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SECOND EDITION
DHAKA SUNDAY JANUARY 25, 2026



REGD. NO. DA 781

VOL. XXXVI No. 12

MAGH 11, 1432 BS

www.thedailystar.net

SHABAN 5, 1447 HIJRI

56 PAGES : TK 15.00

Onslaught of AI content aims to sway voters

Unofficial pro-BNP, pro-Jamaat actors flood social media with disinformation, manipulative narratives; pro-AI pages target interim govt, NCP's female politicians

ABDULLAH HEL BUBUN
and ABIR AYON

On January 11, a Facebook reel featured a police officer at a staged press conference, where the official confidently predicted that Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami would secure 200 seats in the upcoming election. The clip also uses derogatory language to accuse the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) of systematic extortion.

Just days earlier, another reel featured a supposed Islamic preacher, vehemently criticising Jamaat for allegedly deviating from the principles of Islam practised in Madinah. In a third short clip, a purported news presenter claims that the United States is sparing no effort to ensure the Awami League's return to power.

But look closer, and the inconsistencies are glaring: facial movements such as blinking and lip-sync appear unnatural, the lighting and textures don't match, and backgrounds often show distortion. And the audio fails to align with the speaker's mouth movements.

Fact is, both videos are fake, made with deepfake and cheapfake artificial intelligence (AI) tools. Social media has no shortage of such content. As the February 12 election draws closer, AI-generated misinformation and disinformation are increasingly flooding Facebook, an investigation by The Daily Star

has found.

Between December 14, 2025, and January 14, 2026, this newspaper documented and analysed 97 pieces of AI-generated content on Facebook, most of them videos,

Many viewers were found to be believing the contents to be true, comment analysis shows.

Data also show an accelerating trend in such AI content as the election day nears. Between the



coming from 19 pages and profiles (see methodology online).

These contents pushed political agendas across parties, attacking

opponents or boosting their own camps, often through manipulation and disinformation. Together, these contents drew 1.6 million engagements within the first 24 hours after they were posted, underscoring the vast number of users exposed to them and raising questions about their potential influence on voters.

first week and final week of data collection, incidents of spreading such content more than tripled from 9 to 33, or a 267% increase within this limited dataset.

Experts point out that AI content acts as a strategic tool to sway public opinion, although its danger must be measured by whether it crosses the "harm threshold" of inciting violence or suppressing voters.

Noting that social media platforms have the technical capacity to detect coordinated inauthentic behaviour, experts also stressed that the platforms should

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Bangladesh replaced by Scotland in T20 WC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh's hopes of featuring in the upcoming ICC Men's T20 World Cup ended yesterday after the International Cricket Council confirmed Scotland as their replacement for the tournament, scheduled to be held in India and Sri Lanka from February 7 to March 8.

The decision brings to a close more than three weeks of uncertainty following the Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) refusal on January 4 to travel to India for their scheduled matches, citing security concerns and the government's

directives.

Thus, Bangladesh, a cricket-crazy nation that began its World Cup

journey at the 1999 ODI World Cup, will miss a cricket World Cup for the first time since.

In a media release yesterday, the ICC stated that following a meeting on Wednesday, the ICC Business Corporation (IBC) Board asked the BCB to confirm within 24 hours whether Bangladesh would participate as scheduled. As no confirmation was received within the stipulated deadline, the ICC moved forward with its replacement process.

In response, the BCB said it has accepted the ICC's decision and won't press the matter any further following a board of directors' meeting last night.



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The Daily Star, marking its 35th anniversary, has been bringing you a five-part series of in-depth supplements examining some of the most pressing issues. Today, we present the concluding part of the 200-page supplement, themed

PRIORITIES FOR TOMORROW

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MANIFESTO EXPECTATIONS

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

Commit to equity, quality in edn

ARAFAT RAHMAN

Political parties must place education at the centre of their manifestos and pledge to address deep-rooted problems – from poor learning outcomes to widening inequality in the sector, say educationists.

They also stress the need for research-based policies and stronger governance to restore public confidence in the education system.

Manzoor Ahmed, professor emeritus at BRAC

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STORIES, PHOTOS FROM THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL ON PAGE 2



In the run-up to February 12 polls, Shakeel Anwar visits outlying constituencies to hear directly from voters about their hopes, demands and expectations.

An election in the shadow of grief

SHAKEEL ANWAR from Rangpur

As the February 12 elections approach, Bangladesh's political conversation is growing louder, shaped by party narratives, elite analysis and the arithmetic of power. I wanted to step away

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TOUCH THE FUTURE

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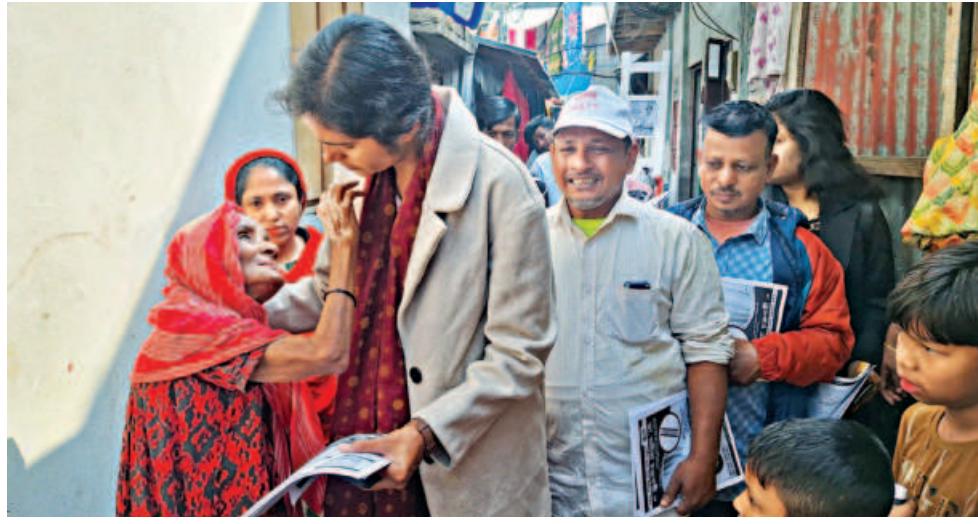
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18 DAYS TO VOTE



ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL.. Clockwise from top left: Islami Andolan Bangladesh Ameer Mufti Syed Muhammad Rezaul Karim addresses a rally in support of the party candidate for Dhaka-3. BNP candidate Shafiqul Haque Milon, from Rajshahi-3, during a voter outreach programme in Naohata. Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal nominee Dr Manisha Chakraborty, from Barishal-5, meets voters in town. The National Citizen Party unveils its election theme song at Shahbagh. The photos were taken yesterday.

'Engaging children in sports, culture can curb online harm'

Tarique addresses reels competition winners; Zaima urges awareness against online harassment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman yesterday said effective primary education and engaging children in productive activities would help reduce the misuse of the internet and harmful exposure among the youth, stressing his party's plans to include sports and culture in school curricula.



"If we teach children from an early age what is right and what is wrong, what is fair and what is unfair, then when a child reaches a certain stage, these ideas will stay in their mind."

"When these children pass primary and secondary education and enter society -- whether in business, jobs or other professions -- they will gradually apply these social values," he said at a meet and greet with 10 winners of the national reel-making competition "Amar Bhaban Bangladesh" at Justice Shahabuddin Park in the capital's Gulshan yesterday afternoon.

Emphasising the role of primary school teachers, he said, "A primary teacher shows a child the world. If teachers teach values properly, children will remember them. This is how gradual change can be brought."

"That's why we want to give more importance to primary education. Our goal is not to build new three or four-storey school buildings. Instead, we want to use that budget to make primary teachers more qualified and provide them with training."

About internet misuse and exposure to harmful content, Tarique said more work was needed in this area. "A child between the ages of

SEE PAGE 9 COL 4

BNP leader shot on Thursday night, dies

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A union-level BNP leader in Dhaka's Keraniganj upazila died at a hospital in the capital yesterday after he was shot by unidentified individuals on Thursday night.

Hasan Molla died while undergoing treatment at Holy Family Red Crescent Medical College Hospital around 3:00pm, Jahangir Alam, additional superintendent of police (Keraniganj Circle), told The Daily Star.

Police are investigating the shooting incident and trying to arrest those involved, he added.

Hasan, general secretary of BNP's Hazratpur union unit, was shot near his residence in Keraniganj's Dhalikandi around 9:30pm on Thursday.

Critically injured, he was first taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

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BNP dismisses India deal claim as 'disinformation'

Slams fraudulent attempts centring its welfare plans

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP has rejected the claim of a deal with India, calling it "complete disinformation meant to create controversy" ahead of the election.

Mahdi Amin, spokesperson for the BNP's election steering committee, outlined the party's position at a press conference at the party office in the capital's Gulshan yesterday.

His remarks followed a statement by Jamaat Nayeb-e-Ameer Syed Abdullah Mohammad Taher, who claimed at a rally in Cumilla that a party was "making a deal with India" to rule the country.

Responding, Mahdi said, "Naturally, he could not and will not be able to present any proof to support his claim. The information in his claim that appeared in the media has no minimum basis in reality and no truth at all."

"If he was given wrong information or this was done to spread confusion, then that is his ignorance? We believe it is either a political tactic or ignorance."

Mahdi emphasised that BNP's politics is pro-Bangladesh. "The politics of our leader Tarique Rahman puts Bangladesh first -- Bangladesh's interests, sovereignty and empowerment of the people," he said.

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9 Indian officials leave Rampal plant without approval

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

Nine Indian officials from the Rampal Power Plant, operated by the Bangladesh-India Friendship Power Company Limited (BIFPCL), have left Bangladesh without prior approval.

The plant's Deputy General Manager (Public Relations), Anwarul Azim, told The Daily Star yesterday, "Nine Indian officials, including eight engineers and one finance officer, left the plant today without formally notifying the authorities. We only became aware of their departure this morning when they were absent from their posts."

The plant authorities later confirmed that the officials had returned to India without informing the management.

Anwarul added that the authorities are investigating the reasons behind their sudden departure.

"Despite their sudden exit, there will be no disruptions to the plant's operations. Our local engineers are capable of managing the facility independently, and we do not anticipate any technical or operational issues," he said.

Further action will be taken after reviewing the circumstances of the incident, he added.

Man killed, dismembered

Woman arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police have arrested a woman after recovering the body parts of a murdered butcher in Bayezid Bostami, Chattogram.

The victim, Anis, 38, was identified after police recovered parts of his body from canals and other locations in the Shahidnagar and Loharpur areas over two days until Friday.

Amirul Islam, deputy commissioner of Chattogram Metropolitan Police, said at a press briefing on Friday night that Sufia, 39, a resident of Raozan, was arrested from Shahidnagar after police confirmed the victim's identity.

Acting on her statement, police recovered additional body parts, he said, adding that Sufia's brother may also be involved.

Police have also detained two more individuals for questioning in connection with the incident.

Earlier, police recovered two severed hands and two legs of an unidentified person from two separate locations near the Oxygen intersection on Thursday night. A forensic team later confirmed the victim's identity through fingerprint matching.

Police said Anis was a resident of Raozan upazila and worked as a butcher in the Oxygen area.

Later, police recovered his head from a canal in the Loharpur area on Friday afternoon.

Zahedul Kabir, officer in charge of Bayezid Bostami Police Station, said Sufia and Anis had been in an extramarital relationship for a long time.

"Recently, a dispute arose between them. Following this, the killing took place," he said, adding that the body parts were disposed of in different locations in an attempt to conceal the crime.

Police said further investigation was under way.

