-Ameer Mufti Syed Faizul Karim, who is contesting from Barishal-5 and Barishal-6, began his campaign in front of Ashwini Kumar Hall.

A large number of party leaders and activists joined the rally, after which the candidate led a procession and conducted door-to-door campaigning.

Other political parties also launched their campaigns. Jatiya Party Chairman GM Quader started campaigning from Rangpur.

Candidates of the left-leaning Ganotantrik Juktafront, including the Communist Party of Bangladesh and Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal, began their electioneering by paying tribute to the martyrs of the Language Movement, the 1971 Liberation War, and the democratic and anti-communal uprisings of 1990 and 2024 at the Central Shaheed Minar.

Gonosamhati Andolan also started its campaign from the Shaheed Minar.

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two separate cases were filed yesterday over a child abuse incident at Sharmin Academy after CCTV footage showing the school's founding principal and manager beating and intimidating a child, triggering widespread public outrage.

The child's mother filed a case with Paltan Police Station under Section 70 of the Children Act against Sharmin Jahan, the

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## CHILD ABUSE

Sharmin Academy founding principal, manager sued

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

According to Paltan Police Station Officer-in-Charge Mostafa Kamal, the two accused are spouses. "They both went into hiding after the video drew widespread attention from lawyers and journalists. We are trying to arrest them."

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## Four-day holiday for election

FROM PAGE 1

meeting at the Chief Adviser's Office with Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus in the chair.

Later, Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam briefed the media at the Foreign Service Academy in Dhaka, saying the council approved the proposal made at a high-level meeting held on Wednesday on the election preparations and security issues.

He said the meeting also approved another holiday on February 10 only for workers in industrial zones.

He said the rationale behind this proposal was that, as February 11 is the day before the election, many voters who are currently staying in Dhaka, industrial towns, or other major cities would be able to travel back to their respective home areas to cast their votes.

It was also expected that such a measure would help manage law and order more effectively during the election period, Shafiqul said.

An official order regarding these decisions will be issued very soon, he said.



Police stand guard near the Science Lab area in Dhaka during a clash between HSC students of Dhaka College and Dhanmondi Ideal College yesterday morning. The clash followed a dispute between the two groups and led to chases and counter-chases. Police fired two rounds of teargas to bring the situation under control. Vehicular movement along the Mirpur-to-New Market stretch was completely suspended. The situation returned to normal in the afternoon.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

## BNP walking a tightrope between rebels and allies

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

Despite hectic negotiations, repeated warnings, and expulsions, BNP has failed to persuade its rebel candidates to withdraw from the election race, triggering frustration and anger among its partners.

BNP has allocated 14 seats to its allies, who had earlier joined hands with the party in a simultaneous movement against the fascist regime. However, in 10 of those seats, BNP rebel candidates remain in the race.

Not only that, but more than five dozen BNP rebel candidates are still contesting, weakening the prospects of the party's own nominated candidates, party leaders said.

The deadline for withdrawing nominations expired on Tuesday. Since then, BNP has said it would try to convince rebel candidates to support alliance nominees and has verbally instructed its grassroots leaders to extend full support to party-backed candidates.

Partners said the failure to rein in rebel candidates has exposed internal weaknesses in BNP's election management and strained relations with alliance partners at a critical stage of the campaign.

A partner said, "We believed that after Tarique Rahman's intervention, the rebels would quit the race, but that did not happen. We did not expect this. BNP has failed to honour its seat sharing commitment."

Developments on the ground suggest little progress.

In Dhaka-12, BNP did not field any candidate, as the seat was allocated to Biplobi Workers Party General Secretary Saiful Haque. Yet, expelled BNP leader Saiful Alam Nirab is contesting as a rebel candidate.

"Even after being expelled, BNP rebel candidates are campaigning using the names of BNP leaders, which is wrong and unlawful. BNP did not show foresight in handling rebel candidates," Saiful Haque said.

In Bogura-2, BNP had earlier announced that the seat would go to Nagorik Oikya Convener Mahmudur Rahman Manna. Later, citing complications with

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## ESSENTIAL DRUGS HC questions legality of 18-member taskforce

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court has issued a rule questioning the legality of the health ministry's decision to constitute an 18-member taskforce for preparing the essential drug list and recommending rational drug pricing excluding Ayurvedic, Unani, Homeopathic, Biochemic, Herbal and Veterinary experts.

In the rule, the court asked the respondents to explain within three weeks why the health ministry's notification issued on July 24 last year and their failure to include all stakeholders in the taskforce should not be declared illegal.

The HC also asked the respondents to show cause as to why they should not be directed to include all stakeholders in the taskforce.

Health secretary, senior assistant secretary at the health services division, and director general of the directorate general of drug administration have been made respondents to the rule.

The HC bench of Justice Ahmed Sohel and Justice Fatema Anwar issued the rule on January 19 following a petition filed by two individuals including

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## Dhaka-15 voters look beyond slogans to safety, services

SHARIF M SHAFIQUE and SADI  
MUHAMMAD ALOK

Rejwana Islam, a resident of Rakin City in Mirpur, has grown up watching the women in her neighbourhood being politically conscious and active, and vocal about local issues.

Now, as the 13th National Parliamentary Election approaches, excitement is building among Rejwana, her relatives, and neighbours.

For the women voters in the area, the true test of any candidate lies not in political speeches, but in addressing everyday problems -- resolving civic issues and ensuring public safety, Rejwana said.

Anjumona Anu, a 35-year-old homemaker from Manipur, echoes this view.

She says insecurity on the streets is a constant cause of anxiety. Following the political change in 2024, she had hoped for more improvements.

As February 12 draws closer, she plans to cast her ballot after careful deliberation.

Dhaka-15, a constituency flanking the iconic Begum Rokeya Sarani -- a major urban thoroughfare named in honour of the pioneer of women's rights, Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain -- encompasses Manipur,

60 Feet Road, Shewrapara, Kazipara, Mirpur-13, and Kafrul.

The constituency has drawn everyone's attention due to the high-stakes battle for this seat between Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Dr Shafiqur Rahman and his primary challenger -- BNP candidate Saiful Islam Milton.

The grievances of the residents are practical and pressing. "The main issue is insecurity. There is a constant fear of mugging, and recently, eve-teasing has surged," said Rizwana.

She also pointed to the lack of parks or playgrounds for children in the vicinity.

Anu adds to the list -- a rise in drug abuse and the perennial curse of waterlogging.

During the monsoon, streets become submerged in filthy water, making the commute a nightmare for students of Manipur School. "Women face many social barriers to moving freely. Overcoming this

fundamental shift in public mindset," she told The Daily Star.

Yesterday, Jamaat Ameer Shafiqur Rahman formally launched his campaign at Mirpur Adarsha High School grounds.

Expressing confidence, he said people would vote "Yes" in the

SEE PAGE 9 COL 3

Dhaka-15, a constituency flanking the iconic Begum Rokeya Sarani encompasses Manipur, 60 Feet Road, Shewrapara, Kazipara, Mirpur-13, and Kafrul

Constituency has 351,718 voters -- including 179,616 men, 172,098 women, and four hijra voters

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

## NID misuse, poll-time donations punishable offence

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



The Election Commission yesterday warned that carrying, collecting or transferring another person's National Identity Card, as well as promising donations during election campaigns, are punishable offences under the law.

In a press release signed by EC Director (Public Relations) Ruhul Amin Mollik, the EC said it has learned that ahead of the national polls, some individuals are collecting voters' personal information and NID details.

The commission said no one is allowed to carry, collect or hand over another person's NID.

It also said no political party, candidate or anyone acting on their behalf may provide or pledge to provide any subscription, donation or gift to individuals, groups or institutions within an electoral area.

Meanwhile, on January 18, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir accused the EC of questionable conduct in several areas. He alleged that Jamaat-e-Islami activists were violating the electoral code by collecting copies of national ID cards, mobile numbers and bKash details from households, calling it a "criminal offence".

On January 21, Jamaat Assistant Secretary General Ahsanul Mahboob Zubair denied the allegation after receiving the party's electoral symbol.

"This is completely false information," he said. "From the very beginning, Jamaat-e-Islami has played the most responsible role in adhering to the electoral code of conduct."



A farmer walks through a vibrant yellow mustard field in the Joyka area of Karimganj upazila. Due to good market prices, mustard cultivation in Kishoreganj increased this year compared to previous years. The photo was taken recently.

## DNCC backtracks on rent guidelines

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Amid widespread criticism, the Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) has revised its recently issued house rent guideline, clarifying that rent determination will be based on negotiation and existing laws.

Earlier, the guideline proposed a standard for fair rent, stating that annual rent should not exceed 15 percent of a house's market value. The guideline, issued on January 20, drew criticism over its legal basis and implementation.

Contacted, DNCC Administrator Mohammad Azaz said the guideline was revised due to misinformation.

"Newspapers published calculations suggesting how much flat owners should charge. However, government valuation is based on the mouza (official land rate) rates, which are much lower than the actual current market value," he said.

Regarding legality, Azaz said DNCC has received a large public response.

"This is becoming a matter of voluntary compliance, as landlords want to rent out properties and tenants want to rent them. Many landlords have already said that since there is now a guideline, they will follow it," he said.

He acknowledged that a formal legal basis would strengthen the process.

"Local government has the authority

to issue such directions and can play a role in dispute negotiations. At the ward level, we can help resolve disputes," he said.

Azaz said the guideline allows landlords or tenants to seek arbitration or mediation from DNCC offices if disputes arise. "If a

### AT A GLANCE

- Rent to be determined thru negotiation, not fixed formula
- Earlier proposal capped rent at 15% of market value
- DNCC says guideline meant for voluntary compliance
- Legal experts warn existing rent law is poorly enforced
- Tenants hope guideline offers channel for dispute resolution

legal framework becomes necessary, DNCC will be able to play a more supportive role," he added.

"That would make the process even stronger. So we are waiting positively," he said.

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## 'Irresponsible and utterly unfounded' China fires back at US envoy's remarks

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

China has urged the US to be more aware of its responsibilities and focus on actions conducive to Bangladesh's stability as well as development and cooperation in the region.

The Chinese embassy in Dhaka said this in a statement yesterday, responding to remarks made by newly appointed US Ambassador Brent Christensen.

During a media interaction in Dhaka on Wednesday, Christensen expressed concerns about China's broader influence in South Asia and said he was committed to clearly articulating the risks of involvement with China in certain areas should Bangladesh choose that path.

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## Expat ministry's statement and our reply

The expatriates' welfare and overseas employment ministry has issued a statement regarding The Daily Star's report titled "Overseas manpower recruitment: Approval for 252 agencies raises red flags" published on January 19, 2026.

The ministry states that the approval of 252 new overseas recruiting agencies followed scrutiny of applications that had been pending since 2023. According to it, during the 16 years of the previous regime, many entrepreneurs, businesspeople, civil society members, and organisations were deprived of licences for political reasons, despite their intention to conduct legitimate business.

The statement says that these pending applications were assessed under six criteria in line with the existing manpower export laws and the Overseas Employment and Migrants (Recruiting Agent License and Sub-Agent Registration and

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

## JULY ATROCITIES ICT-2 frames charges against Quader, 6 others

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A tribunal yesterday charged Obaidul Quader and six other leaders of the Awami League and its affiliated organisations with crimes against humanity over atrocities during the July 1971 uprising.

Quader, also a former minister for road transport and bridges, was charged on three counts, while the six others face one count each. All the accused are absconding.

The three-member International Crimes Tribunal-2, headed by Justice Nozrul Islam Chowdhury, framed the charges under the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, 1973.

The other accused are Awami League Joint General Secretary AFM Bahaudin Nasim; former state minister for information Mohammad Ali Arifat; Jubo League Chairman Sheikh Fazle Shams Parash and its General Secretary Moiul Hossain Khan Nikhil; and Chhatra League President Saddam Hussain and General Secretary Sheikh Wali Asif Enan.

According to the prosecution, Quader, as AL general secretary and a cabinet minister, exercised command and control over law enforcement agencies and armed cadres of the AL, Jubo League and Chhatra League to violently suppress the quota reform movement that began on July 1, 2024.

Count 1 alleged that between July

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1



# INTERNATIONAL

GREENLAND ROW

## Nato cannot negotiate for Denmark

Says Danish govt after Trump announced a deal

AFP, Copenhagen

Nato chief Mark Rutte cannot negotiate on behalf of Denmark over Greenland, the Danish government said yesterday, a day after US President Donald Trump announced a deal following talks between the two men.