'The days of neglecting Dhaka-9 over'

Says Tasnim Jara as she reveals her six-point manifesto

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



Tasnim Jara, an independent candidate for the Dhaka-9 constituency and a former NCP leader, yesterday unveiled her six-point election manifesto on Facebook, pledging to address the area's long-standing problems.

Sharing the manifesto on Facebook, she said she would present a concrete action plan to resolve the issues if elected.

"The days of neglecting Dhaka-9 are over. We pay equal taxes; our rights must be equal. This time, we will claim our fair share," she said, referring to her constituency, which covers Khilgaon, Sobujbagh, and Mugga thana areas under the Dhaka South City Corporation.

Though not a "professional politician", Tasnim said she belongs to the area.

"During elections, leaders come, take votes, and disappear. The state treats us only as a source of revenue. We pay the same taxes as Gulshan Banani but receive third-class services," she wrote, outlining proposals to end the disparity.

She proposed a 'No Service, No Bill' policy for gas and utility services and promised to draft a law in parliament to enforce it. She also vowed to dismantle the

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Family, farmers cards BNP ploy to buy votes: Nahid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nahid Islam, convener of the National Citizen Party (NCP) and the 10-party alliance candidate for Dhaka-11, yesterday alleged that the BNP is using family and farmer cards to buy votes.

"People do not trust these promises anymore. They want implementation because they have heard too many false assurances in the past," Nahid told journalists while campaigning at Queens Garden area in his constituency, where he inaugurated an election office.

He also alleged that the BNP is violating the electoral code of conduct and intimidating NCP activists.

Nahid claimed that the party has prepared a list of NCP well-wishers, supporters, and activists and is either filing false cases against them or planning to "deal with them" after the polls.

The NCP leader said BNP activists were hanging and plastering posters in the area in clear violation of the electoral code of conduct, while his banners and posters were being torn down.

"We are witnessing an atmosphere of fear in different areas of my constituency," he said, adding that the prevailing environment is not conducive for voters to cast their votes freely.

"If we see the Election Commission lose its neutrality at the final stage, we will launch an all-out movement against it. This is our warning," he said.

He also alleged that land grabbing and illegal occupation have intensified since August 5 under a specific political group.

"Land grabbing is continuing, particularly by our rival candidate. We are committed to fighting corruption, discrimination, and authoritarianism," he said, reaffirming his pledge to push

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1



A high-level delegation from Unesco visits The Daily Star Centre in Dhaka yesterday to express solidarity with the newspaper following the December 19 mob attacks and arson at its headquarters. Officials from Unesco headquarters in Paris and its Dhaka office toured the fire-damaged sections on the first and second floors.

Security, stability top voter concerns in Dhaka-10

SHARIF M SHAFIQUE and SADI MUHAMMAD ALOK



Voters want more than a power shift; they want an end to corruption, extortion and misrule.

MD JASHIM UDDIN SARKER
Jamaat candidate

If corruption, land grabbing, or extortion occurs, I ask the people to contact me directly.



SHEIKH RABIUL ALAM
BNP candidate

regarded as one of the capital's most "elite" constituencies.

The constituency encompasses vital landmarks, including Dhanmondi Lake, New Market, Jigatola, Tannery Mor, Sat Masjid Road, Green Road, Abahani Grounds, Square Hospital, Shukrabad, Sobhanbagh, Dhaka City College, and Dhaka College.

Despite the modern roads and high-

rises, Dhanmondi and Kalabagan frequently witness incidents of mugging and extortion.

Meanwhile, densely populated areas such as Hazaribagh, Jigatola and Kamrangirchar suffer from chronic waterlogging, gas shortages, and a lack of playgrounds.

Mohammad Kabir, who has been running a tea stall in different parts of Dhanmondi for nearly 30 years, said he has faced repeated evictions despite assurances from politicians about permanent space.

Driven by the need for a livelihood, he has set up his stall once again. Now a voter of Dhaka-10, his perspective is grounded in survival.

"The country has many problems, but I believe unemployment is the foremost," Kabir told The Daily Star. "Unemployment fuels crime, theft, mugging and drug abuse. The new government's top priority should be top priority."

The New Market area, a major commercial and educational hub, continues to face traffic congestion,

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Partho calls for unity, peaceful campaign

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Barishal



Bangladesh Jatiya Party Chairman Andaleeve Rahman Partho yesterday received a warm and enthusiastic welcome as he returned to his hometown Bhola for a public outreach programme after eight years.

Partho arrived in Barishal by road from Dhaka before travelling to Bhola by speedboat from Laharhat.

People lined the riverbank, roadsides and even rooftops to see and greet the Bhola-born leader.

Addressing the

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

Plots afoot to undermine July uprising Says Mamunul

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Pirojpur



Chief of Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis Mamunul Haque yesterday alleged that a conspiracy is gradually taking shape to undermine the July uprising, which he said was achieved through the collective participation of students and general people.

He made the remarks while addressing an election rally of Jamaat-e-Islami at Pirojpur-2 constituency at Government Swarupkathi Model Secondary School field in Nesarabad upazila

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Professor Salimullah Khan speaks at the ninth episode of Itihas Adda, titled "Abu Mohamed Habibullah's Itihas Chorcha," held at The Daily Star Centre yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

ABM Habibullah redefined how Bengal's history is read

Say speakers at Star Itihas Adda

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

For decades, history in this region focused on dynasties, wars and imperial courts, but Professor ABM Habibullah shifted attention to trade, culture and the social lives of ordinary people in Bengal, said speakers at an event yesterday.

Academics and journalists made the remarks at the ninth episode of Itihas Adda, titled "Abu Mohamed Habibullah's Itihas Chorcha," held at The Daily Star Centre.

They said Habibullah's work challenged colonial interpretations of history and traced the independent roots of Bangalee Muslim identity.

Professor Salimullah Khan described Habibullah as a lone figure in the intellectual landscape of East Bengal, noting that he stood outside the dominant historical traditions centred on Calcutta or Aligarh.

He said Habibullah's scholarship directly countered the views of colonial-era historians, including Sir Jadunath Sarkar.

"Jadunath Sarkar believed that any significant achievement of the Muslim community in India took place only during the Mughal period," Salimullah said.

"Habibullah Sir rejected that idea. He argued that the Turko-Afghan period, or the Sultanate era, laid the real foundation of Muslim rule and civilisation in the subcontinent," he added.

Salimullah also explained Habibullah's reading of Bengal's long political independence from Delhi during the Sultanate period.

According to Habibullah, Bengal remained independent for more than two centuries because of its control over maritime trade routes dominated by Arab merchants.

"As long as the Arabs controlled the Indian Ocean, Bengal

maintained an independent connection with the wider world," Salimullah said.

"When the Portuguese defeated the Arabs and took control of the sea routes, that link was broken. Bengal was then forced to look inward towards Delhi and eventually lost its sovereignty to the Mughals," he added.

Salimullah further said Habibullah's method could be used to question later historical interpretations, including those of historian Richard Eaton on mass conversion in Bengal.

He said Islam in Bengal evolved from an urban, merchant-based religion into a rural social force during the independent Sultanate period, driven mainly by Sufis and missionaries rather than imperial authority.

Md Anisur Rahman, a researcher and teacher at Jagannath

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Dialogue key to navigating bilateral challenges

Says Fouzul at India's Republic Day event

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The challenges of the bilateral relationship between Bangladesh and India should be approached as opportunities for renewed dialogue, said Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Adviser Muhammad Fouzul Kabir Khan yesterday.

"Like any neighbour, our bilateral relations do have challenges, but our shared experience shows that we have overcome challenges in the past and renewed our partnership for the greater good of the people," he said at India's Republic Day event organised by the Indian High Commission at a city hotel.

The event was attended by politicians, diplomats, journalists, academics, business leaders and civil society members.

"Guided by goodwill, mutual trust and respect, Bangladesh aims to foster strong relations with its neighbouring countries, including India, and expects those relations to be based on fairness, mutual dignity and equity," Fouzul said.

"We are committed to advancing this relationship through a people-centric approach. Placing the welfare of our people at its core, I am confident that our ties will continue to grow," he said.

"Our shared geography reminds us that what unites us -- the rivers, the forests, the mountains, the music, the writings and the dreams of our people -- is more powerful than what divides us," he said.

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China-backed hospital to boost healthcare in north

TOHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY and MD ASADUZ ZAMAN

The government is set to build a 1,000-bed hospital in Nilphamari at a cost of Tk 2,459 crore, with most of the funds supposed to be coming from China, to improve access to modern healthcare in the northern region.

Officials said a project to establish the "Bangladesh China Friendship Hospital" is expected to be placed before the ECNEC meeting today.

The project, titled "Establishment of a 1,000-bed Bangladesh-China Friendship General Hospital to provide advanced medical services to the people of the northern region and neighbouring countries," is scheduled to be implemented from January this year to December 2029.

Of the total cost, China is supposed to contribute Tk 2,280 crore as investment and grant, while the government will fund the remaining amount.

Once completed, the facility will be the first 1,000-bed hospital located at a district headquarters, as all existing hospitals of similar

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Hindus will no longer have to live in fear: Fakhrul

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Thakurgaon



BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday said that the party will ensure peace and security for all citizens if it is voted to power.

Fakhrul, also BNP's candidate from Thakurgaon-1 constituency, was addressing an election rally in Auliapur union of Thakurgaon Sadar upazila.

He said the foremost responsibility of a BNP government would be to ensure peace and security for all.

Claiming that the BNP always stands with the Hindu community, he said there is fear and anxiety among Hindu voters, as many believe that if they vote for someone else, they may be harmed.

"Our Hindu brothers and sisters will no longer have to live in fear. This country is yours. You have the same rights as Muslims. It must be remembered that we are all equal citizens of the same country," he also said.

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Postal ballots must reach ROs by 4:30pm on polling day: EC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission yesterday said postal ballots for the national elections and referendum will be counted only if they reach the returning officer by 4:30pm on polling day, February 12.

"Postal Vote BD registered voters should cast their ballots promptly and submit the yellow envelope at the nearest post office or mailbox," said Brigadier General Saleem Ahmad Khan, head of the EC's Out of Country Voting System Development and Implementation Initiative.

Postal voting for expatriates, government officials on election duty and people in lawful custody opened at 5:00pm on January 21.

Bangladesh currently has 12.76 crore registered voters. Of them, 1,533,683 voters - 1,281,435 men and 252,246 women -- have registered through the Postal Vote BD app.

Ahead of the twin polls, the EC has dispatched 7,28,023 postal ballots to voters in 122 countries.

Voters will receive ballot papers bearing electoral symbols and will be able to cast their votes by email.

According to EC data, Saudi Arabia recorded the highest number of registrations at 2,39,186.

District-wise, Cumilla topped the list with 1,12,090 registered overseas voters, followed by Dhaka with 1,08,757.

In addition to expatriates, 7,61,141 voters, comprising officials engaged in election duties and people in lawful custody, have registered under the Postal Vote BD system.

Among them, 6,285 registrants are in legal custody.

While postal voting has been part of Bangladesh's electoral process since 1972, this is the first time the EC has introduced an IT-supported online postal voting system.

The commission said expatriate voters will not be charged, although the cost per ballot under the Postal Vote BD system is Tk 700.



Fish farmers strain to catch fish from a wetland in the Rajshahi district, as the rapid drying of waterbodies there has forced them to harvest early. This vast wetland in Mohanpur upazila's Mailiboli area, replete with water just a few days ago, is now nearly dry. In the coming days, Boro rice will be planted here, turning it green again, as farmers have already begun planting nearby fields. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

Security, stability top voter concerns

FROM PAGE 3

footpath encroachment by hawkers and unplanned parking. Frequent waterlogging and recurring clashes between students and traders further disrupt daily life.