Trump backed down on threats to seize Greenland by force after meeting Rutte on Wednesday, saying he had reached a "framework" of a deal on the Danish autonomous territory.

Details of the agreement made at the World Economic Forum in the Swiss ski resort of Davos remain scant.

The position of Denmark and that of Greenland are the same, and no negotiations were held yesterday



with Nato about our sovereignty," Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen told Danish television.

"Of course it is only Denmark and Greenland themselves that can make decisions on issues concerning Denmark and Greenland," she said earlier in a statement.

The US and Denmark will renegotiate a 1951 defence pact on Greenland, a source familiar with the talks between Trump and Rutte told AFP yesterday.

Putting US military bases on Greenland under US sovereignty had not been discussed during the talks, the source said.

Danish Defence Minister Troels Lund Poulsen said on social media yesterday that Rutte "cannot negotiate an agreement on behalf of Denmark or Greenland".

However, he said Rutte had "worked loyally to maintain unity within Nato" and it was "very positive" that the alliance wanted to do more to strengthen Arctic security. "We have a clear red line," he added. "We will not cede sovereignty over parts of the kingdom."



Family members and colleagues carry the body of a Palestinian journalist killed in an Israeli strike, during a funeral procession in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday. Gaza's border crossing with Egypt will reopen next week, the Palestinian technocrat leader Ali Shaath announced.

PHOTO: AFP

## Death toll in Karachi mall fire hits 55

AFP, Karachi

The death toll from a mall fire in Pakistan's biggest city rose to at least 55 people, a Karachi government official said yesterday.

A total of 55 bodies have been recovered since Saturday night" when the fire erupted, said Javed Nabi Khoso, deputy commissioner of Karachi's south district.

Relatives of those still missing have criticised the slow operation at the three storey Gul Plaza, where rescuers are scouring the wreckage for human remains. More than 50 families have given DNA samples, provincial health official Summaiya Syed told journalists Wednesday.

## 'Finger on trigger'

Iran warns as Trump says it wants talks

AFP, Paris

The commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards yesterday warned Washington that the force had its "finger on the trigger" in the wake of mass protests, as US President Donald Trump said the Islamic republic still appeared interested in talks.

A fortnight of protests starting in late December shook the clerical leadership under supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, but the movement has petered out in the face of a crackdown that activists say has left thousands dead, accompanied by an unprecedented internet blackout.

The prospect of immediate American action against Tehran appears to have receded over the last week, with both sides insisting on giving diplomacy a chance even as US media report Trump is still studying options.

Addressing the World Economic

Forum in Davos, Trump said the US struck Iranian uranium enrichment sites last year to prevent Tehran from making a nuclear weapon. Iran denies its nuclear programme is aimed at seeking the bomb.

"Can't let that happen," he said, adding: "And Iran does want to talk, and we'll talk."

Guards commander General Mohammad Pakpour warned Israel and the US "to avoid any miscalculations, by learning from historical experiences and what they learned in the 12-day imposed war, so that they do not face a more painful and regrettable fate".

"The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and dear Iran have their finger on the trigger, more prepared than ever, ready to carry out the orders and measures of the supreme commander-in-chief -- a leader dearer than their own lives," he said.

## 'India somewhat overreacted'

FROM PAGE 12

Pakistan is their decision."

"Of course, it is regrettable, but I cannot change their decision. If they think they are not safe here, let them do it," he said.

"If we want good bilateral relations, we first have to decide that we want good bilateral relations. And if we just go on taking one step after another, it will spiral the relations downwards."

"If I look at my acquaintance with India over the last close to 40 years in different capacities, I would say that it has overreacted somewhat. I would expect more subtle reactions from India."

Bangladesh-India relations have remained strained since the fall of the Awami League regime and the flight of deposed leader Sheikh Hasina to India. Following recent demonstrations in various parts of India, including near Bangladesh missions, Bangladesh suspended consular services at its missions in New Delhi, Agartala and Kolkata.

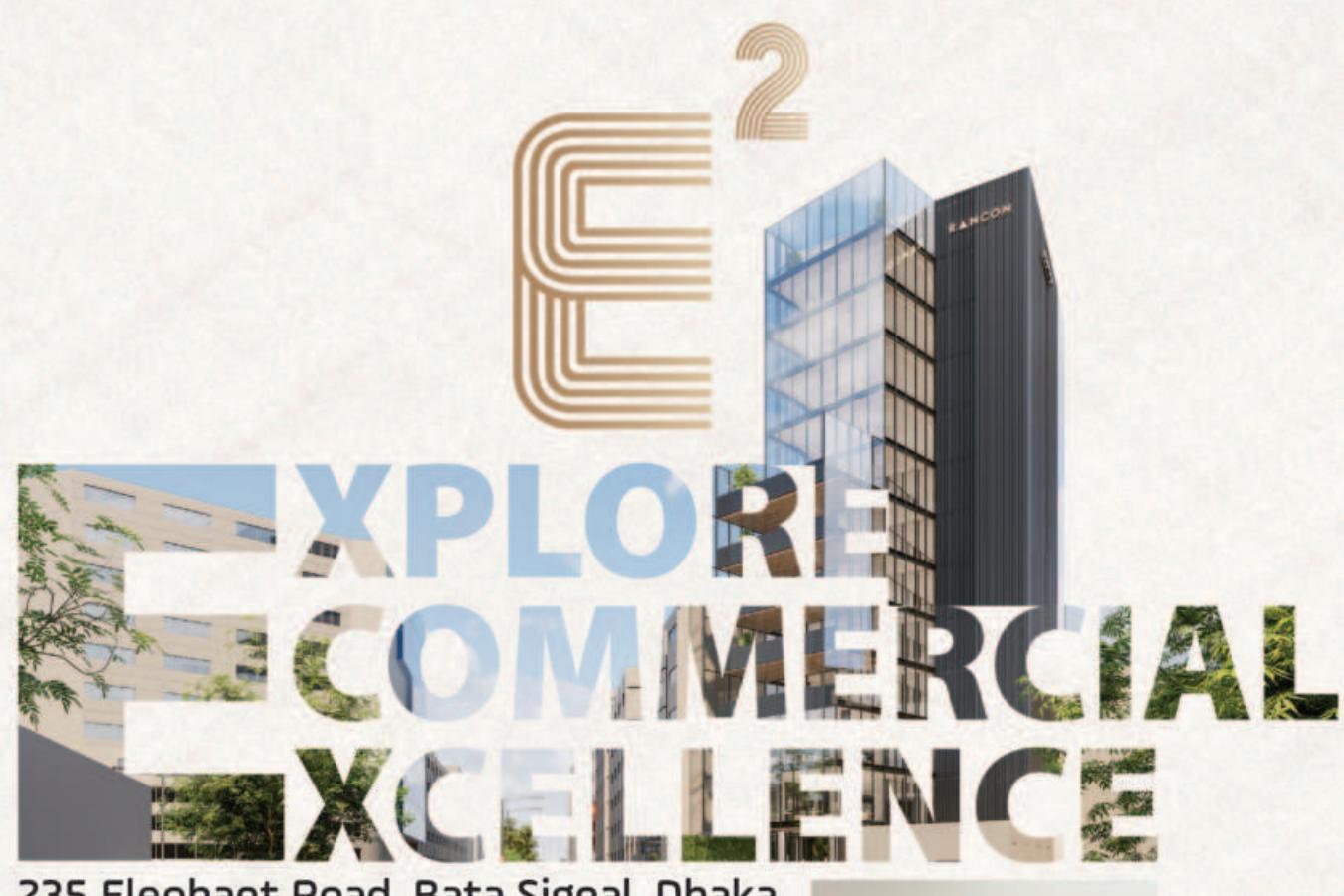
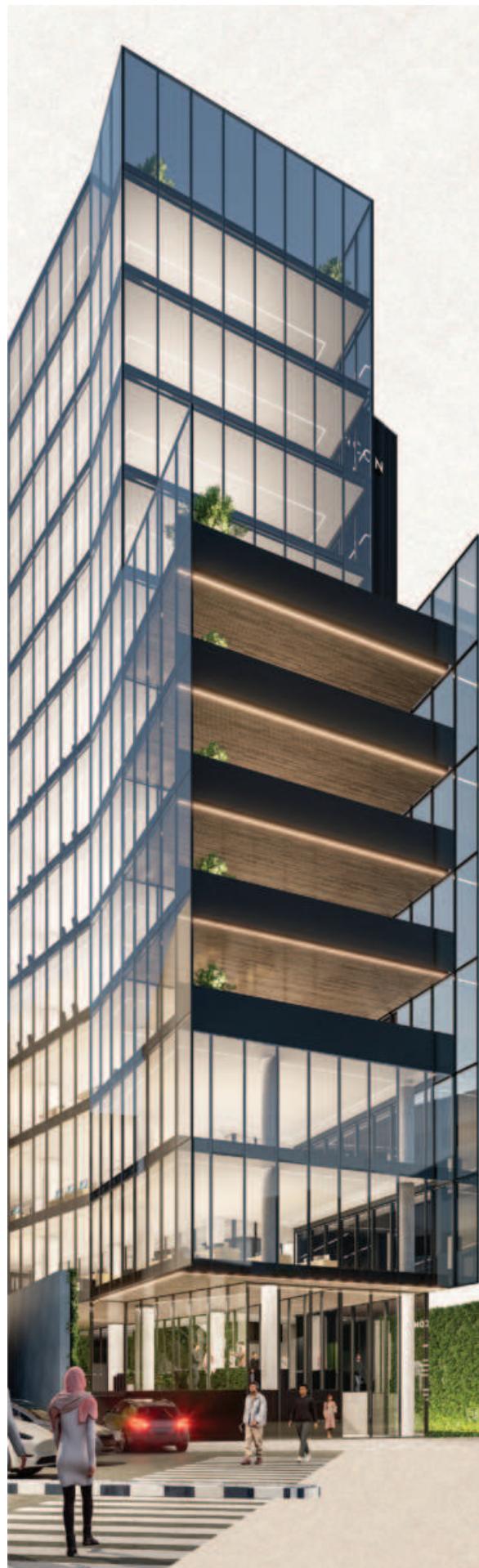
Touhid said both Bangladesh and India need to take positive steps to keep relations strong, as they have not been at a desirable level.

"I would say that we should have had more interactions, more understanding of each other, and I wish that to happen."

Despite the desire to improve ties, Touhid said there is a general feeling in Bangladesh that India's response has not been very positive and that Bangladesh's sensitivities have not been adequately addressed.

Bangladesh expects that as long as Hasina remains in India, she would refrain from making statements that do not align with the situation in Bangladesh and Islamabad.

"There is nothing unusual about it. It's just another neighbouring country," Touhid said.



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## New pay scale needs more scrutiny

Proposed government pay hike risks destabilising public finances

A hefty pay raise proposed for government employees may appear, at first glance, to be a matter of fairness. However, it also stands to become a fiscal landmine for the next administration. The Ninth National Pay Commission set up by the interim administration argues that a revision has been due for a decade, during which high inflation has steadily eroded real incomes. The issue here is not whether government employees deserve better pay, but how the increase is designed, financed, and how large it should be. The commission has proposed raises by up to 142 percent, at an estimated annual cost exceeding Tk 1 lakh crore. This single decision would absorb roughly a quarter of the current annual tax revenue at a time when the tax-GDP ratio is at a historic low and public debt pressures are intensifying.

The state already relies heavily on borrowing, not only to fund development spending but also to service existing debt. Adding a recurring expense of this scale would almost certainly require even more borrowing. The consequences are predictable: higher inflation, reduced space for private investment, and cuts in essential sectors such as health, education, and infrastructure. More worrying is the absence of a credible plan to finance the proposal sustainably. Without a significant expansion of the tax base and stronger revenue collection, the burden will simply be shifted forward. The next government would inherit a sharply reduced fiscal space, limiting its ability to honour its promises or respond to economic shocks.

This brings us to a deeper flaw in the commission's approach. Pay revisions are often presented as a cure-all for inefficiency and corruption, based on the assumption that better-paid officials will perform better. History suggests otherwise. Following the last major pay hike in 2015, the tax-GDP ratio fell, and corruption, by all perceptions, showed little improvement. As Towfiqul Islam Khan, an economist, pertinently asks, where is the analysis of why this happened? And where are the reforms to ensure that higher salaries actually translate into better governance? A pay scale disconnected from accountability, productivity benchmarks, and institutional reform is simply a larger bill for the same results. Without changes in how the civil service is evaluated, promoted, and disciplined, higher pay will become a bloated expense rather than an investment in state capacity.