Abu Sayeed Rubel, member secretary of the New Market Traders' Association, said ensuring security and maintaining a stable business environment are their main demands from the next MP.

As the election approaches, candidates have intensified door-to-door campaigns and courtyard meetings to understand local grievances.

Md Jashim Uddin Sarker, the Jamaat-e-Islami candidate for Dhaka-10, said voter enthusiasm has increased, especially among young people who were unable to vote in 2014 and 2018.

"They want more than a power shift; they want an end to corruption, extortion and misrule," he said, identifying security, drainage and gas supply as key issues.

"Extortion, mugging, and

the teen gang culture are major threats. Traders live in constant fear of extortion," he said, promising to solve these issues in phases if elected.

He also stressed the need for a level playing field, citing the recent killing of Osman Hadi as evidence that armed criminals remain active.

BNP candidate Sheikh Rabiul Alam described Dhaka-10 as a diverse constituency, housing both working class and elite residential zones, with varying voter expectations.

"I have adopted a strategy to reach people by considering these differing realities," he said.

Emphasising the BNP's goal of establishing a participatory state system and an accountable government, Rabiul said, "In the past, many MPs of this constituency were not residents of this area. Many voters feel that elected representatives disappear after elections."

"I live here and have always stood beside the people, even during the last 17 difficult years. By any

means, I will be here for the people," he said.

He pledged zero tolerance for political criminalisation.

"If corruption, land grabbing, or extortion occurs, I ask the people to contact me directly," he said, urging everyone to vote spontaneously.

Both major candidates promised to address long-standing tensions between students and traders in the New Market area.

Other candidates contesting in this constituency are -- Md A Awal (Islami Andolan Bangladesh), Nasreen Sultan (AB Party), Abu Hanif Hridoy (Bangladesh Republican Party), Abul Kalam Azad (Bangladesh Labor Party), Anisur Rahman (Muktijote), Abdulla Al Hussain (Amjanata Dal), Bani Bepari (Jatiya Party), and Md Zakir Hossain (Janata Dal).

Dhaka-10 has 3,88,660 voters -- up by 63,727 from the last election -- including 2,04,604 men, 1,84,050 women and six hijra voters.

Partho calls

FROM PAGE 3

gathering, Partho said, "There is no alternative to BNP-Bangladesh Jatiya Party unity," urging locals, leaders and activists to put aside differences and remain united.

He also said although he might become a lawmaker, Golam Nabi Alamgir would remain the guardian of the constituency.

Partho told voters that if elected, he would ensure that people would be able to "sleep peacefully," adding that no injustice would be tolerated.

Referring to his family legacy, he said his father had never wronged anyone. "People in Dhaka may like me, but the people of Bholo love me. Bholo is my home. My symbol is the bullock cart," he added.

He also called for peaceful campaigning, urging supporters to ensure that other candidates could conduct election activities without obstruction and that no violence or deterioration of law and order takes place.

China-backed

FROM PAGE 3

capacity are currently situated in divisional cities.

Apart from serving the northern region, the hospital will also provide treatment to patients from neighbouring countries, marking a significant development in Bangladesh's medical sector, health officials said.

The main hospital building will be 10-storey high with a semi-basement. Two additional 10-storey buildings will be constructed for doctors, along with a six-storey building for nurses and two 10-storey buildings for other staff members.

Separate structures will be built for a mosque, kitchen, waste management, and other services. The hospital will also include a helipad and an automated ambulance system, according to project documents.

After China expressed interest in investing in a large hospital in Bangladesh, the interim government decided to locate the facility in the northern region, which lacks advanced healthcare infrastructure.

Currently, most patients from the area depend on Rangpur Medical College Hospital or facilities in Dhaka for advanced treatment.

Following demands from residents of several northern districts for a major medical facility, the health administration selected Nilphamari after conducting a study with a government organisation.

A senior official of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), speaking anonymously, said China had initially proposed Dhaka as the site, but the interim government preferred to build the hospital outside the capital.

Nilphamari was eventually chosen partly due to the presence of a large number of Chinese nationals working at the Uttara Export Processing Zone in the district, he said.

The hospital site has been selected at Itakhola Union, beside the Daraoni Textile Mill, about five kilometres from the Nilphamari district headquarters, said district Civil Surgeon Abdur Razzaque yesterday.

He said 25 acres of khas land have already been earmarked for the project due to the area's strategic advantages.

The site is located around 25 kilometres from Syedpur Airport, the railway station, and the local BGB office, with the Uttara EPZ nearby.

The civil surgeon said that although a medical college was established in Nilphamari in 2018, it does not have an attached hospital. As a result, residents depend on the existing 250-bed district hospital, which lacks key facilities, including an intensive care unit.

According to government documents, Nilphamari has a population of around 21 lakh and requires between 45,000 and 60,000 hospital beds under World Health Organization standards.

However, the shortage of facilities forces residents to seek treatment in Rangpur or Dhaka, significantly increasing healthcare costs.

The documents also note a rising prevalence of non-communicable diseases in the northern region, including cardiovascular diseases, cancer, and diabetes.

The planned hospital will offer both general and specialised services, including ICU, CCU, and HDU facilities, along with modern diagnostic and surgical capabilities.

PRAYER TIMING JANUARY 25			
Faz	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib
AZAN 5:35	12:45	4:15	5:46
JAMAT 6:10	1:15	4:30	7:15

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

Date: 24/01/2026

প্লট ক্রয়
বসন্তো আবাসিক এলাকায় এম. এন. ও পি. বি. কে. মেকেন সাইজের প্লট করা করতে আছে। শুধুমাত্র সরাবার জমির মালিকগন যোগাযোগ করুন।
মোবাইল: ০১২২৪-৬৬৬ ১২২

Date: 24/01/2026

e-Tender Notice (Revised)

FROM PAGE 3
He outlined several pledges, including creation of jobs for one crore people and issuance of health cards.

Referring to the Liberation War of 1971, Fakhrul said those now seeking votes for the scales had opposed Bangladesh's independence.

"This time we have the opportunity to take the right decision. Vote for the sheaf of paddy and strengthen the hands of those who stand for independence and speak about family cards, agriculture cards, health cards and strengthening law and order," he added.

Referring to his family legacy, he said his father had never wronged anyone. "People in Dhaka may like me, but the people of Bholo love me. Bholo is my home. My symbol is the bullock cart," he added.

He also called for peaceful campaigning, urging supporters to ensure that other candidates could conduct election activities without obstruction and that no violence or deterioration of law and order takes place.

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INTERNATIONAL

Snow, heavy rain kill 61 in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

Snow and heavy rain have killed 61 people in Afghanistan in the last three days, the disaster management authority said yesterday.

The deaths occurred between Wednesday and Friday, mainly in central and northern provinces of the country, according to a map released by ANDMA.

The "initial figures of casualties and destruction" also include 110 injured people and 458 houses either partially or fully destroyed, it added.

The Salang highway, one of Afghanistan's main roads, has been closed, the provincial authority for Parwan said. Food supplies were distributed to travellers stuck on a mountain pass in the central Bamyan province.



Aurora borealis lights up the sky above a The Nuuk cathedral in Nuuk, Greenland, on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

Israeli strike kills 2 teenagers in Gaza

US envoys in Israel for talks

AFP, Gaza City

Gaza's civil defence agency said Israeli forces killed two teenagers in a drone strike yesterday, while the military said it eliminated two "terrorists" who planted an explosive device near troops.

The civil defence agency said the drone killed the two near Kamal Adwan Hospital in Beit Lahia, in northern Gaza. The territory's Al Shifa Hospital said it received the two bodies, adding they were two boys aged 13 and 15.

The Israeli military said the pair had posed an "immediate threat" to its soldiers as they crossed the Yellow Line and planted an explosive device in the area. Under a US brokered ceasefire that came into effect on October 10, Israeli forces have withdrawn to positions behind a so-called "Yellow Line" in Gaza, though they remain in control of more than half of the territory.

Israeli forces have killed at least 477 Palestinians in Gaza since the ceasefire took effect.

Meanwhile, US envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner were in Israel yesterday to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, mainly to discuss Gaza.

The US on Thursday announced plans for a "New Gaza" rebuilt from scratch, to include residential towers, data centres and seaside resorts.

Trump seeking to forge 'new UN': Lula

AFP, Brasilia

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva accused Donald Trump on Friday of trying to create "a new UN" with his proposed "Board of Peace."

The veteran leftist joins other world leaders who have avoided signing up for Trump's new global conflict resolution organisation, where a permanent seat costs \$1 billion and the chairman is Trump himself.

"Instead of fixing" the United Nations, "what's happening? President Trump is proposing to create a new UN where only he is the owner," Lula said.

Trump unveiled his "Board of Peace" at the World Economic Forum in Davos Thursday, joined on stage by leaders and officials from 19 countries to sign its founding charter.

Lula defended multilateralism against what he called "the law of the jungle" in global affairs.

His remarks come a day after he spoke by phone with Chinese leader Xi Jinping, who urged his counterpart to safeguard the "central role" of the United Nations in international affairs.

US to limit support for allies

Priority shifts to homeland security; curbing China remains main global focus

AGENCIES

The US military will prioritize protecting the homeland and deterring China while providing "more limited" support to allies in Europe and elsewhere, a Pentagon strategy document released on Friday said.

The 2026 National Defense Strategy (NDS) marks a significant departure from past Pentagon policy, both in its emphasis on allies taking on increased burdens with less backing from Washington, and its softer tone on traditional foes China and Russia.

"As US forces focus on homeland defense and the Indo-Pacific, our allies and partners elsewhere will take primary responsibility for their own defense with critical but more limited support from American forces," the strategy said.

The previous NDS -- released under President Donald Trump's predecessor Joe Biden -- described China as Washington's most consequential challenge and said that Russia posed an "acute threat."

Latin America tops the US 'global' focus

'Respectful relations' with Beijing sought

Russia threat seen as 'persistent but manageable'

Pentagon foresees 'more limited' role in deterring North Korea

The new document however urges "respectful relations" with Beijing -- while making no mention of US ally Taiwan, which China claims as its territory -- and describing the threat from Russia as a "persistent but manageable" one affecting Nato's eastern members.

Both the Biden and Trump strategies say homeland defense is important, but their descriptions of the threats facing the US differ significantly.

The Trump administration's NDS takes aim at the past administration for neglecting border security, saying this led to a "flood of illegal aliens" and widespread narcotics trafficking.

"Border security is national security," and the Pentagon "will therefore prioritize efforts to seal our borders, repel forms of invasion, and deport illegal aliens," it said.

The 2026 NDS also includes no mention of the dangers of climate change.

Like Trump's national security strategy, which was released last month, the NDS elevates Latin America to the top of the US agenda. The document called that the "Trump Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine," a reference to the declaration two centuries ago by the then-young United States that Latin America was off limits to rival powers.

The Pentagon also foresees a "more limited" role in deterring North Korea, with South Korea taking primary responsibility, a move that could lead to a reduction of US forces on the Korean Peninsula.

Suicide blast at wedding kills 7 in Pakistan

REUTERS, Dera Ismail Khan

The death toll from a suicide bombing at a wedding near the Afghan border rose to seven yesterday, police said.

The bombing tore through a building housing members of a peace committee during a wedding ceremony on Friday in northwestern Pakistan's Dera Ismail Khan district, said a police official.

The committees are made up of local residents and elders and supported by Islamabad as part of its efforts to counter militants in the regions along the Afghan border.

No group has claimed responsibility for the bombing.

Probe points to feud over extortion: DMP

FROM PAGE 12
He added that police were working to dismantle the syndicates and would conduct further drives.

Musabbir, a former general secretary of Sweekhaseb Dal's Dhaka North City unit, was shot dead on January 7 in an alley off Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue.

His wife filed a murder case with Tejgaon Police Station the following day, accusing four to five unidentified assailants.

On January 11, the DB arrested four suspects -- Zinnat, Abdul Kadir, Md Reaz, and Md Bilal. Another alleged shooter, Rahim, was arrested from Narsingdi on Tuesday, bringing

the total number of arrestees to five.

Asked about their identities, Shafiqul said they should be described as extortionists rather than political activists.

"Extortionists have no political ideology. They use political banners only as a cover," he said.

According to DB sources, Dilip is a close aide of a top criminal from the Tejgaon area.

After the 2024 political changeover, Dilip allegedly began extorting money from businessmen who had shifted their operations from the Bashundhara area to locations near Karwan Bazar.

When some shop owners refused to

pay, he allegedly threatened them over the phone. A video of such threats later circulated on social media.

Musabbir's family has remained largely silent since the incident and declined to speak on record.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, a family member said they had never heard the name Dilip or Binash before police mentioned it.

"We even spoke to businessmen in the Karwan Bazar area, and they also said they had not heard of anyone extorting money under that name," the family member said.

"We want the truth to come out quickly and the perpetrators to be brought to justice."

'Play a more effective role'

FROM PAGE 12
Everyone should be able to speak freely and campaign independently."

Majumdar also said that "money is playing a big role in the election".

He said the authorities should have formed election expenditure monitoring committees for one or more constituencies to reduce costs, prevent irregularities, and ensure control over election spending. But this was not implemented, leaving the previous system intact.

Majumdar noted that although the existing Representation of the People Order provides for nominations based on such panels, no political party has created panels reflecting grassroots opinion nor

nominated candidates from them. "This is a clear violation of the law, and the Election Commission has taken no action," he said.

Presenting the keynote paper, Sarkar said, "People want democracy to be institutionalised, the rule of law to be established, and good governance to prevail in all spheres of the state. There is no alternative to a free and fair election to fulfil these aspirations. Only through such an election can democratic transition truly begin."

A final farewell

FROM PAGE 12
bucket of water and later took her own life," he claimed.

Swarnali's father, local Jatiya Party leader Ruhul Amir Howlader, said, "My daughter died by suicide. We do not want to blame anyone. We applied to receive the bodies of my daughter and grandson without delay. Now we will follow whatever decision the administration takes."

Officer-in-charge of Bagerhat Sadar Police Station Mohammad Masum Khan said a murder case had been filed over the death of the child.

"At this stage, whether the death of Swarnali was a murder or a suicide will be determined after the official autopsy report is received," he said, adding that further legal steps would depend on the findings.

He also said issues related to the husband's parole and other arrangements fall under the jurisdiction of the district magistrate, not the police.

Police said the autopsy report had not been received as of 9:00pm yesterday.

A death out of nowhere

FROM PAGE 12

As of last night, the police were still going through CCTV footage from the area and could not confirm from which building the rod fell.

"No one has been arrested yet. The investigation is ongoing," the IO said.

According to the case statement, the incident occurred between 2:00pm and 2:45pm in front of Ashfaq's office on Road-140 in Gulshan I.

At the time, construction work was underway on the 25th floor of the Concord MBR Skyline building located across the road.

Ashfaq's colleague Sazzad Hossain told The Daily Star that they had been standing and talking for five to six minutes when the rod fell from above.

"I am still traumatised. I still can't believe that a lively man, who I was just talking to, could die in such an unfortunate way. This is just unacceptable," Sazzad said.

Ashfaq's brother-in-law, Ashraful Hasan, said Ashfaq's wife and their

11-year-old daughter have been left numb with grief.

"This cannot be described as mere negligence; it was gross negligence that led to a death. Construction work on a 25-storey building along a busy road cannot be carried out without adequate safety measures," he added.

CONCORD STATEMENT
In a statement issued yesterday, Concord Group expressed deep sorrow over the death and conveyed condolences to the victim's family.

The group claimed that at the time of the incident, glass-cleaning work was being carried out at a nearby building, using a scaffold along the footpath. During the work, a small piece of iron rod fell from above and struck the pedestrian on the head, it said.

The statement said workers were seen hurriedly removing the scaffold after the incident. It also claimed that several steel rods were visible on the roof of that building, from where a loose rod may have fallen. Concord

had been hit.

Fires broke out in several buildings hit by drone debris while heat and water services in parts of the capital were interrupted, he said.

Zelensky said Russia had launched "over 370 attack drones and 21 missiles of various types".

The strikes left 88,000 families temporarily without power in Kyiv, according to DTEK, Ukraine's largest energy provider.

Meanwhile, the head of the northern Chernigiv region, Vyacheslav Chaus, said "hundreds of thousands" were without electricity after Russian strikes on a critical energy facility in the Nizhyn district.

Zelensky last week declared a "state of emergency" in the energy sector, batted by relentless Russian strikes on heat and electricity supplies.

While diplomacy to end Europe's worst conflict since World War II has gained pace, Moscow and Kyiv appear deadlocked over the issue of territory.

Hours after Putin met Witkoff -- and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner -- in Moscow, the Kremlin said its demand that Kyiv withdraw from the eastern Donbas region still stood.

"If they don't, they're stupid -- that goes for both of them."

"Russia's position is well known

on the fact that Ukraine, Ukrainian armed forces, have to leave the territory of the Donbas," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

"This is a very important condition," he added.

Kyiv has rejected such terms. "The Donbas is a key issue," Zelensky told reporters on Friday, ahead of the talks.

Zelensky said he and Trump had agreed on post-war security guarantees in Davos.

Russian and Ukrainian negotiators are last known to have met face-to-face in Istanbul last summer, in talks that ended only in deals to exchange captured soldiers.

The Abu Dhabi meeting is the first time they have faced each other to talk about the Trump administration's plan.

Putin has repeatedly said Moscow

Probe points to feud over extortion: DMP

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Venezuela says over 600 prisoners released

AFP, Caracas

Venezuela's interim president Delcy Rodriguez said Friday that over 600 inmates have been released, far more than estimated by rights groups, who

Why have we failed to end migrant workers' abuse?

A sinister nexus has been allowed to thrive

A recent Bloomberg investigation confirms what reports in *The Daily Star* and other media have been trying to establish: that a deliberately engineered system exists through which Bangladesh's migrant workers are recruited, resulting in horrendous exploitations. It is a business model in which workers are charged up to \$6,600 for jobs that are often nonexistent, benefitting everyone in the nexus, including recruiters, political elites, and those working the digital system. Only the worker gets the raw end of the deal, left with huge debts to pay, losing dignity, and in some cases, life itself.

The shocking case of Shofiqul Islam, a Bangladeshi migrant worker who borrowed \$4,400 to get a construction job in Malaysia, only to end up dead in a derelict building outside Kuala Lumpur, is a stark example of the tragic consequences of this nefarious system. Shofiqul, like hundreds of others, reached Malaysia but found that there was no job. His employer disappeared, and he was left stranded in a building.

Over the past decade, more than 800,000 Bangladeshis went to Malaysia, and many of them have fallen into crippling debt, paying for recruitment fees that are far higher than those charged to workers from other countries. Many become victim to debt bondage, forced labour, and human trafficking. Shockingly, all this is happening under the noses of the Malaysian authorities, who seldom do anything meaningful to stop these abuses.

The recruitment process, moreover, is tightly controlled. With a small number of agencies involved, it is facilitated by the introduction of a digitised system under Bestinet, which has actually centralised the corruption. The Bloomberg investigation has identified a Bangladeshi living in Malaysia as allegedly a major player in this system and the founder of Bestinet, who has apparently used political connections in both countries to perpetuate this exploitation.

Even though these abuses were well known and internal discussions about reform had taken place, contracts were extended during the AL regime. Strangely, despite the gravity of Bloomberg's findings, the governments of both countries did not respond to its queries. Even the current government's inaction in ending this exploitation is disturbing. This raises the question: are the remittances that migrant workers send home more important than their rights and their lives? Why have these sinister networks not been dismantled despite all the evidence at hand? In fact, even during the interim government's tenure, official visits of high officials on both sides and promises of solutions have not yielded any change.

There is no denying that workers need to be able to find jobs abroad and that our economy is highly dependent on the remittances they send home. But the state must put an end to this blatant exploitation by breaking the syndicates, enforcing ceilings on fees, and bringing politically connected actors and criminal brokers to book. For the next elected government, these are priority tasks—ensuring that migrant workers pay affordable recruitment fees through legitimate systems, guaranteeing their dignity and safety.

Alarming decline in fish stocks in the Bay

Authorities must take steps to reverse the situation

It is alarming to see the persistent decline in fish stocks in the Bay of Bengal, as well as its effects on the lives of coastal fishing communities. According to an analysis citing the findings of a comprehensive fisheries survey published recently, the stock of small pelagic species—the mainstay of coastal fisheries—has fallen by 78.6 percent in just seven years, from 158,100 tonnes in 2018 to 33,811 tonnes in 2025. The rate at which this is happening is astonishing. Clearly, the crisis goes beyond any temporary or cyclical downturn, with experts pointing to a multidimensional failure rooted in years of overfishing, climate change, pollution, and weak marine governance that has allowed depletion to proceed largely unchecked.

A fall of this magnitude will have serious implications for Bangladesh's food security. Presently, the Bay of Bengal accounts for about 12-15 percent of the country's total fish production, according to a Department of Fisheries report dated June 26, 2025. Fish provide nearly 60 percent of national animal protein intake, while also playing a significant role in blue economy exports. Therefore, if the current trend holds, it is not just the fishing communities that will suffer; the consumers, exporters, and the broader economy will also be affected. While talking to this daily, members of fishing communities spoke of facing debt burdens as catches become unreliable, even during peak seasons, and operating costs rise. Higher market prices do help offset losses to some extent, but not enough to make up for the depleting source of revenue.

The question is, what's causing the crisis? Experts say that no single factor is to blame. Excessive fishing over years has been a major factor, of course, but other reasons including climate change, warming temperature, and the decline in oxygen levels in coastal waters have also disrupted the marine ecosystem in ways that are favouring opportunistic species such as jellyfish, which prey on fish eggs and fry. The decline of natural predators like sea turtles has also upset the predator-prey balance that once kept jellyfish in check. Another factor causing the decline in commercially valuable fish is continued pollution of water.

Considering the gravity and complex nature of this problem, it is vital that the authorities adopt a comprehensive response. They must ensure stricter regulation of fishing activities, protection of critical breeding habitats, and serious action to curb water pollution. Investment in scientific monitoring and enforcement mechanisms is also essential. Equally important is providing support to fishing communities so that any fish conservation effort does not come at the cost of their survival.

EDITORIAL

Chattogram port needs a coherent land-use strategy



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

AHAMEDUL KARIM CHOWDHURY

For more than three decades, one critical weakness has quietly shaped the development of Chattogram Port Authority (CPA): the absence of a comprehensive and transparent land use plan. This is not a minor administrative lapse. It is a strategic failure that has persisted across governments and reform agendas, and it now threatens Bangladesh's ambition to develop Chattogram as a competitive regional port.

As the Bay Terminal project moves forward and international operators prepare to play a greater role in Bangladesh's port sector, the consequences of this long-standing omission are becoming increasingly evident. Decisions involving some of the country's most valuable land assets are being taken without a publicly articulated framework explaining how port land is prioritised, what uses are preferred, or how present choices serve long-term national interests. In a modern port system, land use determines capacity, efficiency, and future growth.