The political context further complicates the issue. For an interim administration at the twilight of its tenure to commit the country to such a sweeping and permanent fiscal decision is questionable. A policy of this magnitude requires democratic legitimacy and public debate. It also demands careful sequencing.

A more responsible path would be for the next elected government to examine any new pay scale. Increases should be phased and explicitly linked to performance. Revenue targets must be met before subsequent adjustments are triggered, and pay growth should be tied to measurable improvements in efficiency, service delivery, and accountability. The state cannot wish money into existence. Without discipline and reform, a well-intentioned pay hike could worsen fiscal stress.

## Parties must go for real police reform

Political control must end to restore public trust in the force

As political parties prepare to unveil their manifestos ahead of the national election scheduled for February 12, a critical opportunity has arisen for them to confront one of the country's most persistent governance failures: the political use or abuse of the police force. Whichever party forms the next government, if it is serious about restoring public trust and ensuring law and order, the depoliticisation of law enforcement must be at the top of its agenda. Law enforcement experts and rights activists also stress that without meaningful police reform, promises of democracy, public safety, and the rule of law will ring hollow.

For decades, policing in Bangladesh has been deeply compromised by political interference. Political parties, when in power, have repeatedly been accused of treating the police as an extension of their partisan machinery. The Awami League's 15-plus years of rule represent the most extreme manifestation of this trend. During that period, enforced disappearances, deaths from so-called gunfights, and custodial torture severely eroded public trust in the police as well as other security and intelligence agencies. The violent suppression of protesters during the 2024 mass uprising—when nearly 1,400 people were killed, according to UN estimates—only worsened police and security agencies' public image.

People had hoped that similar human rights violations would not recur during the interim government's tenure. However, the law and order situation over the past 17 months has been deeply unsatisfactory, marked by murders, robberies, abductions, and a surge in mob violence. In 2025 alone, at least 197 people were killed in mob attacks, up from 128 the previous year, according to AIN o Salish Kendra. Moreover, corruption within law enforcement agencies continues to exacerbate the situation.

The utmost priority for the next government, therefore, should be establishing a truly independent police reform commission. Although the interim government issued a gazette in December 2025 to establish a police commission, experts argue that the ordinance is flawed and undermines the commission's independence. The next government must rectify these flaws through the proper procedures. An independent commission should be able to investigate complaints against police personnel impartially, both from the public and within the force, while also implementing other key recommendations of the Police Reform Commission.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

### Madeleine Albright sworn in as US secretary of state

On this day in 1997, Madeleine Albright, who had earlier served as US ambassador to the UN, assumed under President Bill Clinton the office of secretary of state, becoming the first woman to hold that cabinet post.



People take part in the 'Hands Off Greenland' protest, held in Copenhagen, Denmark on January 17, 2026, after the White House said that the US was considering a range of options to acquire Greenland.

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

## US-EU tensions over Greenland may have serious effects for us



THE THIRD VIEW

Mahfuz Anam  
is the editor and publisher of The Daily Star.

MAHFUZ ANAM

We are now justifiably focused on the upcoming general election, which will hopefully give us an elected and accountable government and restart our journey towards democracy.

However, the world is focused on something else. It wants a restoration of the existing world order, or a more rational one than the one we are forced to face now. Europe's latest dilemma—physical attack by Russia on the east and the threat by the US to take "full control" of the island of Greenland on the west—has changed the world as we knew it after the Cold War. Europe may have been prepared militarily, economically, psychologically, and emotionally for aggression from Russia. But to be threatened by their most trusted ally—which, after World War II, has stood by them and which, through the Marshall Plan, has helped rebuild their devastated countries—is something these nations find extremely hard to live with. Thankfully, US President Donald Trump's statement in Davos on Wednesday, that he will not use force to acquire Greenland, may have calmed European nerves a bit. But the shock still persists, and so does a serious doubt about the reliability of the transatlantic alliance.

Europe's shock started with a sudden and irrational imposition of US tariffs, that too without any discussion or negotiations (the latest report says that Nato members have been exonerated from that). They were, and are, also disturbed by President Trump's thoughts on peace in Ukraine. Is it to allow Russia to keep the territories conquered so far? What price will Ukraine have to pay for peace? Russia is clearly the aggressor here, but Trump's attitude towards President Vladimir

from heavy dependence on the US and seeking diversification.

The members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (Nato), whose protection its members enjoyed for the last eight decades, are now in danger of being bullied by its principal founder with the threat of occupying part of the territory of one of its members: Denmark. The Nato Charter says that an attack on any one of them is to be considered an attack on all. So, how the US's demand for the ownership of Greenland will ultimately work out is the central question in all European leaders' minds. Yes, at Davos, President Trump said he would not use force, but he reiterated the US's need for the Danish territory.

What Trump has set in motion is to make meaningless the most important pillar on which the modern international system functions: the notion of national sovereignty.

The Peace of Westphalia of 1648 initiated the modern-day practice of interstate relations, though the concept was more centred around the rights of the state and the ruler. The notion of popular sovereignty was articulated by philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who stated that "sovereignty resides with the people." Thus, the focus was shifted from the ruler to the people, a crucial transition towards making democracy meaningful. Through the process of decolonisation and the idea of self-determination of nations and peoples, the principle of people-centred sovereignty got further currency.

The defeat of Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini and the total destruction of fascism after World War II greatly strengthened the notion of sovereignty, which was given the most widespread

of the rise of the destructive powers, in an overall sense, the demise of a law-based international order will mark the beginning of the end of our civilisation. It is an existential question that we are now facing.

The Russian attack and occupation of Ukraine's territory stand as a total violation of the idea of national sovereignty. The abduction of Venezuela's president and his wife, and President Trump's declaration that the US will "run" Venezuela for as long as necessary, are again a very dangerous breach of the notion of sovereignty. Trump's wish to take over Greenland, a territory belonging to Denmark (which may not materialise as recently indicated), has added to concerns about the transatlantic treaty's stability. *The Wall Street Journal's* report on Wednesday that the US plans a regime change in Cuba by the year's end, and similar other rumours concerning other Latin American countries, are adding to global concerns about the rights of nations to exist as independent states. All this further jeopardises the very structure on which the modern international system operates.

Our civilisation's most laudable "journey", among a few others, has been



PHOTO: REUTERS

US President Donald Trump attends the 56th annual World Economic Forum (WEF) meeting in Davos, Switzerland on January 21, 2026.

like ours?

Specifically, the most important area of concern for Bangladesh is that the two contesting parties of the present tension, the US and the EU, are the two biggest markets for our ready-made garment export, which accounts for 80 percent of our export earnings. If these two destinations become embroiled in various trade issues, tariff wars, and,

**Europe may have been prepared militarily, economically, psychologically, and emotionally for aggression from Russia. But to be threatened by their most trusted ally—which, after World War II, has stood by them and which, through the Marshall Plan, has helped rebuild their devastated countries—is something these nations find extremely hard to live with.**

God forbid, military confrontation, then the impact on us will be an economic disaster.

If the relations between the EU and the US become volatile, it is not inconceivable that special conditions may be imposed on us by one side or the other, such as arbitrary taxes, forced price reduction, or a ban if we trade with certain countries that are blacklisted by some other, etc. Thus, the absence of a rules-based international trading order will be a serious threat to countries like ours.

It is not inconceivable that geopolitical factors may come into play. We may come under greater pressure to choose sides. Our own region may become a playground for others. The Indo-Pacific zone, South China Sea, Bay of Bengal, etc may become pressure points of our foreign policy. We may be asked not to accept investment from countries that are not in the good books of a powerful one. When power becomes the final arbiter instead of rights, the needs and demands of smaller countries like us are likely to be flouted.

The groups that are celebrating at the moment are the arms producers and suppliers. Every European country is increasing their defence spending. Asia is not far behind. Even smaller countries are falling in line in this regard. We, whose resource constraints are well-known, could end up doing the same.

Just when the whole world should be diverting its resources to fight climate change, we are spending many times more in preparing to destroy ourselves in the name of protection. What the present situation is doing is diverting our attention and resources from serving humanity to serving the spread of suspicion, instability, hatred, and, if not war, then definitely rearmament. Experience of the past decades proves that it is the wrong policy to pursue. Having seen and experienced all that, how can we repeat the same scenario? How can we be so short-sighted?

Greenland may be far in distance, but not so far in terms of geopolitics and geo-economics.

that from "might is right" to the notion that what is morally, ethically, and legally right is far mightier than might itself. The fundamental precondition for the modern international system to operate and survive is a rules-based international system in which every country has equal rights and every country, however powerful, obeys the same laws. The post-World War II world has more or less proven its validity.

We must never lose sight of the fact that the modern world's prosperity, the rise in global wealth (however maldistributed), and the spread of the notion of universal human rights, freedom of speech, and democracy all depend on the rules-based international system. Equally important is the right of every nation to be the owner of its natural resources, which is dependent on an international order. If this collapses, then big powers will wreak havoc on smaller countries, and we will have nowhere to go to seek redress.

Putin does not seem to indicate that he thinks so.

A major breach of trust factor between Western allies occurred when Trump "invited" Canada to become the 51st state of the US. Any citizen of an independent country would have found it insulting, as the Canadians rightly did. The Davos speech by Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney clearly illustrates how ruptured their relationship is now, and the long-term impact President Trump's policies is likely to have on Canada.

The reason we cite Canada is because it shows how a close ally of the US, and an extremely close trading partner for decades, has begun to move away. The Canadian leadership has been talking about a trade strategy of moving away

acceptability with the formation of the United Nations, whose founding Article 2(1) clearly states, "The organisation is based on the principle of sovereign equality of all its members." This means that all states, large or small, are legally equal with i) territorial integrity, ii) political independence, and iii) legal personality, all three of which are to be treated as inviolable.

Without a firm and irrevocable recognition of the rights and obligations of all countries, big and small, the international order as we know it will not survive. And if that happens, we will see the return of the "rule of the jungle" at the state level, with the most powerful ones having the arsenal with unimaginable destructive capacity, not to mention nuclear weapons. Because

What does all this mean for countries

# Why are so many public hospitals lying idle?



**Dr Abdullah A Dewan**  
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ABDULLAH A DEWAN

When it comes to public healthcare, Bangladesh is suffering not just from a collection of unused hospital buildings, but also a systemic and nationwide atrophy of health service delivery. Locked hospitals or clinics are the most visible symptoms of a deeper, more dangerous problem. Beneath the rusted gates and dusty corridors of "ghost facilities" lies a chronic failure of governance characterised by manpower deficits, almost-institutionalised absenteeism, and a public health system that has been structurally cannibalised to act as a predatory referral funnel for private profit. Across the country, a large number of fully constructed health facilities—monuments of wasted public capital—stand idle. At the same time, those that remain open often operate as vacuous proxies of their intended purpose.

This crisis of non-functionality is no longer anecdotal. A report published by *The Daily Star* on January 10, 2026 documents a staggering reality: at least 80 government health facilities across 18 districts remain

as recently as in 2024, others have stood as architectural cadavers for more than a decade. The buildings did not fail structurally; they are intact and standing. Rather, the state failed to animate them.

The reasons cited by health officials—shortages of manpower, lack of equipment, and missing operating budgets—are deeply revealing. These are foundational prerequisites of healthcare planning that were ignored from the project's inception. A hospital built without a recruitment plan is not an "incomplete project"; what it reflects is a serious failure of planning and coordination, in which infrastructure development has been decoupled from the institutional and human resource capacities required to make such facilities functional. Perhaps this is what happens when the system prioritises "bricks and mortar" as a means of budgetary disbursement, political optics, and rent seeking. In contrast, the long-term work of staffing, training, and maintaining accountability is

**These idle structures range from specialised 20-bed trauma centres and dedicated children's hospitals to community clinics and essential staff quarters. While some were completed as recently as in 2024, others have stood as architectural cadavers for more than a decade. The buildings did not fail structurally; they are intact and standing. Rather, the state failed to animate them.**

completely inactive despite being fully commissioned at a substantial cost. The figure would certainly be far higher if all the districts were surveyed. These idle structures range from specialised 20-bed trauma centres and dedicated children's hospitals to community clinics and essential staff quarters. While some were completed

administratively demanding. So, you end up in a situation where the state builds the shell but excises the soul of the service.