During the 1990s, as containerisation in global trade expanded, and throughout the 2000s, as shipping and logistics became increasingly integrated and time-sensitive, Bangladesh failed to establish a guiding spatial vision for its principal port. Prime waterfront parcels—scarce and irreplaceable assets—were leased for long periods without competitive tendering or strategic reassessment. Facilities that could have evolved into customs-bonded logistics zones or export supporting clusters instead became general purpose rental spaces, renewed routinely and rarely reviewed against changing trade patterns.

These decisions shape the choices facing the CPA today. The ongoing discussion surrounding the Laldia area illustrates this challenge. Laldia is a vacant waterfront site that the CPA has considered for a greenfield concession involving a global operator. Engaging reputable international firms is not, in itself, problematic. Bangladesh needs foreign expertise and capital to expand port capacity and modernise operations.

The concern lies elsewhere: there is no publicly available land-use framework explaining why this specific parcel is being considered, how it fits into a wider spatial plan, or what alternative uses were evaluated. Without such clarity, debate becomes project-specific rather than strategic, and institutional credibility suffers. This is not how major ports communicate decisions involving nationally strategic assets.

Past land allocations highlight

the cost of operating without a plan. Some non-waterfront areas—such as the old X and Y shed zones—were at least partially aligned with off-dock or support functions. At the same time, prime waterfront locations with direct channel access were also used for similar purposes. What planning logic differentiated between these parcels? Why were waterfront and non-waterfront lands treated as interchangeable?

In any world-class port, proximity to the water defines land value and purpose. Using waterfront land for

finally allocated through a structured, competitive tender. The facility is now operational, supporting lighterage activities and generating revenue. This example demonstrates that reform is not theoretical. Where clarity and competition replace informality, the port benefits, and public interests are served.

However, isolated successes cannot compensate for the broader absence of a coherent land-use strategy. Without a masterplan, the CPA faces three serious risks.

First, strategic waterfront assets are being fragmented and gradually lost to suboptimal uses. Once committed under long-term leases, these parcels are extremely difficult to recover without costly disputes and compensation. Bangladesh risks trading the "front porch" of its economy for short-term convenience.

Second, the lack of planning weakens Bangladesh's position with foreign investors. Global terminal operators

a framework, even well-intentioned collaborations may fall short of their potential.

What is needed now is a structured, forward-looking approach to port land management. The CPA should develop a professional, publicly accessible land-use masterplan that identifies all port land, classifies it by strategic function, and outlines intended uses over the coming decades. This process should involve consultation with port users, shipping lines, logistics providers, customs authorities, and exporters to ensure that the plan reflects operational realities as well as policy goals.

In parallel, existing land leases, particularly long-standing ones, should be reviewed to establish a transparent pathway toward competitive, value-based allocation as contracts expire. Waterfront land must be reserved for activities that genuinely require maritime access, while non-waterfront areas can be better utilised for logistics,



FILE PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

'Once waterfront land is misallocated, reclaiming it becomes legally, politically, and financially difficult.'

activities that could be located several kilometres inland is not merely inefficient; it permanently erodes strategic potential. Once such land is misallocated, reclaiming it becomes legally, politically, and financially difficult.

Globally, major port authorities—from Singapore to Rotterdam—anchor land decisions in long-term masterplans, updated regularly to reflect changing economic realities. By contrast, Bangladesh has largely operated on a piecemeal basis, an approach ill-suited to a country aspiring to middle-income status and deeper integration into global supply chains.

To be fair, the CPA has shown that when transparent processes are followed, outcomes improve dramatically. The Sadarghat Lighterage Jetty is a case in point. After lying unused for years, it was

make long-term commitments based on clarity, expansion potential, and regulatory predictability. When these elements are unclear, investors price in institutional risk, and the country risks receiving weaker proposals than its assets deserve.

Third, unplanned land use undermines the competitiveness of the entire port ecosystem. Without designated logistics zones, customs-controlled areas, and value-added clusters, Chattogram cannot match the efficiency of regional competitors such as Colombo or Chennai, let alone emerging hubs in Southeast Asia.

This is not an argument against foreign participation. On the contrary, international operators are essential to Bangladesh's maritime development. But foreign partnerships must operate within a clear planning framework that prioritises long-term value over short-term expediency. Without such

warehousing, and export support.

The Bay Terminal project offers Bangladesh a major opportunity to strengthen its position in regional supply chains. But new terminal capacity alone will not deliver the intended benefits if surrounding land use remains unplanned. A modern terminal cannot compensate for an under-structured hinterland.

Bangladesh's port sector now operates in a far more competitive environment than it did three decades ago. Expectations of transparency are higher, competition is more intense, and strategic missteps carry greater cost. This makes disciplined land-use planning essential. Before further long-term land concessions are finalised, a clear and credible land-use framework must be put in place. This will shape Chattogram Port's role in Bangladesh's development for decades to come.

Fair pay cannot be left to corporate 'goodwill'



Nafis Ehsas Chowdhury is a columnist and studies business at the United International University (UIU). The author acknowledges guidance from Md Jakowan, assistant professor of human resource management at UIU.

NAFIS EHSAS CHOWDHURY

In the air-conditioned classrooms of our universities, we are fed an expensive lie. Many of us spend four years burying our noses in books on marketing theories from the West and human resources philosophies from global conglomerates, which teach us one fundamental truth: human resources are the most valuable asset of an enterprise.

It sounds beautiful. It sounds logical. But when a fresh graduate steps into the corporate reality of Dhaka's offices, that theory doesn't just dissolve; it is ripped apart. The reality we have cultivated in Bangladesh is not just inefficient; it is despicable. We have allowed a culture to fester where employees are not treated as assets, but as liabilities to be tolerated. The corporate elites have weaponised the one thing we have in abundance: our youth. Because of the surplus of graduates, companies know they have the upper hand. They know that for every person asking for a dignified wage, there are 50 others

desperate enough to accept half that. This reserve of the unemployed allows corporations to abuse talent with pay structures that are insulting and treatment that is dehumanising.

The tragedy is that these organisations are shooting themselves in the foot. You cannot bully an employee into productivity. When a person feels unwanted and realises that they are viewed as a burden rather than an asset, their motivation collapses.

We are currently sitting on a goldmine of bright young minds capable of transforming industries. But they are instead suffering, unable to perform adequately because their employers are too stingy to honour their loyalty.

But the true cost of Bangladesh's corporate culture isn't reflected on companies' balance sheets. It is evident in the living rooms of our homes.

Consider the "officer." In our society, this title carries weight—they must look the part, wear the suit, maintain the facade, and keep up an "officer-level"

lifestyle. But with payment structures that haven't kept pace with inflation, many of these professionals are living a lie. They have no savings and are drowning in unpayable liabilities. Most of these high-up professionals are one medical emergency away from ruin.

In an economy like ours, financial instability is the primary building block of domestic chaos. You cannot have a

the system. This implants a trauma in them that is hard to undo, and teaches them that the "straight path" leads to misery.

We are inadvertently pushing our youth towards an unsocial—or rather, anti-social—lifestyle. When the system fails to provide dignity, the path of crime and corruption becomes an attractive alternative.

This must be fixed now. We cannot rely on the "goodwill" of capitalists to

solve a problem they profit from. Fair pay cannot be left to the "goodwill" of corporations; it must be a non-negotiable legal mandate.

We must establish a mandatory salary floor for professionals, scaled to the size and resources of the employer. This

shouldn't be a polite suggestion, but rather a law of the land. Any company that chooses to exploit talent by ignoring these minimums must face swift and severe disciplinary action.

The Ministry of Labour and Employment can no longer remain a passive observer. It needs to launch genuine research and investigations to see if this crisis is accidental or if it is deliberated by powerful lobbies for unethical gain.

We need a higher level of inclusion and transparency. We need to stop pretending that this is just "how the market works." It is time to admit that our culture of employee marginalisation is not just bad business—it is a social crime.

Why the interim government's 'Yes' vote advocacy is legitimate



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has served as a member of the Constitution
Reform Commission (2024-2025) and the
expert legal panel of the National Consensus
Commission (2025).

IMRAN A SIDDIQ

Bangladesh's upcoming July National Charter referendum has triggered a debate that goes beyond the substance of constitutional reform. At the heart of this debate lies this question: can the interim government openly advocate for a "Yes" vote? Detractors warn that government advocacy undermines neutrality, violates democratic norms, and also risks undermining the political process. However, when examined within the country's political context and comparative constitutional practices, the case for principled government advocacy is stronger than critics acknowledge.

Much of the criticism rests on the assumption that the interim government is akin to a conventional non-party caretaker government with a narrow mandate to conduct elections. That assumption is flawed. This government did not assume office under any constitutional provision; it arose from a popular uprising that rejected authoritarian rule and demanded a fundamental restructuring of the political order. Its legality originates from the constituent power of the people, and its legitimacy is derived not merely from political neutrality but from its mandate to pursue reforms that would enable a transition to a more accountable system of governance. The referendum on the July National Charter reforms lies at the heart of this mandate. It is the institutional means by which the reform agenda is placed directly before the people. To insist that the government remain silent on the referendum's outcome is to misunderstand its distinctive character and purpose.

Some argue that the government cannot campaign for a "Yes" vote without influencing the voting process. This argument, however, conflates advocacy with coercion. By supporting the reforms, the government is not denying citizens a choice. No voter is prevented from rejecting the reforms; political parties remain free to campaign for a "No" vote, and any rejection would be binding. If voters approve the reforms, they acquire democratic legitimacy that no uprising alone could supply. By



FILE VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

urging a "Yes" vote, the government is not circumventing public consent but submitting itself to it.

The claim that citizens lose their capacity for independent judgement once a government expresses a preference reflects an authoritarian mindset inherited from the past decade, which sought to regulate every aspect of public life. Democratic theory rests on the opposite premise: that voters are capable of weighing arguments, assessing sources, and deciding for themselves.

Comparative constitutional law offers a useful perspective, particularly through the US Supreme Court's government speech doctrine. Although Bangladesh's legal system is distinct, the doctrine captures a core democratic principle: that governments

mandatory levy on beef producers to fund generic advertising, holding that citizens have no constitutional right to object merely because public funds convey a government message they oppose. In *Pleasant Grove City v. Summum* (2009), the court ruled that monuments in public parks constitute government speech, permitting officials to select which messages to display without violating free speech guarantees.

The reasoning here is straightforward. Democratic governments exist to pursue policies. They may advocate their positions, so long as dissenting voices remain free. Government advocacy becomes objectionable only when it crosses into coercion or suppression, not when it advances a case and submits itself to public judgement.

This balanced approach is echoed in the Council of Europe's guidelines on constitutional referendums. While the Venice Commission emphasises that "the national, regional and local authorities must not influence the outcome of the vote by excessive, one-sided campaigning," it explicitly recognises that "contrary to the case of elections, it is not necessary to completely prohibit the intervention of the authorities supporting or opposing a proposal

between neutrality and political leadership.

Bangladesh must therefore assess this question on its own constitutional and political terms, especially given the transitional, post-uprising context in which this referendum is taking place. There is no constitutional or legal bar preventing the interim government from supporting a "Yes" vote, nor is a reasonable use of public funds for campaigning questionable. The interim government derives its authority from the constituent power of the people and holds office on the strength of its commitment to comprehensive state reforms. In that context, it is not only permitted but also morally obliged to campaign in support of the reforms and submit them to popular approval.

History shows that transitional governments often advocate constitutional reform in the aftermath of popular uprisings. Following Egypt's 2011 revolution, interim authorities actively campaigned for constitutional changes, explaining the need for reform and urging public approval through successive referendums. Tunisia's post-Arab Spring transition similarly featured state-led advocacy as part of redefining the political order.