The human cost of this situation is captured in the tragedy of Talia village in Gazipur. Here, a 20-bed hospital completed in 2020 at a cost of approximately Tk 20 crore has never treated a single patient. The

local community donated their ancestral land in good faith, believing their sacrifice would secure the health of their children. Instead, the state returned a locked gate. Similar stories resonate from Rangpur to Savar. Roadside trauma centres remain shuttered while highway fatalities mount; paediatric wards overflow in urban centres while rural children's hospitals remain unused. This is not an accidental error in

suggestion—to visit the same doctor's private chamber. This is a predatory "referral funnel" where the public sector is used to harvest patients for the private market.

This redirection of care creates a two-tiered reality. The poor, who frequent public facilities because they lack alternatives, are nudged towards expenses they cannot afford. When a government doctor encourages a patient to take tests at a particular private



**The 20-bed hospital in Gazipur's Talia village is one of the 80 medical facilities across 18 districts that have remained non-operational for years.**

FILE PHOTO: STAR

government machinery; it is the machine working as intended to satisfy infrastructure targets while ignoring human outcomes.

The crisis extends far into the heart of the system. Even where clinics are officially open, service delivery is compromised by the corrosive practice of "dual loyalty." Many government-employed doctors regard their public duty as an inconvenient burden while treating private practice as their real profession. Patients in public hospitals frequently report being rushed, ignored, or treated with indifference, only to be told—either explicitly or through heavy

diagnostic centre, the public service is effectively being cannibalised from the inside. This decay is exacerbated by widespread absenteeism among doctors and support staff, who, due to lack of oversight, often remain absent from duty.

The argument that the nation is "too poor" to ensure functional hospitals is dismantled by the examples of countries with comparable or even lower GDPs. Vietnam, for instance, integrated its health expansion with strict commissioning mandates. No district hospital or community centre is declared operational until the

necessary doctors and nurses are physically present and the supply chain is established. In Vietnam, non-functionality is treated as an administrative failure, not a standard condition.

Sri Lanka offers an even more striking contrast. Despite enduring significant fiscal constraints and political upheavals in recent times, its public health system remains a pillar of the state. Public service is treated as a non-negotiable professional obligation, with a clear separation maintained between public duty and private practice. Patients are not pushed out of public hospitals to generate private income. Sri Lanka's maternal and child health metrics can rival those of much wealthier nations.

Even Rwanda, which manages health services with a fraction of the resources available to many Asian nations, demonstrates the power of localised accountability. In the Rwandan model, local administrators are held personally and professionally responsible when a facility fails to provide service. Attendance and supply metrics are monitored in real time. Similarly, Nepal has addressed its complicated geography through compulsory rural service requirements for new medical graduates, ensuring that even remote hospitals have a human presence.

To move from this moral failure to functional governance, no health facility should receive final funding until a sanctioned staff list is physically present on-site. Furthermore, the referral funnel must be dismantled through digital oversight. Implementing biometric attendance and real-time patient feedback loops would make it impossible for doctors and staff to be ghosts in the system. Most importantly, there must be a forensic audit of every official who approved the construction of the 80 facilities identified in *The Daily Star* report without a corresponding staffing plan.

When we allow empty hospital buildings to decay while the sick and vulnerable travel miles in desperation, our conscience rots. Fifty-four years after independence, people are still struggling for the most basic healthcare. This is not a failure of resources but that of governance, and an indictment of a development model that values the cold concrete over the living citizen.

## 'A world of fortresses will be poorer, more fragile'

**Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney delivered a powerful address at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, on Tuesday. An abridged version of the speech is published below in the public interest.**



**Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney delivers a speech during the World Economic Forum annual meeting in Davos on January 20, 2026.**

PHOTO: AFP

with varying rigour depending on the identity of the accused or the victim.

This fiction was useful. And American hegemony, in particular, helped provide public goods: open sea lanes, a stable financial system, collective security, and support for frameworks for resolving disputes. So, we placed the sign in the window. We participated in the rituals. And we largely avoided calling out the gaps between rhetoric and reality. This bargain no longer works.

Let me be direct: We are in the midst of a rupture, not a transition. Over the past two decades, a series of crises in finance, health, energy, and geopolitics have laid bare the risks of extreme global integration.

But more recently, great powers have begun using economic integration as weapons. Tariffs as leverage. Financial infrastructure as coercion. Supply chains as vulnerabilities to be exploited.

You cannot "live within the lie" of mutual benefit through integration when integration becomes the source of your subordination.

The multilateral institutions on which middle powers have relied—the WTO, the UN, the COP—the very architecture of collective problem solving, are under threat. And as a result, many countries are drawing the conclusion that they must develop greater strategic autonomy: in energy, food, critical minerals, and in finance and supply chains. And this impulse is understandable. A country that cannot feed itself, fuel itself, or

approach rests on what Alexander Stubb has termed "values-based realism"—or, to put another way, we aim to be principled and pragmatic.

Principled in our commitment to fundamental values: sovereignty and territorial integrity, the prohibition of the use of force except when consistent with the UN Charter, and respect for human rights. And pragmatic in recognising that progress is often incremental, that interests diverge, that not every partner will share our values. So we're engaging broadly, strategically, with open eyes. We actively take on the world as it is, not wait around for a world we wish to be.

We are calibrating our relationships so their depth reflects our values. And we're prioritising broad engagement to maximise our influence, given the fluidity of the world order, the risks that this poses, and the stakes for what comes next. And we are no longer relying on just the strength of our values, but also on the value of our strength. We are building that strength at home.

To help solve global problems, we are pursuing variable geometry—in other words, different coalitions for different issues based

**Let me be direct: We are in the midst of a rupture, not a transition. Over the past two decades, a series of crises in finance, health, energy, and geopolitics have laid bare the risks of extreme global integration. But more recently, great powers have begun using economic integration as weapons. Tariffs as leverage. Financial infrastructure as coercion. Supply chains as vulnerabilities to be exploited. You cannot 'live within the lie' of mutual benefit through integration becomes the source of your subordination.**

on common values and interests. This is not naive multilateralism. Nor is it relying on their institutions. It's building coalitions that work, issue by issue, with partners who share enough common ground to act together. In some cases, this will be the vast majority of nations. What it's doing is creating a dense web of connections across trade, investment,

culture on which we can draw for future challenges and opportunities.

Middle powers must act together because if we're not at the table, we're on the menu.

But I'd also say that great powers can afford, for now, to go it alone. They have the market size, the military capacity and the leverage to dictate terms. Middle powers do not. But when we only negotiate bilaterally with a hegemon, we negotiate from weakness. We accept what's offered. We compete with each other to be the most accommodating. This is not sovereignty; it's the performance of sovereignty while accepting subordination.

In a world of great power rivalry, the countries in between have a choice: compete with each other for favour or to combine to create a third path with impact. We shouldn't allow the rise of hard power to blind us to the fact that the powers of legitimacy, integrity, and rules will remain strong if we choose to wield them together. Which brings me back to Havel. What would it mean for middle powers to "live the truth"?

First, it means naming reality. Stop invoking "rules-based international order" as though it still functions as advertised. Call it what it is: a system of intensifying great power rivalry where the most powerful pursue their interests using economic integration as a weapon of coercion.

It means acting consistently, applying the same standards to allies and rivals. When middle powers criticise economic intimidation from one direction but stay silent when it comes from another, we are keeping the sign in the window.

It means building what we claim to believe in. Rather than waiting for the old order to be restored, it means creating institutions and agreements that function as described. And it means reducing the leverage that enables coercion.

Building a strong domestic economy should always be every government's immediate priority. And diversification internationally is not just economic prudence; it is the material foundation for honest foreign policy. Because countries earn the right to principled stands by reducing their vulnerability to retaliation.

The old order is not coming back. We shouldn't mourn it. Nostalgia is not a strategy. But from the fracture, we can build something better, stronger, more just. This is the task of the middle powers—the countries that have the most to lose from a world of fortresses and the most to gain from genuine co-operation. The powerful have their power. But we have something too: the capacity to stop pretending, to name reality, to build our strength at home, and to act together.

**For more than five decades, Abul Hayat has remained a constant presence in Bangladesh's television drama and cinema. An accomplished actor, playwright and director, he continues to act in both television and film. Over the course of his career, he has received numerous accolades, including the Ekushey Padak.**

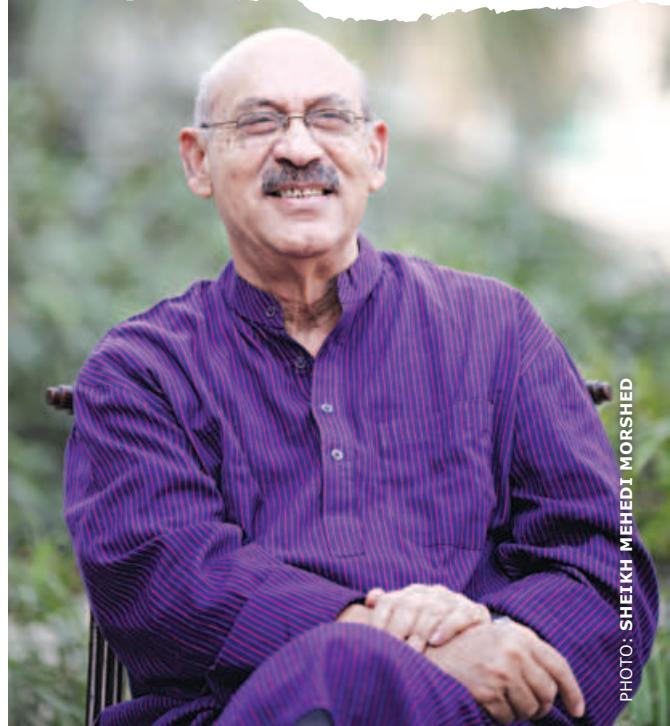


PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

# I still write for joy: ABUL HAYAT

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

Alongside acting, writing has long been central to his creative life. He has authored short stories, novels and newspaper columns, with several books already published. At the upcoming Amar Ekushey Book Fair, three new titles by Abul Hayat are set to be released.

In a conversation with The Daily Star, the veteran artiste spoke primarily about his journey as a writer.

Recounting how it all began, Abul Hayat recalled his student days at the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, where he served as general secretary of Sher-e-Bangla Hall.

"We were planning to publish a magazine, but no one was submitting any writing. There was simply nothing to print," he said with a smile. "So, I was asked to contribute a story. That put me in real trouble, because I had never written anything before."

He eventually wrote a short love story. When more material was needed, he submitted a travel narrative. The magazine was published with both pieces.

"Unfortunately, I no longer have those first two writings," he

said. "In 1971, the Pakistani army set fire to our hall. Many things were destroyed, including that magazine. Even now, I wonder how I managed to start writing stories at all."

Abul Hayat credits daily newspapers and fortnightly magazines with nurturing his writing career. At one point, Tarkalok was among the country's most popular magazines. Its editor, Arefin Badal, encouraged him to write a column titled *Jibon Khatay Footnote*. "The response from readers was remarkable," he said.

He also wrote for Bichitra. "Arun Chowdhury once asked me to write for Bichitra, and that's how it began," he recalled.

Later, he penned a long-running column titled "Esho Neepobone" for Prothom Alo. His first novel was *Trishnar Shasti*, followed by the short story collection *Ochena Tara*.

Asked what motivates him to write, Abul Hayat replied simply: "I write for the joy of it. Writing gives me pleasure. I've always loved reading stories and novels—this habit goes back to my childhood, and I still haven't lost it."

His earliest reading memories

began with detective novels by Swapan Kumar. "I bought them for six annas," he said. "Later, I started reading Sarat Chandra. Up to my matriculation exams, his books fascinated me deeply."

He then turned to writers such as Banafool, Manil Bandopadhyay, Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay and Tarashankar Bandopadhyay. *'Pather Panchali'* affected me profoundly," he said. "I cried after reading *Aam Aatin Bhepu*. I couldn't accept Durga's death."

Even as an adult reader, certain works moved him deeply. "Rabindranath Tagore's 'Chhuti' made me cry as well," he admitted.

Meanwhile, preparations are underway for the release of three new books by Abul Hayat at this year's Amar Ekushey Book Fair. Two of the titles are *Elomelo Bhabnay Ashite Ashilam* and *Ghor*. The third, *Jugalbandi*, will be published by a different house and is a joint work by novelist Rabeya Khatun and Abul Hayat.

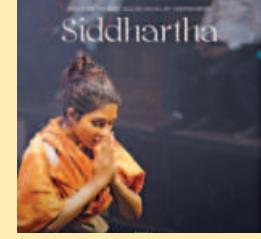
After decades of artistic achievement, Abul Hayat continues to write; not out of obligation or ambition, but for the enduring joy that words bring him.