In Bangladesh, the interim government is expected to be neutral with respect to the forthcoming elections, but it is not—and need not be—neutral on the reform agenda. It has already established multiple reform commissions precisely to pursue far-reaching changes. Government advocacy in favour of a "Yes" vote is therefore entirely proper. In this context, advocacy is not authoritarian; it is a necessary element of democratic reconstruction. The government's silence in the name of neutrality would not protect democracy; it may weaken it. Citizens are entitled to know what the government believes the uprising stood for, which reforms it supports, and why those reforms matter.

The July National Charter referendum presents a clear constitutional question of whether Bangladesh should adopt safeguards designed to prevent the re-emergence of unchecked executive power, or retain the existing constitutional framework. A vote in favour of the charter is not an endorsement of the interim government. It is an endorsement of reform, institutional restraint, and decentralisation of power. The interim government is legally and democratically entitled to articulate this position. The ultimate determination, however, rests with the people.

Greenland and the return of empire politics



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Khan Saifur Rahman and Associates in Dhaka.

KHAN KHALID ADNAN

The international order built after World War II rests on one hard rule: states may not threaten or use force to take territory. Article 2(4) of the United Nations (UN) Charter was written to make conquest illegitimate, not just unpopular. The UN's Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations later reaffirmed that borders are not to be changed by coercion. Thus, when a great power signals that sovereignty is negotiable, smaller states should read it as a systemic warning, not colourful rhetoric.

In early January, President Donald Trump revived and escalated his push for the United States to take Greenland. On January 10, he said the US would act on Greenland "whether they like it or not," adding that it could be done "the easy way" or "the hard way." That was not bargaining, but more so a threat to change borders using pressure.

A new development now complicates the picture further. At the World Economic Forum in Davos on January 21, Trump said he would not use force to acquire Greenland and spoke of a "framework" for an Arctic and Greenland arrangement being discussed with Nato Secretary General Mark Rutte. The next day, Denmark's prime minister reiterated that Arctic security can be discussed, but only "with respect for our territorial integrity," and Greenlandic parliamentarian Aaja Chemnitz stressed that nothing can be negotiated without Greenland's participation. Meanwhile, it is reported that the emerging idea is not a sovereignty transfer, but an update to existing defence arrangements, alongside Arctic security and raw materials cooperation.

Developments since Davos underline why wording matters. Trump has since touted the understanding as giving the US "total access" to Greenland, even as Denmark and Greenland maintain that sovereignty is not negotiable and key details remain uncertain. Denmark and Nato are discussing how the whole alliance should step up Arctic security,

including talks to revise the 1951 agreement governing US military presence on the island. If the framework is to be off-ramp rather than a precedent, it should be negotiated transparently with Nuuk, Greenland's capital, at the table, and it should explicitly reaffirm sovereignty while focusing on defined defence tasks, basing rights, and funding.

A renunciation of force is welcome. But it does not erase earlier threats, and it does not satisfy the deeper question: can territorial ambition be pursued through intimidation instead of invasion?

In Davos, Trump framed Greenland as something the US "needs" and hinted that refusal from Greenland would carry consequences. If the goal is still to gain control, the method matters less than the message: borders can be bent to the will of the strong.

Greenland is not an ownerless prize on a map. It is a self-governing country within the Kingdom of Denmark. Under the 2009 Act on Greenland Self-Government, Greenland manages most of its own domestic affairs, while Copenhagen (Denmark's capital) retains responsibility for foreign affairs, defence, and security policy. The Act recognises Greenlanders as a people with the right to self-determination, including the option of independence. "Acquisition" is therefore an error of category error and any legitimate change in status must happen through Greenlanders' freely expressed choice and Denmark's constitutional role.

This is why the most basic flaw in Washington's posture has been political as much as it is legal. Greenland's future cannot be negotiated over Greenlanders' heads. Even a Nato-labelled package will look colonial if Nuuk is treated as a bystander. Chemnitz's warning is not diplomatic theatre. It is the minimum standard for legitimacy: Greenland must be at the table as a political actor, not treated as a strategic surface. The strategic reasons behind the US's interest in Greenland are real. Greenland hosts the Pituffik Space

Base, central to missile early warning and space surveillance. The island also sits in the Greenland, Iceland, and UK corridor, which is essential for monitoring Russian naval movement in the North Atlantic. Plus, climate change is reshaping risk calculations in the Arctic and will continue to pull major powers northward.

But none of this justifies treating Greenland as an object to be possessed. Strategy is not a

temptation. Yet, none of these calls for annexation, but rather investment, regulation, and contracts under Greenlandic law and consent, with clear local benefits and high standards.

This is where the Nato crisis begins. Nato's legitimacy rests on collective defence consistent with principles in the UN Charter. If one ally openly pressures another ally over territory, the alliance stops being collective

bargaining chip.

The Davos "framework" can become an off-ramp if it replaces territorial theatre with a consent-based security package. That means three things. First, Denmark and Greenland must be free to say no without facing threats. Second, Greenland must be fully represented in any talks that concern its territory, basing, or resources. Third, any upgraded defence footprint should be paired with transparent



US President Donald Trump holds a bilateral meeting with Nato Secretary General Mark Rutte at the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland on January 21, 2026.

PHOTO: REUTERS

legal licence because Washington already has extensive access.

The 1951 Defense of Greenland Agreement underpins US defence activity on the island and has been updated since. If deterrence and access are the goal, ownership is unnecessary. If the US wants wider radar coverage, larger runway capacity, or more logistics hubs, it can negotiate expanded arrangements transparently with Denmark and Greenland, and finance what it asks for.

Completing the big picture, Greenland's rare earth and uranium prospects are often brought up in supply chain debates, even as local politics, environmental constraints, and infrastructure limits make extraction slow and contested. Offshore hydrocarbons

defence and starts looking like coercion inside the club. Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen outlined the stakes when she warned that if the United States attacks a Nato country militarily, "everything stops." The point was not to dramatise but to draw a line around the basic trust that holds alliances together.

Even without force, coercion can still corrode the system. The Friendly Relations declaration explicitly recalls the duty to refrain from military, political, or economic coercion aimed at another state's territorial integrity or political independence. Tariff threats over Greenland or hinting that intra-alliance solidarity is conditional present the outward message that sovereignty is a

economic and social investment that Greenlanders themselves prioritise, rather than a narrow extraction agenda.

For Bangladesh, this principle is not remote. Rules against coercive territorial changes act as a shield for every medium and small state. If Greenland can be pressured because it is strategically valuable, others can be pressured because they are "inconvenient." The discussion on Greenland should therefore be taken as a warning and a test, not a precedent. Bangladesh has its own stake in a world where strategic access is negotiated, not imposed, and where economic pressure is not used to rewrite political realities. When great powers normalise the language of "need" over consent, small states pay the price first.

BEYOND STEREOTYPES:
Rupert Grey's 'Homage to Bangladesh'

PHOTOS: COURTESY

NAVEEN ISLAM TOREE

"Bangladesh is an international basket case!"

The comment, made by former United States Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in March 1972, reflects a mindset that still lingers in many Western narratives about Bangladesh today.

Rupert Grey, a descendant of Charles Grey and best known professionally as a leading libel and copyright lawyer stood against this statement. "If Bangladesh is a basket case," Grey tells *The Daily Star*, "then it is so in the best possible way." For him, the term collapses under the sheer vitality of the country. A single square metre of a Bangladeshi street, he argues, holds more energy than entire neighbourhoods in London. Where life in England often unfolds in rigid routines, Bangladesh thrives in spontaneity—where a hanging lighter at a tea stall can become a



moment of shared choreography.

For decades, Bangladesh has been framed through a narrow international lens—one shaped largely by narratives of floods, fragility, and poverty. Rarely has the country been viewed by a patient observer willing to look beyond disaster and discover beauty. The stories of everyday resilience, humility, and quiet determination are often overshadowed by inherited prejudices of the Global North.

Homage to Bangladesh is Grey's attempt to challenge that perspective.

Grey's photographic work reveals a deeply personal creative journey—one shaped not by passing curiosity, but by lived experience, long-term engagement, and respect.

These ideas were explored further at a recent *Book Talk* at Justice Shahabuddin Park, where Grey was in conversation with Imran Rahman, Professor of Finance at the University of Liberal Arts

Bangladesh. Sponsored by Securex under its initiative **Voices Shaping Society**, the event positioned the book as more than a visual archive—it became an invitation to rethink how Bangladesh is seen, remembered, and represented.

Grey's relationship with Bangladesh began in 1992, when he travelled to the Sundarbans with his family. But it was his invitation from the British Council to attend Chobi Mela in 2004 that proved transformative. What began as a professional assignment evolved into a connection spanning nearly two decades.

Rather than foregrounding crisis, *Homage to Bangladesh* documents everyday life—faces caught in thought, labour unfolding at its own rhythm, communities shaped by history yet grounded in the present. In resisting spectacle, the book challenges the reductive stereotypes that have followed Bangladesh since its independence in 1971.

Homage to Bangladesh offers something rare: time. Time to look, to listen, and to recognise a country in its full human complexity.

WHAT'S THE HAPS?

'Rickshaw Art Festival 2026'

Shei Dhaka &

NSUAPC are

bringing the

Rickshaw Art

Festival 2026,

celebrating

Bangladesh's



iconic rickshaw art through a contemporary lens. Blending tradition with pop culture and film banner aesthetics, the festival will feature exhibitions, workshops, film screenings, and panel discussions. It will bring together students, artists, media, and cultural stakeholders in a vibrant creative exchange.

Date: Wednesday–Saturday | Jan 28–31

Time: 10:00am–6:00pm

Venue: North South University

Exhibition Center

Vicky Zahed to direct romantic thriller 'Pulsirat'

Vicky Zahed is set to direct a new romantic thriller titled *Pulsirat*. The director has officially signed an agreement with SVF Alpha-I Entertainment Limited and the film's title has already been registered with the Bangladesh Film Directors' Association.

In addition to directing *Pulsirat*, Zahed is also writing the screenplay, with the first draft already completed.

Speaking to Prothom Alo, Shahriar Shakil, managing director of SVF Alpha-I Entertainment Limited, said that the makers are considering Afran Nisho and Mehazabien Chowdhury for the two lead roles. Discussions with both actors are currently underway, though the casting has not yet been finalised.

Vicky Zahed has previously worked with the Nisho–Mehazabien pairing on several popular projects including *Chirokal Aaj*, *Punorjonmo* and *Redrum*.



Apu Biswas returns to OTT with 'Shikar'

After nearly three years away from regular shooting, Apu Biswas returned to work toward the end of last year. Continuing her comeback, she has now signed a new web film titled *Shikar*, directed by Kamruzzaman Roman, marking her latest venture into web-based content.

Apu previously appeared in the web film *Chayabazi*, directed by Syed Shakil, which

was released in 2023. With *Shikar*, she is once again exploring the digital platform, this time in a thriller set against a border-area backdrop.

In *Shikar*, Apu will star alongside small-screen actor Polash. The story and screenplay have been written by Abdullah Zahir Babu. The cast also includes Rashed Mamun Apu and Mahmudul Islam Mithu, among others.

Most of the film's shooting is scheduled to take place in Nepal, with the team set to depart in early March. If all goes as planned, the web film will be released on a local OTT platform. The platform name and release date will be announced officially soon.



NEWS

Onslaught of AI content aims to sway voters

FROM PAGE 1

apply their content moderation tools and policies effectively to fight disinformation, especially during elections.

ATTACKER, TARGET, NARRATIVE

More than half the content spread by these actors were classified as manipulative content, followed by disinformation (39.18 percent). The remaining 9 percent were categorised as hate speech, religious provocation, character assassination, and sexual and gender based violence.