## 'Ekshathe Alada': Yash-Parsa unite for Hoichoi Eid film

Hoichoi is set to introduce a new content format this Eid al-Fitr with the launch of one-hour original films, beginning with *Ekshathe Alada*, starring Yash Rohan and Parsa Eva in the lead roles. Directed by Rezaur Rahman, the romantic comedy explores contemporary urban relationships, focusing on love, misunderstandings, personal space and career-driven tensions.

The film marks Rahman's directorial debut on the streaming platform and brings together Yash and Parsa for their first collaboration on Hoichoi. Alongside the lead pair, the cast includes Tariq Anam Khan, Tushar Khan, Rosey Siddiqui and Deepa Khandakar. The makers describe the project as a timely story reflecting everyday relationships, designed to offer audiences a compact yet engaging viewing experience this Eid.

### WHAT'S THE HAPS?



## 'Siddhartha'

Aarshinanagar's *Siddhartha*, adapted from Hermann Hesse's celebrated novel, returns to the stage with a meditative journey into self-realisation and inner awakening. Directed by Reza Arif, the production blends physical theatre, poetic narration and philosophical inquiry. It invites audiences to reflect on desire, renunciation and the search for meaning through a compelling ensemble performance.

**Date:** Saturday–Monday | Jan 24–26, 2026

**Time:** 7 pm

**Venue:** Experimental Theatre Hall, BSA



## Mehazabien, Pritom to lead Shihab Shaheen's new Chorki series

Filmmaker Shihab Shaheen is set to direct a new web series for Chorki, starring Mehazabien Chowdhury and Pritom Hasan in the lead roles. The Chorki original series is currently titled *Cactus*, though the name may be changed later.

Blending dramedy, thriller, and action elements, the series is written entirely by Shihab Shaheen, who has penned

the story, screenplay, and dialogues. The series will portray the journey of an ordinary young man who gradually becomes a spy. It is slated for release later this year.

The ensemble cast also includes Manosh Bandopadhyay, Salahuddin Lavlu, Shahadat Hossain, Naziba Basher, among others.

## NEWS

### Govt salary hike questionable

FROM PAGE 12

is needed to determine where and how the effectiveness of government spending has actually improved. There is little discussion about wasteful government projects and administrative costs, and effective accountability for these expenses is largely absent."

He said although salaries of government officials have increased significantly, there is no clear assessment of whether this has led to better performance, improved service delivery, or higher efficiency in development projects.

Pointing to the government flats for secretaries on the capital's Minto Road, he said they are "more luxurious than many five-star hotels".

"Bangladesh cannot move forward without proper management of public expenditure.... What is more concerning is the absence of strong and effective accountability mechanisms to monitor such spending."

"Several serious inefficiencies have taken root in the state system. One is the funding crisis. Another is the lack of transparency in decision-making. There are also projects driven by the ego of those in power."

Referring to the recent

appointment of three government officials to the Biman Bangladesh Airlines board, Zillur said, "What is the explanation for this? If there were valid reasons for the appointments, what is the problem with making them public? The lack of transparency in decision-making persists in this government as well. It existed before, and we must ensure it does not continue in the future."

He alleged that mega projects lack proper prioritisation and transparency.

"Corruption is a major problem, but no research has so far been able to prove that corruption has decreased. People no longer want to hear promises; they want to see real work. Various reform initiatives, including in the Anti-Corruption Commission and the Media Commission, have not been effective in practice."

Expressing doubt over the upcoming election, he said, "The government is talking about it being the best election in history, but in reality, there is a growing fear that it could become the worst election in history."

Although the country is now moving towards the polls, the important decisions the government is taking every day do not fall under

routine work, he said, adding, "Their real intentions remain unclear."

Zillur said the government has spoken extensively about reforms and held many dialogues but has not been able to create a single visible example. "They have even failed to set an example in a basic area like traffic management."

BNP Vice Chairman Asaduzzaman Ripon said members of parliament should have adequate benefits in principle. "However, being an MP should be a full-time responsibility, not a part-time job."

"Many people become MPs primarily to increase business or professional advantages. They often use their position to easily influence secretariat officials, ministers, or bureaucrats."

Moderated by CGS Executive Director Parvez Karim Abbasi, the event featured speakers including Dhaka University (Administration) Pro-Vice-Chancellor Prof Syama Haque Bidisha; M Abu Yusuf, executive director of RAPID (Research and Policy Integration for Development); and Mahmudul Islam Chowdhury, former mayor of Chittagong City Corporation, among others.

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### Saraswati Puja today

FROM PAGE 12

appearing when nature is at its most vibrant.

She is depicted as a graceful woman with a crescent moon on her brow, riding a swan or peacock, or seated on a lotus.

The largest celebration will take place at Jagannath Hall of Dhaka University, where thousands of devotees are expected to join rituals and visit pandals set up on the dormitory playground.

According to a press release, 76 puja mandaps have been set up under the supervision of the Jagannath Hall administration.

The programme will feature rituals, cultural events, devotional

music and offerings, reflecting the hall's long-standing Saraswati Puja tradition.

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus yesterday issued a message extending his heartfelt greetings and congratulations to members of the Hindu community on this occasion.

In his message, he said Bangladesh is a shining example of communal harmony where, for thousands of years, people of all religions and ethnicities have lived together in mutual respect and amity.

"This country belongs to all of us. Bangladesh is a safe and peaceful homeland for everyone, irrespective of religion or caste," he said.

**Airlines cheer**

FROM PAGE 12

United Airways, which has ceased operation, owes CAAB Tk 355.37 crore: Tk 56.88 crore is the main amount and the remaining Tk 298.49 crore is accumulated surcharge.

Regent Air, also defunct, owes Tk 283.38 crore: the main amount is Tk 136.18 crore and the remaining Tk 147.20 crore is late fee.

"We have been urging the regulatory authority to reduce the rate for many years, but nobody paid heed to our request to save the industry. Finally, our demand has been met. We are completely satisfied with the government's move which

will be helpful for the country's aviation industry," Mofizur said.

The move will also benefit the passengers, according to aviation experts.

At present, only three private airlines are in operation: US-Bangla Airlines, Novoair and Air Astra.

If more airlines enter the market, the price of ticket will reduce due to competitiveness, said Wahidul.

"When we took the move to revive the operation of United Airways, foreign investors declined to invest when they came to know about the black law of high rate of surcharge," said ATM Nazrul Islam, another aviation expert.

### Woman burnt to death

FROM PAGE 12

attacked the house of Abdul Wahab, a local shop owner, the OC said.

Most of the residents managed to flee, but Wahab's mother, Sabiha Begum, was burnt alive inside the house, he added.

According to Prothom Alo, Wahab is nephew of Alauddin Munshi, former general secretary of Kalom union unit Awami League.

Rejaul's nephew Haider Rashid, former general secretary of the union unit BNP, told Prothom Alo that supporters of Alauddin Munshi killed Rejaul.

However, police are yet to say anything about the motive behind

the killings.

The OC said no case had been filed in connection with the incidents as of 8:30pm last night. Both bodies were handed over to their respective families after autopsies.

Additional law enforcement personnel have been deployed in the area to prevent further untoward incidents, he added.

Contacted, BNP Natore district unit member secretary Md Asaduzzaman confirmed that Rejaul was a supporter of BNP, but held no party post.

"We cannot yet confirm whether the incident occurred due to political rivalry or personal enmity," he said.

### 'Things are really calming down'

FROM PAGE 12

said yesterday it was not joining at present. China has not yet said whether it will join, reports Reuters.

However, around 35 countries have committed to join including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Turkey.

Permanent members must also pay \$1 billion to join, leading to criticisms that the board could become a "pay to play" version of the UN Security Council.

The board's creation was endorsed by a United Nations Security Council resolution as part of Trump's Gaza peace plan, and UN spokesperson Rolando Gomez said yesterday that UN engagement with the board would only be in that context.

### US urges Syria to support jihadist transfer to Iraq

AFP, Damascus

The commander of US forces in the Middle East has called on Syria's president to support the transfer of thousands of jihadist prisoners from Syria to Iraq, the US military said.

In a phone call on Wednesday, Admiral Brad Cooper urged Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa to "avoid any actions that could interfere" with the process.

The United States said Wednesday it was launching an operation to move up to 7,000 Islamic State group jihadists across the border.

The announcement came after the withdrawal of Kurdish-led forces who had long secured the detention camps, as Syrian government troops took control of Kurdish territory in the north and northeast.

Iraqi and US authorities have already announced the transfer of a first group of 150 prisoners, a mix of Iraqis and foreigners.

Sharaa and Cooper also discussed the importance of Syrian government forces adhering to a ceasefire with the Kurdish forces, the statement by the US military's Central Command added.

### What may cash aid actually mean?

FROM PAGE 12

it does not cannibalise long-term development spending on health and education.

The dilemma becomes starker when viewed alongside other major fiscal proposals.

A pay commission recommendation to raise salaries for government employees by as much as 142 percent would, if fully implemented, add an estimated Tk 1.06 lakh crore a year to the budget.

The state already spends about Tk 1.31 lakh crore on salaries and pensions; the proposal would effectively double the public-sector wage bill.

Such an expansion would place severe strain on public finances and risk fuelling inflation -- disproportionately hurting the very groups social protection programmes are meant to shield.

The BNP's broader roadmap also includes "farmer cards" to provide

digital identities and "seasonal credit", aimed at reducing dependence on middlemen.

Although Jamaat has yet to unveil detailed welfare plans, the deeper anxiety surrounding social safety nets is less about the availability of funds, but more about the mechanism of delivery.

Bangladesh's history with social protection is riddled with "inclusion and exclusion errors" -- a polite term for patronage and graft.

"The key point is that it must not follow political patterns; it should actually reach the intended beneficiaries," he said.

# NEWS

## Expat ministry's statement and our reply

FROM PAGE 3  
Conduct) Rules, 2025. Based on intelligence reports and recommendations from an inter-ministerial committee, licences were granted to 252 agencies, following assurances that no prior licence existed in the name of the applicants or their family members.

The ministry further states that out of a total of 2,646 licensed recruiting agencies, 1,865 are currently active, and that with the addition of the 252 newly licensed agencies, the number of active agencies will stand at 2,117. It argues that this number is not excessive for a country of about 180 million people and claims that strengthened digital monitoring, audits, grievance mechanisms, and punitive measures are in place to ensure accountability.

**OUR REPLY**  
The Daily Star's report examined the policy outcome of approving 252 new overseas recruiting agencies, which raised the total number of licensed agencies to 2,646, according to data provided by the ministry itself.

The ministry's clarification that some

applications had been pending since 2023 does not address the core concern raised in the report. The central issue is not how long the applications remained pending, but the rationale behind expanding the number of licensed agencies at a time when the labour migration sector is hit by shrinking overseas markets, persistently high migration costs, widespread complaints of fraud, and weak enforcement of rules and regulations.

More importantly, the decision directly contradicts the recommendation of the government-commissioned White Paper on the economy, released in December 2024, which explicitly called for a reasonable reduction in the number of recruiting agencies to curb corruption, exploitation, and financial irregularities. The ministry's statement does not explain why this key recommendation was disregarded, nor does it provide evidence-based justification for reversing that policy direction.

The ministry also did not clarify what new developments, market

assessments, or policy evaluations prompted the approval of such a large number of licences at this juncture. Assertions about strengthened digital monitoring and accountability mechanisms remain unsubstantiated, particularly when official data show thousands of complaints filed against recruiting agencies each year and an extremely low conviction rate in human

trafficking cases. Whether agencies are currently "active" or "inactive" does not change the regulatory reality. All licensed agencies remain legally entitled to operate at any time, and their sheer number inevitably increases the burden on an already overstretched oversight system.

It is also notable that the ministry did not dispute any factual information

presented in the report, including comparative regional data, statistics on complaints, or expert opinions. The report incorporated the views of the ministry's senior secretary, who defended the decision, and clearly stated that the adviser to the ministry did not respond to this newspaper's requests for comment.

The Daily Star stands by its report.

## BNP walking

FROM PAGE 3  
nominations, the party as an alternative candidate. Eventually, the BNP nominee did not withdraw. "BNP announced Bogura 2 for me, then nominated another leader as an alternative. Later, my nomination was declared valid, but the BNP candidate kept creating problems. Now I really do not know what more there is to say," Manna said.

In Narail-2, Fariduzzaman Farhad, chairman of the National People's Party, dissolved his party and joined BNP to contest the seat.

Tenants must pay rent by the 10th of each month, and landlords must issue written receipts.

Tenants (with landlord approval) may use rooftops, balconies, and open spaces. For safety reasons, landlords must provide tenants with keys to the roof and the main gate under certain conditions.

If

a tenant fails to pay rent on time, the landlord may issue verbal and written warnings. Continued noncompliance may result in a written notice, after which the landlord may terminate the contract.

Section 15 of the House Rent Control Act, 1991 states that standard rent should equal 15 percent of a house's market value. However, the law has not been effectively enforced, with no rent controllers appointed and few cases taken to court.

In 2010, Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh filed a writ petition seeking enforcement of rent control, which remains pending.

In 2015, the High Court directed the government to form a commission to set rent limits and appoint rent controllers at the ward level.

BNP has given four seats to Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Bangladesh -- Sylhet-5, Narayanganj-4, Brahmanbaria 2, and Nilphamari-1. Three of those constituencies have BNP rebel candidates.

Jamiat Secretary General Manjurul Islam Alendi said, "The BNP gave us four seats, and three of those have rebel candidates. This is embarrassing, uncomfortable and painful for us," he said.

"BNP should not have thought its responsibility was finished just by expelling the rebels. The party should have called them, explained the situation, and tried to solve the problem through discussion, but it did not do that," he added.

In Sylhet 5, Jamiat candidate Md Ubaidullah Faruq is contesting, while Sylhet district BNP Vice-President Mamunur Rashid remains in the race as a rebel.

In Narayanganj-4, two

expelled BNP leaders -- Shah Alam and Giasuddin

DHAKA FRIDAY JANUARY 23, 2026

MAGH 9, 1432 BS

The Daily Star

9

## ICT-2 frames

FROM PAGE 3  
11 and 16, 2024, Quader issued direct instructions to crush the movement, including exhortations to kill protesters, publicly branding demonstrators as "Razakars", mobilising armed party cadres, financing violent operations and ordering internet throttling.

These acts allegedly led to the killing of six people and serious injuries to more than 300 on the Dhaka University campus, in Chattogram and elsewhere.

Count 2 said that between July 17 and 20, 2024, Quader directed nationwide preparations for repression, ordered street-level resistance by party forces, publicly endorsed curfews with "shoot-at-sight" instructions, conspired with senior leaders and law enforcement agencies, and authorised lethal operations, including helicopter firing.

During this period, 36 people were killed in the Mirpur and Mohakhali areas of the capital, the prosecution alleged.

Overall, the prosecution claims that more than 1,400 protesters were killed and over 25,000 seriously injured in widespread, systematic and targeted attacks carried out with the accused's knowledge and involvement. The tribunal fixed February 17 for the prosecution's opening statement and the recording of witness testimony.

Meanwhile, the prosecution yesterday completed the second day of arguments in the Abu Sayed killing case. Arguments are set to resume on Sunday.

## US praises

FROM PAGE 4  
Meanwhile, Major General E Darrin Cox, commanding general of the 18th Theater Medical Command US Army Pacific (USARPAC), visited Bangladesh from January 18 to 22 to strengthen medical partnerships with the Bangladesh Army Medical Forces.

"This engagement

supported US Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) and US Army Pacific (USARPAC) goals to enhance collaboration and build partner capacity," US embassy spokesperson Poornima Rai said in a statement yesterday.

Meetings in Dhaka and visits to Jalalabad Cantonment and the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) in Sylhet laid the foundation for future joint exercises and expert exchanges in key medical specialties, she said.

**PRAYER TIMING**  
JANUARY 23

Fazr Juma Asr Maghrib Esha

AZAN 5:30 12:30 4:15 5:40 7:00

JAMAAT 6:05 1:15 4:30 5:44 7:30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

## HC questions legality

FROM PAGE 3  
AK Mahbubur Rahman, secretary general of Bangladesh Unani Medical Association.

Senior lawyer Subrata Chowdhury assisted by Advocate AKM Jaglu Haider Afric Advocate Sanjid Rahman Shuvo appeared for the petitioners while deputy attorney generals Khan Ziaur Rahman and Mohammad Abdul Karim, along with Assistant Attorney Generals Khorshed Alam Selim, Md Uzzal Hossain and Rayhanul Islam represented the state during hearing of the petition.

Jaglu Haider told The Daily Star yesterday that the task force traditionally included representatives from all streams -- Allopathic, Ayurvedic, Unani, Homeopathic, Biochemical and Herbal. In this instance, only allopathic representatives were included.

The petitioners said on November 10, 2024 the Advisory Council (Cabinet Division) issued directives regarding the approval of the Essential Drug List.

The directives said the Health Services Division's "Essential Drug List" is timely, but it should be reviewed by a high-level task force comprising all stakeholders.

Subsequently, an 18-member task force was formed to make recommendations on the preparation of the National List of Essential Medicines and ensuring their availability.

Professor Shahinul Alam, vice-chancellor of Bangladesh Medical University, was made its chair, and Muhammad Mozammel Hossain Khan, joint secretary (Drug Administration Wing) of the

Health Services Division, was made its member secretary.

Section 13 of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 2023 provides for the formation of a National Drug Advisory Council and specifies the matters on which it will advise the government.

Under this section, the government must form a National Drug Advisory Council comprising a chairman and such number of members as it considers appropriate from time to time. The council will advise the government on implementing the National Drug Policy, developing the domestic pharmaceutical industry, and ensuring the production and supply of medicines to meet national demand.

The same section also provides that, to fulfill the objectives of developing the domestic pharmaceutical industry and meeting national demand, certain medicines from Allopathic, Ayurvedic, Unani, Homeopathic, Biochemical, Herbal and Veterinary Categories will be declared as "essential medicines" with a list to be published and updated every two years, the petitioners stated in the petition.

The petitioners alleged that the formation of the 18-member task force violates Section 13 of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 2023.

When contacted, Zakir Hossain, secretary general of Bangladesh Association of Pharmaceutical Industries, said "We agree with the arguments made by the petitioners. Our position is that until the matter is resolved by the court, the ministry should refrain from taking further action."

FROM PAGE 3  
referendum to be held alongside the February 12 election.

The three canals in this constituency have turned into garbage dumps," he said. He also cited problems such as polluted canals, a shortage of colleges and hospitals, and the spread of drugs and crime, and promised to address gas and water shortages by involving local residents.

Meanwhile, BNP Central Executive Committee member and local resident Mamun Hasan said the party has adopted a "special electoral strategy" as the highest Jamaat leader is contesting the seat.

The country is passing through a critical juncture, but people are conscious. They know there is no alternative to the 'Sheaf of Paddy' to protect independence and

sovereignty," he said.

The two parties have distinct styles on the ground. Mahmud Shobir of Shewrapara said Jamaat workers are focusing on door-to-door campaigns, while BNP activists are organising processions and local gatherings.

Shah Alam Tuhin, member secretary of Jamaat's election management committee, said they are receiving an "extremely positive" response. "We have a strong organisational base in Manipur, Shewrapara, Kazipara, and Ibrahimpur," said Tuhin.

However, Tuhin raised concern over security, alleging that "vast amounts of illegal weapons and money linked to the previous 'fascist' regime remain unrecaptured. He called for strict administrative vigilance to prevent violence.

Despite the rivalry, Tuhin noted that they maintain a "cordial relationship" with BNP candidate Milton.

Milton, however, described Dhaka-15 as a BNP stronghold.

Citing his local roots and experience, he expressed confidence in his party's organisational strength.

He was quick to point out the past, saying, "In the

2018 election, the Jamaat Ameen contested from this seat under the BNP's 'Sheaf of Paddy' symbol and was defeated. Recently, Jamaat workers faced public backlash while trying to collect personal data from households and had to apologise."

Dhaka-15 is home to key institutions such as Manipur School, Hermann Gmeiner School, the National Heart Foundation, and the BRTA.

The constituency has 3,51,718 voters -- including 1,79,616 men, 1,72,098 women, and four hijra voters -- more than 7,000 higher than in the previous election.

Other candidates in the race include Ahmed Sajedul Huq Rubel (CPB), Md Shamsul Haque (Jatiya Party), Md Ashfakur Rahman (Bangladesh Jasad), Khoabar Hossain (Janata Dal), and Md Nilav Parvez (Amjanatar Dal).

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## 229 sued

FROM PAGE 4

Motaleb Hossain Bhuiyan, a deputy assistant director of Rab-7, and three other members of the elite force were injured.

Law enforcement officials said the injured were rescued and taken to the Combined Military Hospital in Chattogram, where doctors declared Motaleb dead.

The deceased officer had been serving with BGB-2 Teknaf Battalion before joining Rab on deputation in April 2024.

Describing the incident, ARM Mozzafar Hossain said a team of 43 Rab members went to Jungle Salimpur in Salimpur union that afternoon to arrest armed criminals.

"Following announcements made through loudspeakers, 400 to 500 people gathered and assaulted the team," he said.

### Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Office of the Executive Engineer, RHD,

Sylhet Road Division, Sylhet.

Phone: 02997700572

E-mail: cesyl@rhd.gov.bd

Date: 21.01.2026

Memo No. 35.01.9100.473.07.017.23.340

### e-Tender Notice 37(Thirty-Seven)/2025-2026

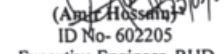
#### Open Tendering Method (OTM)

e-Tenders are invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://eprocure.gov.bd>) by Executive Engineer, RHD, Sylhet Road Division, Sylhet. For the procurement of following work.

| Tender ID No & Package No.  | Name of work  | Tender Document last selling / downloading Date and Time | Tender Closing & Opening Date and Time |
|---|---|--|--|
| Tender ID: 1217879<br>Tender Package No: eGP-35/PMP-Road/EE/SDR/Syl/2025-26 (Re-Tender) | Periodic Maintenance work under PMP (Road-Major) providing Partial Strengthening, DBS Base Course, DBS Wearing Course, Road Marking, Reflecting Road Stud, Traffic Sign & Sign Post Work Ch.00+000 to Ch.03+984 (Ambarkhana to Tilagar) of Ambarkhana-Shahi Eidgah-M. C. College-Tilagar (R-248) Road under Sylhet Road Division, Sylhet during the FY 2025-2026. | 08-Feb-2026 17:00  | 09-Feb-2026 17:00                      |
| Tender ID: 1217997, Tender Package No: eGP-32/PMP-Road/EE/SDR/Syl/2025-26 (Re-Tender)   | Periodic Maintenance work under PMP (Road-Major) providing by Rigid Pavement Work at Ch. 218+320 to Ch. 219+450 Km (Lalabazar North to Lalabazar) of Dhaka (Katchpur)-Bhairab-Jagadishpur-Shaistaganj-Sylhet-Tamabil-Jaflong Road (N-2) under Road Division Sylhet, during the year 2025-2026.  | 08-Feb-2026 17:00  | 09-Feb-2026 17:00                      |

This is an online Tender, where only e-Tenders will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/ hard Copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, please register on e-GP System portal (<http://eprocure.gov.bd>) The fee's for downloading the e-tender documents from the national e-GP portal have to be deposited on line through any member of schedule bank for e-GP.

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk ([helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd](mailto:helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd))

  
ID No: 602205  
Executive Engineer, RHD  
Road Division, Sylhet.

# Tarique slams 'ticket to heaven' pledge

FROM PAGE 2

Taking the stage at 12:28pm, the BNP chief spoke for 23 minutes, addressing a range of issues, including the oppression and torture of his party's leaders and activists during the Awami League's 16 years in power, enforced disappearances, the country's fragile economy, looting, and the need to reform the state structure.

He also outlined future plans, including the introduction of family, farmers' and health cards; large-scale canal excavation, with 20,000 kilometres to be dug nationwide; employment generation; and measures prioritising farmers, women, and environmental protection.

Tarique said that if the party is voted to power, the country would be governed in accordance with the righteousness of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

Referring to the enforced disappearance of BNP leader Ilias Ali and the deaths of 13 people in Sylhet during the July uprising, he said, "Through the sacrifice of these lives, we began the journey to claim our rights, but a vested group has already started conspiring against it, and the conspiracy has not stopped inside the country either."

"On August 5, 2024, the people of Bangladesh proved that if they remain united, they can resist any conspiracy."

At one point during his speech, he called a person from the crowd onto the stage and asked, "What do you all believe? Who is the owner of the Holy Kaaba? Who is the owner of the world? Who owns the heaven? Who owns the sun and the stars?"

To each question, the man responded with "Allah".