Of them, 50 deepfakes and cheapfakes came from pages or profiles that appear to support Jamaat. BNP-aligned pages contributed 30 contents,

Awami League political landscape, has largely focused on attacking one another on social media as the ground campaign also heats up.

Most of the pro Jamaat posts targeting BNP centred on allegations of extortion and corruption. For example, a video posted on January 13 by a page called Haque Television depicted a fruit seller claiming that the BNP was planning to steal votes in the same way as the Awami League. He ended with a call to resist "terrorists and extortionists."

Beyond efforts to delegitimise the BNP, many posts from Jamaat-aligned pages and profiles targeted the general public by promoting class people.

In one video, a man speaking in Bangla is shown standing in a desert environment, claiming that, as a migrant, he has "seen everything" and would vote for Jamaat in the upcoming election.

Two more videos explicitly equated voting for and supporting Jamaat and its student wing, Islami Chhatra Shibir, with supporting Islam itself. One urged viewers to "Let your vote be in favour of Islam," while another framed Shibir's recent victories in student council elections as a victory for Islam.

Overall, 50 of the 97 AI contents analysed appeared manipulative. Jamaat-aligned pages and profiles accounted for the largest share of these posts (34), followed by BNP affiliated actors with 14, while Awami League-aligned sources contributed two.

For this investigation, manipulation was defined as content that seeks to generate fear, bias, or false binaries without presenting verifiable or falsifiable evidence, relying instead on insinuation or rhetorical framing.

VOTERS FALL FOR IT
Comment sections show that many users are falling for this manipulation trap, taking the content to be true, although some flagged the content as AI-made.

For instance, in an AI-generated video, which received 2,700 comments, a supposedly Hindu individual was depicted saying that this time the Hindus would vote for Jamaat. Commenting on the post, one user said, "Alhamdulillah Bhalo."

The majority of comments below the same post appear to be positive, although many seem to be coming from bots.

Some users were also quick to call out the deception to alert other users. Md Reazul Hassan, a verified user, commented, "AI Video."

This pattern of positive comments

and calling out the deception is evident across the AI-generated content from other pages and profiles.

However, the engagement (1.6 million for these 97 contents) is distributed unevenly across parties, with Jamaat-aligned profiles and pages dominating both volume and reach, potentially influencing many of them.

For example, Jamaat-aligned Uttorbong Television, with 14 videos, alone attracted over 1.06 million engagements, roughly 64 percent of all engagements across all posts. Other Jamaat aligned pages include Akhi's Story, Haque Television, and Jamaat Shibir Supporters.

Together, these four pages account for 44.33 percent of the 97 posts analysed, but about 78.37 percent of total engagement, revealing pro-Jamaat actors' dominance in generating engagement.

Similar to Jamaat-aligned pages, where one or two pages accounted for a disproportionately large share of total engagement, the same pattern was observed among BNP-aligned entities. Of the total engagement attracted by pro-BNP AI content analysed, 97% came from Next Insight Network.

In contrast, Awami League-affiliated pages had a limited reach.

From 17 posts coming from 10 profiles and pages, they generated 11,800 engagements. Although AI aligned pages produced 17.53 percent of the AI content analysed for this investigation, they accounted for less than 1 percent of engagement, suggesting a weaker circulation network.

The most prominent pro-AL actor was Shiron Islam, who disseminated six AI contents and accounted for 59.15 percent of the total engagement generated by Awami League aligned actors.

A recent investigation by Dismislab, a fact-checking organisation, identified him as the third largest spreader of disinformation in 2025, responsible for 62 such content.

Shiron Islam (AL-aligned), Engr. Jahirul Islam Tom (BNP aligned), and Next Insight Network (BNP-aligned) did not respond to multiple text messages.

Uttorbong Television and Haque Television (Jamaat affiliated) replied, denying any political ties and claiming their videos aim to present the "truth" to society.

Both pages avoided direct questions regarding the authenticity of their content or whether their AI-generated videos were misleading the public with disinformation.

Miraj Ahmed Chowdhury, managing director of Digitally Right, said the influence of synthetic media depends entirely on a voter's individual digital literacy, making public awareness far more effective than police enforcement in preventing deception.

"While some can easily spot AI, others may be deeply misled by the 'realism' of the persona presented. This issue cannot be tackled by the police; it requires widespread awareness so that voters understand that what they see online isn't always real," he told The Daily Star.

Asked about the role of social media platforms in preventing manipulative AI content and disinformation, he said, "Platforms have the technical capacity to detect coordinated inauthentic behaviour and bot driven engagement, but there are questions about their will to enforce these policies effectively. We need more transparency from platforms to act as watchdogs, and to share exactly why and under whose directive content is being moderated or removed."

[Authors are interns at The Daily Star. See online for a more detailed version and full methodology]

Additional reporting and research: Nourin Sultana Toma, Mir Rownak and Tarek Hossain

স্থান পরিবর্তন

ব্র্যাক ব্যাংক বিজয়নগর শাখা
এখন নতুন ঠিকানায় আরও বড় পরিসরে

পুরাতন ঠিকানা

ভবনের নাম: টেম্পো কম্পোজিউশন হোল্ডিং নং: ১৬৯ (১/১ সাবেক)

সড়ক: মৈমান তজুরুল ইসলাম সরণি, ওয়ার্ড নম্বর: ১৩

সিটি কর্মসূচী/পৌরসভা: ঢাকা দক্ষিণ সিটি কর্মসূচী

থানা: ম্লটন, জেলা: ঢাকা

নতুন ঠিকানা

ভবনের নাম: আকরাম টাওয়ার (২য় তলা)

হোল্ডিং নং: ১৯৯ (বিজয়নগর), সড়ক: মৈমান তজুরুল

ইসলাম সরণি, ওয়ার্ড নম্বর: ২০

সিটি কর্মসূচী/পৌরসভা: ঢাকা দক্ষিণ সিটি কর্মসূচী

থানা: রমনা, জেলা: ঢাকা

BRAC BANK
আমেরিকান বাণিজ্য

২৪ ঘণ্টা কল সেন্টার: ১৬২২১

An election in the shadow of grief

FROM PAGE 1
from that noise and listen instead to how politics is understood at the grassroots.

For the first episode of this series, I travelled to Babanpur, a village in Rangpur's Pirganj, that briefly entered national consciousness after Abu Sayed was shot dead by police during a demonstration on July 16, 2024, turning him into a symbol of the movement that ultimately led to the collapse of Sheikh Hasina's 16-year rule.

Eighteen months later, Babanpur is quiet again. The attention has largely faded, but the consequences remain.

On the afternoon of January 23, I met Mokbul Hossain, Abu Sayed's father, at his home, along with his eldest son, Ranjan Ali, and Rubiya Begum, a neighbour and sister-in-law. When I asked whether they could feel the election approaching, Rubiya said yes, activists from both the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami had been visiting homes in the area.

Beyond that, however, national politics felt distant to her.

"I don't know what is happening around the country," she said.

That sense of detachment stood in sharp contrast to the scale of campaign promises circulating nationally. I asked what they thought of the BNP's proposal for family cards providing Tk 2,500 a month to millions of households, or Jamaat's pledge to help hundreds of thousands of unemployed young people.

None of them appeared particularly interested. They were unfamiliar with the details, and the promises stirred little expectation.

Their scepticism was not rooted in ideology, but in experience. Mokbul said me that such pledges are routine before elections and rarely followed through. "These things are said every time before elections," he said. "Then they are forgotten."

Rubiya's response went further. For her, politics should not be complicated. "We want a peaceful life," she said. "What they give or don't give does not matter to us. My brother-in-law was killed. I don't want anyone else in the family to be killed. No mother should lose her child."

Government assistance, she added, rarely reaches people like them anyway. "All those dalals (middlemen)

take the lion's share," she said. Peace and security, not promises, were her priorities.

When I asked Mokbul whom he would vote for, he did not name a party or candidate. He said he would wait and see where public support appeared to be moving before deciding. Most people in the village, the elderly farmer said, preferred to be on the side of the eventual winner.

Later that afternoon, I stopped at a tea stall in Jafarpura Bazar, about a mile from Babanpur. There, Abul Hossain, Nazrul Islam and Abdur Razzak, all farmers in their 50s, spoke with greater political engagement. Unlike the family in Babanpur, they were eager for an election and believed it could bring an end to the current uncertainty.

"This government is not representative," Nazrul told me. "It was not voted in by the people."

Asked how they decided whom

for the BNP and spoke cautiously about its chairman, Tarique Rahman. Years spent abroad involuntarily, he hoped, might have changed him. "Maybe he has learned something," Abul said. "Maybe he will be more sensitive."

Others at the tea stall remained non-committal, weighing their options. Posters and banners of both BNP and Jamaat candidates competed for space around Jafarpura Bazar.

A few hours in Babanpur and Jafarpura made it clear to me that for many in rural Bangladesh, work, faith and survival come first. There is little trust in politics or government, but enduring faith in the Almighty. People are convinced they must survive through hard work, regardless of who is in power.

Mokbul Hossain's parting words captured that sentiment succinctly: "If the government helps us that is good. But we do not rely on them."

Meanwhile, campaigning in northern Bangladesh is intensifying.

On the day I landed at Sajidpur airport, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir arrived from Dhaka on his way to Thakurgaon. That same night, Jamaat Ameer Shafiqur Rahman addressed a rally in Rangpur city after touring other northern districts. The choreography of the election is clearly underway.

Babanpur, too, bears traces of political attention. The village road has been paved since Abu Sayed's death. Senior government figures have visited. On the day I was there, government adviser Adilur Rahman Khan briefly paid respects at Abu Sayed's grave. Jamaat leaders were also expected to visit.

Yet for Abu Sayed's family, these visits and gestures do not translate into political faith. The election feels close in time, but distant in meaning. In Babanpur, the ballot is measured not against manifestos, but against memory, loss and a fragile hope that this time power will not demand such a personal cost.

As he saw me off, Babanpur resident Tota Mia offered a confident warning: whoever comes to power after the election can no longer govern the way the Hasina administration did. "People will come out onto the streets once again if they do," he said.

(Shakeel Anwar is a former BBC journalist.)

to support, Abul Hossain offered a simple explanation. "You can sense who is a good man," he said. "We want someone who can run the country properly." Pressed on what "properly" meant, he said all they wanted was a life without constant disruption.

The men at the tea stall expressed deep scepticism about campaign rhetoric. Abul laughed as he described what he saw as outlandish promises. "They even give certificates to Jannah," he said. "All fraud."

Nazrul raised the question that cuts through much of rural political debate. "The country itself is needy," he said. "Where will the money for all these pledges come from?"

Abul admitted to having a soft corner

ensuring justice for the killings of our brothers during the July uprising, including martyr Sharif Osman Hadi, will be one of our key agendas," he added.

As part of the day-long campaign organised by the 10-party alliance, Nahid also took part in public interaction programmes in the Banshtola, Nobodhara Road, Ekota Road, and Nure Chala Bazar areas.

to intervene in the relocation request.

Scotland, the highest ranked T20I side which did not originally qualify for the tournament, will now take Bangladesh's place in Group C, alongside West Indies, Italy, and England. They are currently ranked 14th in the ICC T20I rankings – ahead of seven teams already in the competition, namely Namibia, UAE, Nepal, USA, Canada, Oman, and Italy.

This is not the first time Scotland has been named as a replacement in an ICC event, having also stepped in for Zimbabwe at the 2009 T20 World Cup due to political relations between Zimbabwe and the UK.

PCB chairman and Pakistan's Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi reiterated his support for Bangladesh yesterday, accusing the ICC of double standards.

"Bangladesh has been treated unfairly," Naqvi was quoted as saying in several media reports. "You cannot have double standards, where one country can make whatever decision whenever and do the total opposite for another country."

Asked about a potential boycott of the World Cup by Pakistan, he said the government would make the decision. "We are waiting for the prime minister to return," he said, adding that a final decision would be taken then.

On Thursday, following a meeting with cricketers, Youth and Sports Adviser Asif Nazrul said there was "no scope" for the Bangladesh team to travel to India as the security situation there has not changed.

Hours after that meeting, the BCB claimed to have approached the ICC's Dispute Resolution Committee (DRC)

cannot ensure women's safety cannot develop." She also pledged strict action against drug syndicates and reforms in addiction treatment.

On education, she criticised corruption in school admissions, saying, "There will be no quota for MPs. Merit and transparency will be the only criteria." She also promised to advocate for teachers' rights and establish modern science labs, coding facilities, libraries, and initiatives to support students' mental health and extracurricular activities.

On security, she said, "A city that

projects running under the Bangladesh government's social safety net. These are run by different ministries or departments, but in a scattered way. This is not right.

"We want to organise this system through family cards. We want to make it universal. For example, a farmer's wife will get it, and an office worker's wife will also get it."

TARIQUE REACHES CTG

Meanwhile, Tarique reached Chattogram

Engaging children in sports

FROM PAGE 2

six and 18 has a lot of physical and mental energy. That energy must be used properly. If given the right place, it will be used in the right way. If not, it will be used in the wrong way..."

"Keeping children engaged would reduce their misuse of the internet," he said, stressing plans to include sports, a third language, recitation, art, music and culture in school syllabuses.

Tarique's daughter Barrister Zaima Rahman, who accompanied him at the programme, stressed the importance of digital education to prevent online harassment and highlighted the need for personal safety.

She urged the attendees to raise

awareness regarding online harassment, especially among young social media users, adding that preventing hacking, teaching people how to report incidents, and setting up community desks could play an effective role in tackling online harassment.

Asked about who would receive family cards and whether widows would be eligible, Tarique said, "Single mothers, brides facing various problems, women whose husbands have left them – look, as far as I understand, there are 138

projects running under the Bangladesh government's social safety net. These are run by different ministries or departments, but in a scattered way. This is not right.

"We want to organise this system through family cards. We want to make it universal. For example, a farmer's wife will get it, and an office worker's wife will also get it."

TARIQUE REACHES CTG

Meanwhile, Tarique reached Chattogram last evening to address a grand rally at the historic Railway Polo Ground around 11:00am today.

This is his first visit to the port city in 21 years.

Shahadat Hossain, mayor of Chattogram City Corporation and former president of Chattogram city BNP, yesterday said, "His [Tarique's] visit has sparked immense enthusiasm among BNP activists and the general public alike."

'Will form inclusive govt if voted to power'

fears spread by opponents, he said, "Some try to scare people by saying, 'If the 10-party alliance, especially Jamaat-e-Islami, comes to power, they will lock homes one by one. They won't let sisters or mothers go out, study, or perform professional duties.' These are all lies peddled by deceivers."

After the Sirajganj town rally, he attended another rally in Ullapara upazila and later in the night in Pabna.

In Pabna, Shafiqur said some quarters have grown uneasy over the rise of freedom-loving people in Bangladesh.

"We'll not interfere in your internal affairs, and you must not interfere in ours. You've already interfered too much," he said while addressing an election rally at Pabna Government College ground.

At each rally, he introduced Jamaat and 10-party alliance-backed candidates, bringing the second day of his campaign tour to a close.

On Friday, the first day of the tour, the Jamaat ameer addressed rallies in Panchagarh, Dinajpur, Thakurgaon and Rangpur.

[Our correspondents from Lammoni, Bogura, and Pabna contributed to this report.]

Commit to equity, quality in edn

FROM PAGE 1

University, said Bangladesh's education system reflects one of the gravest failures of political leadership since independence.

"Despite decades of promises, we still do not have a comprehensive education sector plan... While around 80 percent of children complete primary education, more than half of them fail to acquire basic literacy and numeracy," he told The Daily Star.

Successive governments have relied on fragmented sub-sector projects instead of pursuing a unified vision, thereby widening inequality across different streams of education and leading to weak learning outcomes, said Prof Manzoor, who led a ministry-formed consultation committee on improving the quality of primary and non-formal education.

He described the country's secondary education system as a "mechanical factory model" of schooling, where short class periods and rigid routines leave little room for meaningful learning.

"This pushes students towards guidebooks and rote learning instead of understanding the content," said Manzoor, also a member of a government committee formed to recommend measures to improve the quality of secondary education.

Regarding the incidents of teacher harassment at educational institutions, he said these are signs of institutional failure and inaction by the authorities.

"We have not seen effective measures from those responsible. In many cases, leadership either shares similar views or remains indifferent due to political loyalty."

The education sector has become deeply polarised. Teachers often carry their personal political ideologies into their profession."

Asked whether he expects the next government to address these issues, he said, "Our past history does not give us much hope... We are

yet to see any indication that future governments will avoid ideological bias and prioritise students' interests over party politics."

Noted educationist Rasheda K Choudhury said expectations from the next government are high because education has been deprived of its due priority for a long time.

"During the interim government's tenure of over one and a half years, the education sector has not received the attention it deserves. Quite simply, it has been deprioritised," said Rasheda, executive director of the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE).

She further said that reducing inequality must be the foremost expectation from the next elected government.

Referring to the July uprising, she said young people had sacrificed their lives to end discrimination, yet disparities in education continue to widen among disadvantaged and left-out groups, including extremely poor families, geographically disadvantaged communities, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities.

"Those with resources can send their children to better institutions, while others are falling further behind."

Rasheda noted that reforms in the sector must focus on accessibility, affordability, quality and equity. "If you give poor-quality education to everyone, it achieves nothing... Education must be of acceptable quality. Ensuring equity will be the biggest challenge."

Referring to disorder on campuses, she said, "A new hope emerged after the mass uprising, but we are now witnessing chaos... Indiscipline is growing among both teachers and students."

Demands for auto-promotion and the humiliation of teachers reflect a complete breakdown of discipline, posing a serious threat to the foundations of the education system, Rasheda said.

"This must be addressed. We hope

BNP dismisses India deal claim as 'disinformation'

FROM PAGE 2

He also said the BNP under late chief Khaleda Zia and Ziaur Rahman had consistently defended national sovereignty against submissive foreign policy.

Referring to past actions, Mahdi said, "We have seen large programmes and rallies held continuously along the banks of the Teesta and the Padma to demand a fair share of water. That's the politics of the BNP. After the killing of Felani at the border, the BNP was the first to protest and take to the streets."

Mahdi also addressed reports of irregularities involving the BNP's proposed welfare initiatives, under which the party has pledged to introduce "family cards" and "farmer cards" if voted to power.

He said some groups were demanding money by promising such

cards to create controversy.

"If BNP is given responsibility through people's votes, these cards will be delivered completely free of cost, through state initiatives, to rightful recipients," he said.

He urged citizens to report any fraudulent activity to the BNP and law enforcement agencies, stressing that attempts to exploit the initiatives were unacceptable.

To strengthen communication with voters, the BNP has launched an election hotline (16543) and a WhatsApp hotline (01806977577).

Mahdi said the services would provide information on election laws, monitor voter complaints, and receive feedback.

"Our main goal is to ensure a transparent, acceptable and citizen-friendly election by involving people from cities and villages across the country," he said.

BNP leader shot on Thursday

FROM PAGE 2
After undergoing surgery at DMCH, he was later shifted to the ICU of Holy Family Hospital, where he died yesterday afternoon, Hasan's younger brother Rakib Hossain told reporters.

Rakib earlier said Hasan suffered a gunshot wound to the right side of his abdomen when two armed criminals shot him while he was returning home from a waz mahfil on Thursday night.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Rakib, who is an assistant publicity secretary of BNP's Hazarapatpur union, said the motive behind the attack on his brother was not clear to him.

He said there is no influence of any political party other than BNP in their area and claimed that his brother, who was a land broker, had no known enemies.

However, he suspected that the attack might have stemmed from an internal conflict within the party.

How Bangladesh's T20 World Cup HOPES UNRAVELLED

STAR SPORTS DESK

With events unfolding over more than three weeks, the International Cricket Council (ICC) yesterday officially confirmed that Bangladesh will be replaced by Scotland in the upcoming T20 World Cup, co-hosted by Sri Lanka and India from February 7. The sequence of events is as follows:

JAN 3:

Indian Premier League (IPL) franchise Kolkata Knight Riders drop Mustafizur Rahman from their squad on instructions from the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). Youth and Sports Adviser Asif Nazrul instructs the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) to request the ICC to move Bangladesh's World Cup matches outside India and calls for IPL broadcasts in Bangladesh to be halted.

JAN 4:

BCB formally requests the ICC to relocate Bangladesh's matches, citing security concerns and following government advice. The board also announces Bangladesh's 15-member T20 World Cup squad.

JAN 5:

The interim government decides to suspend IPL broadcasts.

JAN 6:

The ICC writes back and seeks detailed security observations from the BCB regarding travel to India.

JAN 8:

BCB sends a second letter to the ICC, reiterating its relocation request with detailed security observations.

JAN 12:

Asif Nazrul reaffirms Bangladesh's stance against travelling to India and



refers to three security points raised by the ICC Security team through inter-departmental communication between the ICC and the BCB.

JAN 17:

An ICC delegate arrives in Bangladesh for further discussions, with another ICC delegate, Gaurav Saxena, joining the meeting virtually. Both parties maintain their initial stance.

JAN 21:

The ICC again rejects Bangladesh's

relocation request and gives the BCB one day to consult the government during a virtual meeting. The meeting includes a vote on Bangladesh's relocation request, with the majority voting against it. The ICC issues a press release confirming the schedule remains unchanged, with Bangladesh's matches in India. BCB president Aminul Islam Bulbul says he is waiting for a "miracle from ICC."

JAN 22:

Bulbul and Asif Nazrul meet with cricketers for the first time during the period. The BCB seeks intervention from the ICC's Dispute Resolution Committee after Asif Nazrul states there is "no scope" to travel to India due to security concerns.

JAN 24:

The ICC confirms Scotland as Bangladesh's replacement in the T20 World Cup after no agreement is reached.



Heat bakes, Djokovic shines

Brutal heat dominated the Australian Open on Saturday, forcing a five-hour suspension of matches on outside courts as temperatures soared to 38C at Melbourne Park. The tournament's Heat Stress Scale hit the maximum level of five, with players and spectators baking in extreme conditions. Reigning champion Jannik Sinner visibly struggled, seen using a cooling tube between games during his third-round match against American Eliot Spizzirri. Battling cramps and losing his first set since October under a blazing sun, the Italian was a limping wreck before the extreme heat policy allowed the roof at Rod Laver Arena to be closed, helping him recover and reach the last 16 with a dramatic 4-6, 6-3, 6-4, 6-4 win. Meanwhile, Novak Djokovic escaped the worst of the heat to beat Botic van de Zandschulp 6-3, 6-4, 7-6 (7/4), securing his 102nd match victory at Melbourne to match Roger Federer's record, while also becoming the first player to reach 400 Grand Slam wins.

PHOTO: AFP/REUTERS

BCB springs surprise, opens door to Shakib's return

SPORTS REPORT

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) on Saturday, out of the blue, said it would consider Shakib Al Hasan for the national team, subject to his availability.

"The board has unanimously decided that the selection panel will consider