Tarique then continued, "You all bore witness that the owner of hell is Allah, the owner of heaven is Allah, the owner of the world is Allah, the owner of the Kaaba is Allah. Brother, does anyone else have the power to give away what is owned by Allah? No one does. So, before the election, one party is telling you 'We'll give you this, we'll give you that, we'll give you a ticket' ... is that not so?"

"If they speak of things that are

not owned by humans -- isn't that shirk?"

Tarique further said the country was liberated in 1971 at the cost of millions of lives, and the people know who played what role during the Liberation War.

"We saw who played a role in the martyrdom of hundreds and thousands of our brothers, in destroying the honour of hundreds of thousands of our mothers and sisters. The people of Bangladesh already know them."

"Brothers and sisters, [we must unite and stand] against such Kufri [acts or beliefs] considered disbelief in Islam, such thoughtlessness and such lies. We need to stay with our 'take back Bangladesh'!"

He said the people have freed the country from autocracy and the next task is to establish the people's rights. "Not just the right to vote or speak, but the right to self-reliance. Our goal is to ensure that every person can feed and clothe themselves, so that everyone can move safely -- that is how we will 'take back Bangladesh'."

He added that the BNP does not only want voting rights or freedom of speech, but also aims to make people economically self-reliant.

Tarique spoke at the second rally at Aipnur playground in Moulvibazar's Sherpur at 3:00pm.

Once again, without naming Jamaat, he reiterated his accusation against a certain party of misleading voters. "They are now going to the homes of innocent mothers and sisters and selling 'tickets to Jannah'."

At a rally in Habiganj, he said, "Let me share another update about the conspiracy to engineer the election -- their people are going door to door, collecting NID and mobile numbers. Have you heard about this?"

"They say they will establish the rule of honest people. They are collecting bKash numbers and phone numbers, saying they will send money -- this is their plan."

Addressing a Brahmanbaria rally at 10:30pm, Tarique urged voters to wake up early, attend Fajr prayers and go to the nearest polling stations.

He began his address at

Kishoreganj's Bhairab rally around 12:15am today. Urging votes for the BNP, he warned the people to stay vigilant against those who halted the voting process for the past 15 years.

## THE PROMISES MADE

In his Moulvibazar speech, the BNP chairman said employment opportunities would increase across the country if his party was voted to power. "Training and language education would be provided to help young people become skilled and secure better jobs."

He added that in the around 130 tea gardens in the district, the workers, particularly women, are living in difficult conditions and earning inadequate wages. "We want to provide family cards to these workers. Through the cards, we will offer either food assistance or cash support so that they can manage their households properly."

He added that besides tea workers, families of day labourers and farmers would also receive family cards.

Tarique also said farmers, through the "farmers' card", would be provided with necessary facilities, while also mentioning plans to introduce honorariums for imams and muezzins.

He said Moulvibazar stands as clear evidence of official neglect, as the previous government failed to ensure even basic healthcare facilities in the region. "Residents are still forced to travel to Sylhet or Dhaka for treatment, risking time, money and lives."

"Medical colleges and healthcare institutions will be established on a priority basis in neglected areas."

In his speech in Brahmanbaria, he said his party will prioritise road construction, the development of educational institutions and employment.

As of the filing of this report at 1:00am, Tarique was scheduled for two more rallies -- one in Narsingdi and another in Narayanganj.

He is scheduled to address a rally at the capital's Bhasantek BRP field at 6:00pm today, marking the second day of his election campaign.

(Our Sylhet correspondents Dwoha Chowdhury and Mintu Deshvara contributed to this report.)

discrimination will be accepted," he said, adding that they were focusing on the election.

"Do not force us to wage a movement," he warned.

Nahid said, "After the mass uprising, we entered politics with hope and aspirations to build a new Bangladesh. In that process, we have largely failed and many tasks remain unfinished. Insha'Allah, in this election, the 10-party alliance will win by a large margin and complete those unfinished tasks."

Without naming the BNP, he added, "We hear about family cards, farmer cards. Cards should be given to people benefit. But will these cards really reach the intended recipients? Will people not have to pay a bribe of Tk 1,000 to receive a Tk 2,000 card?"

At the end of the rally, the Jamaat ameer handed out balance scale symbols to party candidates and presented a balance scale bearing a water-lily emblem to Nahid Islam.

"We want to build a Bangladesh that belongs to children; to young men and women; to Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians; and to workers, farmers, and professionals from all walks of life."

At the rally, National Citizen Party Convener Nahid Islam called on the Election Commission to act neutrally to ensure a fair election.

"There must be the same code of conduct for all parties. No

## Israel strikes four Syria-Lebanon border crossings

REUTERS

Israel launched strikes on four border crossings on the Syria-Lebanon border on Wednesday evening, saying "they were used by the Iran-backed group Hezbollah to smuggle weapons".

Israel and Lebanon agreed to a US-brokered ceasefire in 2024, ending more than a year of fighting between Israel and Hezbollah that culminated in Israeli strikes that severely weakened the group. Since then, both sides have traded accusations of violations.

Lebanon has faced growing pressure from the US and Israel to disarm Hezbollah, and its leaders fear that Israel could dramatically escalate strikes across the battered country to push Lebanon's leaders to confiscate Hezbollah's arsenal more quickly.

Another Israeli strike on the southern Lebanese village of Qennarit wounded 19 people, the Lebanese health ministry said.

The Israeli military had issued a warning on Wednesday to residents of certain buildings in the southern Lebanese villages of Qennarit, Kfour and Jarjoua ahead of planned strikes on what was described as Hezbollah infrastructure.

"If bribery and extortion are not eliminated, these benefits will never reach the people. On the one hand, the party [BNP] promises to distribute cards, but on the other, it is trying to bring loan defaulters into parliament. If the intention is truly to serve the people, no loan defaulter should be nominated."

"During this period, people were denied their right to vote. We are reclaiming that right today, honouring the sacrifices of thousands of martyrs. This time, we will vote 'yes' for reform. We aim to win and implement our promises of structural and constitutional change within parliament," he said.

# NCP's only goal is to win

FROM PAGE 2

given special privileges. Even before the official campaign started, they had been campaigning nonetheless. To remain neutral, the commission must behave impartially," he said.

Despite what he described as challenges, Nahid reaffirmed the party's commitment to remain in the race.

As part of the day's activities, NCP Chief Coordinator and Dhaka-8 candidate Nasiruddin Patwary said, party leaders visited the graves of the three national leaders, organised a parade, and held a march for justice in the capital.

After the prayers, Nahid and other candidates for Dhaka constituencies marched to the National Press Club.

Nahid, who is contesting from Dhaka-II, said the election marks Bangladesh's return to the ballot after 16 years.

"During this period, people were denied their right to vote. We are reclaiming that right today, honouring the sacrifices of thousands of martyrs. This time, we will vote 'yes' for reform. We aim to win and implement our promises of structural and constitutional change within parliament," he said.

# Sharmin Academy founding principal, manager sued

FROM PAGE 2

Earlier, police said they had spoken to the child's family, who initially did not agree to file a case, citing security concerns.

The CCTV footage, dated January 18 at 12:51pm, shows a woman dragging a child dressed in a school uniform into an office room. She first slaps the child. A man who was already present in the room then joins in, grabbing the child by the throat at times and pressing his mouth shut at others.

The man is seen holding a stapler. The child is sometimes crying and at other times writhing in distress. The woman holds the child by the hands to restrain him. At one point, when the child spits on the woman's sari, the man presses the child's head against the spot and shakes it several times.

While the child is seen crying in fear, the woman is seen smiling and laughing.

The footage, which went viral on Wednesday, was shared on Facebook by Advocate Saleh Uddin, who described it as a "sample" of



how children are punished at the institution.

Saleh later filed another case with the court of Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Ripon Hossain against Sharmin and Pabitra under Section 323 of the Penal Code, said Rifat Rahman, a lawyer for the

complainant.

Speaking to the daily Prothom Alo yesterday at the Paltan Police Station, the boy's mother said, "My child is still traumatised. Even in sleep, he suddenly screams, 'Don't stitch my mouth shut.' He also keeps saying, 'I won't go to school anymore.' He is so afraid that we might send him back to school that he doesn't even want to stay with us. He has gone to his maternal grandparents' home."

The child's father said that within just one week of enrolling in the school's pre-play class, his son became a victim of such inhumane abuse. After watching the video, they were left stunned. Their son repeatedly said, "The uncle said if I tell at home, he will slit my throat. He will stitch my mouth shut."

According to a 2011 Supreme Court judgment, corporal punishment in schools violates children's constitutional rights. A Ministry of Education circular banned corporal punishment in schools that year.

# Record crore-rich candidates in race

FROM PAGE 1

Speaking to this newspaper, Tauhidul, who also led the research team, said their findings are based on the analysis of affidavits submitted by 2,288 candidates who were initially declared valid by the Election Commission.

With many of them later pulling out, a total of 1,981 candidates now remain in the race.

The watchdog reported that 1,696 candidates are contesting a national election for the first time.

Of the valid candidates, 560 declared movable or liquid assets worth Tk 1 crore or more. The number was 273 in the 2008 election and has steadily risen to 547 by 2024.

Seven of the 10 candidates with the highest movable assets are from the BNP, while three are independents.

BNP's candidate from Chapainawabganj-2, Aminul Islam, declared the highest movable assets, totalling Tk 599 crore.

Twenty-seven candidates reported movable and immovable assets worth Tk 100 crore or more, including 18 from the BNP and nine independents.

A total of 891 MP aspirants declared movable and immovable assets worth Tk 1 crore or more.

TIB found that 76 percent of candidates hold at least an undergraduate degree -- the highest share to date.

Although the number of candidates who identify as businesspeople fell slightly, they still make up almost half (48 percent) of those in the race, while career politicians account for less than two percent.

Iftekharuzzaman said this fact is a reflection of money's role in politics.

Islamist party nominees now account for over one-third of the valid candidates, marking their strongest presence since 2008.

Replying to a question, Iftekharuzzaman said he hopes that the Election Commission, Anti Corruption Commission and National Board of Revenue will find discrepancies in the affidavits of the candidates and take action accordingly.

The watchdog noted that while indebted candidates are at their lowest share in five elections, 25 percent still carry loans or liabilities totalling Tk 18,868 crore -- the highest to date.

A total of 59.41 percent of BNP candidates have loans, while the figures stand at 32.79 percent for independents, 26.97 percent for the Jatiya Party, 25 percent for the Communist Party of Bangladesh, and 22.26 percent for Jamaat-e-Islami.

Several MP aspirants possess more than 50 acres of land, in violation of existing law. A total of 530 candidates, or 22.66 percent, currently face lawsuits. The average age of candidates is 51 years -- the lowest since 2008, when it stood at 72.

In addition, although information about one candidate having company registrations in tax havens has long been publicly available, no such declaration was found in the candidate's affidavit, Iftekharuzzaman said.

He further said one candidate failed to declare any personal assets abroad, despite his wife owning a flat in Dubai.

Another candidate disclosed ownership of three flats abroad, while the actual number is at least three times higher.

TIB also found that a candidate who did not disclose ownership of any foreign business enterprises was linked to 11 companies abroad.

In addition, although information about one candidate having company registrations in tax havens has long been publicly available, no such declaration was found in the candidate's affidavit, Iftekharuzzaman said.

According to party sources, Islami Andolan Bangladesh has fielded

# IAB promises justice, equal opportunities

FROM PAGE 2

the campaign, carrying the party's electoral symbol, the hand fan.

During the campaign, leaflets were distributed among the public, and the candidate interacted with people from different walks of life.

Many greeted Faizul and

exchanged views with him, while party activists sought prayers and support.

Campaign activities were also conducted in different areas of the city, including Sadar Road and the Launch Ghat areas.

According to party sources, Islami Andolan Bangladesh has fielded

candidates in 259 constituencies across the country. Of the 21 seats in the Barishal division, the party is contesting 20.

In the Barishal-5 constituency, Jamaat-e-Islami has extended its support to the Islami Andolan candidate.

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# 'Should never go hardline from the start'

Known as one of the key architects behind Bangladesh's early rise in international cricket and cricket diplomacy, **Syed Ashraful Huq** is deeply pained by the prospect of Bangladesh missing out on the upcoming ICC T20 World Cup, set to be held in India and Sri Lanka from February 7. The former Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) general secretary and ex-chief executive officer of the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) has left an indelible mark wherever he has worked during his storied career as a cricket administrator. With Bangladesh now on the brink of facing an exit from the T20 World Cup due to stalled negotiations with the ICC, Ashraful spoke to *The Daily Star's* **Samsul Arefin Khan** over the phone from Bangkok, Thailand, on Thursday, sharing his concerns and insights. Excerpts from the interview are as follows:

**DS:** How do you see the events that unfolded in the last few weeks?  
**SAH:** The whole thing has been mishandled. Sports and politics should never be mixed. I feel that we have failed to understand the difference between a domestic tournament and a World Cup.

**DS:** Your take on how things have been handled.

**SAH:** The strategy was wrong. You should never go hardline from the start. Everything should have a window for compromise and a dialogue with the opposition. In the '80s, there was a chance of an India-Pakistan war at any time. General Zia-ul-Haq [former Pakistan president] went to watch a Test match in Jaipur to diffuse everything. After the Kargil conflict in 2004, the full Indian team went to Pakistan. At that time, Atal Bihari Vajpayee told the team before leaving for Lahore from Delhi that winning or losing wasn't the most important thing; the important thing was winning the hearts of the people of Pakistan.

In 2008, during the terrorist attacks, I was in a key position as the CEO of the ACC. Later, we reasoned with Indian PM Manmohan Singh and Shashank Manohar, president of the BCCI. We



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Youth and Sports Adviser Asif Nazrul, alongside Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Aminul Islam Bulbul, addressed the media yesterday following a meeting with national team cricketers, including those named in the squad for the upcoming T20 World Cup, at a hotel in the capital. This marked the first time the players were involved in any form of discussion since the board decided earlier this month not to send the national team to play the T20 World Cup in India due to security reasons. While the sports adviser reaffirmed the stance of not sending the team to India for the marquee event, the overall mood could be gauged from T20I skipper Litton Das's reaction, as he said, "Don't have anything to say," while leaving the hotel.

**SAH:** First of all, going on a hardline stance was our mistake. Why take a hardline in sports? We should follow the process. During the whole process, we were in contact with the ICC because they are the owners of this thing. The ICC has done a security assessment and if the ICC says the security situation is alright – since it is their tournament – we have to accept it. If our government doesn't accept it, diplomatic channels are always open. Our board president could have easily gone and asked the Indian board if our security was guaranteed. Did he ask him or whether our government has asked the Indian government whether they can give us protection from the threats? We reacted based on what extreme right-wing groups like the RSS or Shiv Sena were saying.

**DS:** How do you see the BCB vs ICC stand-off?

**SAH:** We already signed a Participation Agreement [for the World Cup]. We are bound to follow their [ICC's] words. If we don't follow their words, our government should have asked the Indian government through diplomatic channels. It should

not be openly asked by writing to them. Our board could have also asked the Indian board whether it is okay or not [for Bangladesh to travel to India].

**DS:** Could there be fines, penalties, or anything else imposed on BCB?

**SAH:** It's possible. Personally, I think missing a World Cup is a huge loss. Our assets are our cricketers. Players like Litton or Mustafizur work so hard for the glory of playing in a World Cup.

**DS:** How would you have tackled the situation?

**SAH:** First, I would recognise my obligation to the ICC because of the signed agreement. If I didn't accept their security assessment, I would use diplomatic channels to ask the Indian government for assurance. For a win-win situation, I would have argued: "If Mustafizur is safe to play in the World Cup in India, why is he not safe for the IPL?" They would have then said yes, and then it would be a win-win situation for both.

**DS:** Should the BCB have communicated with the other boards?

**SAH:** The board should have talked and

fixed things earlier, so the government's decision wouldn't have to be that way. They should have spoken with the Indian board and the ICC. If they couldn't speak directly, they could have used someone like [Aminul Islam] Bulbul to help fix things. Bulbul and Roger Binny, the former BCCI president, worked together at the ACC. He could have a discussion regarding the Mustafizur issue. If Bulbul couldn't speak directly, Roger could have talked for him in this matter as well.

**DS:** How do you see Bulbul as an administrator?

**SAH:** I have a lot of respect for Bulbul because I was his colleague for 12-15 years at the ACC. Bulbul is a world-class coach educator and world-class programme conductor, but he hardly has any experience as an administrator.

**DS:** Various media reports claim that Pakistan also might not play if we don't play. Does their solidarity help us?

**SAH:** Pakistan will 100% play. We shouldn't find any contentment or satisfaction thinking Pakistan is with us.

told them that if this situation persists between the two countries, things will never improve. They both agreed and came to play the Asia Cup in 2010. These things require discussion. Just saying from here that "I won't go" doesn't work.

**DS:** How do you see the fact that the players were involved in a discussion only yesterday?

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



## Saraswati Puja today



### STAR REPORT

Saraswati Puja, a major religious festival of the Hindu community, will be celebrated across the country today with devotion, festivity and fervour.

Saraswati, the goddess of wisdom and knowledge, is worshipped by devotees -- particularly students -- at educational institutions and temples.

The celebration falls annually on the fifth day of the bright fortnight of Magh, marking the birth of Goddess Saraswati. The day is known as "Vasant Panchami".

The puja will begin in the morning, followed by the offering of "anjali", a ritual offering of flowers.

On the auspicious day, children are initiated into learning through "hatekhori", typically with a slate and chalk in hand.

Later, prasad, or blessed food offerings, will be distributed among devotees.

Goddess Saraswati embodies power, creativity and inspiration,

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**THE FLOATING LILY-TROTTER ...** A pheasant-tailed jacana seen walking over waterlily pads on a pond in Chattogram's Anowara KPZ area, its impossibly long toes spreading its weight like poetry across water. Native to South and Southeast Asia, this waterbird inhabits freshwater wetlands, marshes, ponds, and rice fields rich in floating vegetation. It feeds primarily on insects, larvae, molluscs, and other small invertebrates, delicately plucked from the surface of leaves and shallow water. A master of balance, its elongated toes and claws earn it the nickname "lily-trotter". Though it is categorised as "Least Concern" on the IUCN Red List, water pollution and hunting still threaten the species' survival.

PHOTO: KOMOL DAS

'India somewhat overreacted'

Touhid tells BBC over Delhi's recall of staff dependents

### DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain has said there is no proof that the Bangladesh government has failed to ensure the security of Indians.

He made the comment in an interview with the BBC News India broadcast on Wednesday, a day after India advised the withdrawal of families and dependents of Indian officials from all Indian missions in Bangladesh.



"Given the security situation, as a precautionary measure, we have advised the dependents of officials in the mission and posts to return to India," the Indian Ministry of External Affairs said.

The Indian missions, however, will continue to remain open and fully operational, it added.

Touhid told the BBC, "There is no proof that we have not been able to ensure security for Indians. But my wishes will not change things. Whether India will categorise Bangladesh as being at par with

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## Airlines cheer as surcharges slashed

### RASHIDUL HASAN

The government has slashed the fees for landing, air navigation, parking and embarkation, much to the relief of the local airlines which have been saddled by the high surcharges.

The yearly surcharge for runway use, control room, aircraft parking and terminal facilities across the country's seven airports now stands to 14.25 percent, down from 72 percent, after the Civil Aviation and Tourism ministry amended the rules.

The move comes following long term requests from the Aviation Operators Association of Bangladesh (AOAB), a platform of privately-owned airline operators, to reduce the annual surcharge from 72 percent to 12 percent to help keep the airlines stay afloat.

The annual surcharge in India is 12 to 18 percent, in Singapore, 8 percent, in Oman 10 percent and in Pakistan 2 percent, according to Mofizur Rahman, managing director of private airline Novoair.

As much as 78 percent of the local airlines' total outstanding dues of Tk 7,351.45 crore with the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) comprises of the late fee for the surcharges.

At least three to four airlines were forced to cease their operation only because of failure to pay their dues to CAAB, said Kazi Wahidul Alam, an aviation expert.

For instance, the now-defunct GMG Airlines owes CAAB Tk 368.29 crore; the main amount is Tk 56.98 crore and Tk 311.30 crore are surcharge and other charges, according to AOAB.

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Woman burnt to death in Natore  
Her home torched after man's murder

OUR CORRESPONDENT,  
Pabna

A woman was burnt to death in a reprisal attack following the killing of a man on Wednesday night in Singra upazila of Natore.

The deceased are Sabiha Begum, 75, and Md Rejaul Karim, 53, a teacher at Bil Haloti Trimohomi College. Both were residents of Kodomtola Kumarpura village, police said.

According to police, unidentified assailants attacked Rejaul, a member of the Singra upazila unit of Zia Parishad, outside his residence around 11:00pm on Wednesday, hacking him to death on the spot.

Hearing his screams, locals rushed to the spot and found Rejaul lying there, but the attackers had already fled by then," said Md Abdun Nur, officer-in-charge of Singra Police Station.

About 30 minutes later, a group of agitated people

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## POLLS PLEDGES: COST OF LIVING What may cash aid actually mean?

### MD ASADUZ ZAMAN

As Bangladesh approaches the February general election, political parties are once again centring their campaign promises on the household ledger.

According to a government survey, average household expenditure reached Tk 31,500 per month in 2022, nearly double the level seen in 2016.

In urban areas, the burden is significantly higher, averaging Tk 41,424, while rural households spend roughly Tk 26,842.

Taken together, families appear caught in a quiet "consumption trap".

Worse still, stubborn inflation has effectively vapourised the savings of low-income households, leaving millions balanced on a financial knife-edge.

The BNP has responded with a "social policy agenda", including "family cards" designed to bypass traditional, leaky distribution channels.

Meanwhile, Jamaat-e-Islami, the BNP's principal electoral rival, has proposed a "smart social security card" and a Qard-e-Hasana scheme, offering interest-free loans of Tk 10,000 per month to five lakh unemployed graduates for up to two years.

For the next elected government, the gamble is twofold: finding the fiscal space to fund such transfers without triggering an inflationary

spiral, and ensuring the money actually reaches the pockets it is intended to save.

The BNP's plan proposes monthly cash transfers of Tk 2,000 to Tk 2,500 to 50 lakh women.

While the amount represents about 6 percent of average urban household spending, for the rural poor it would account for roughly 9 percent.

However, economists are questioning the fiscal and operational realism of the proposal.

The primary objective of such cash support is survival, said Zahid Hussain, former lead economist at the World Bank's Dhaka office.

"This is just to meet the bare minimum -- basically staying alive and keeping people away from a crisis," he said.

He argued that the proliferation of welfare cards lacks a "scientific approach".

Hussain said policymakers must first calculate the precise financial requirement to bridge the "poverty gap" for the most vulnerable.

His estimates suggest that addressing the poverty gap would require around Tk 6,000 crore annually. Once administrative costs and leakages are added, the total could rise to Tk 10,000 crore.

Even then, the programme would remain "financially affordable" for the state -- provided

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Govt salary hike questionable amid spending concerns

### Says Hossain Zillur

### STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Hossain Zillur Rahman, a former adviser to the caretaker government, yesterday questioned the sharp increase in government employees' salaries at a time when public spending efficiency remains questionable.



"A huge salary increase was announced for government officials. But where is the explanation of how much the implementation rate of the Annual Development Programme [ADP] has improved because of it?" he said at a policy dialogue titled "Economic Governance and Corruption Prevention," organised by the Centre for Governance Studies (CGS) at the CIRDAP auditorium in Dhaka.

Zillur, also the executive chairman of the Power and Participation Research Centre and the president of CGS, said, "A comprehensive review

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## 'Things are really calming down'

Claims Trump as he launches Board of Peace at Davos

### AGENCIES

US President Donald Trump said yesterday that "things are really calming down" as he joined other world leaders at a signing ceremony for his "Board of Peace" at Davos.

"Just one year ago the world was actually on fire, a lot of people didn't know it," Trump told the audience, as he again claimed to have ended eight wars.

Trump appeared to touch on those concerns in his opening remarks at the signing ceremony for the board, originally intended to help end the Gaza war, saying the new board would work with the UN as he listed other major diplomatic issues around the region and worldwide.

"Well, this is a very exciting day, long in the making, and many countries have just received their notice, and everybody wants to be a part of it, and we'll work with many others, including the United Nations," he said.

Trump, who will chair the board, has invited dozens of other world leaders to join it and sees the grouping addressing other global challenges beyond the stuttering



The Board of Peace's potential membership has however proved controversial, with Trump having invited Russian President Vladimir Putin, who invaded Ukraine four years ago.

Russia said late on Wednesday it was studying the proposal after Trump said it would join. France has declined. Britain

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Cargo vessels line the banks of the Bhairab River awaiting loading and unloading. Due to poor navigability, ships can only enter and leave during high tide, slowing operations and prolonging turnaround. Traders say the delays are a major inconvenience. The photo was taken yesterday from Noapara in Jashore.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN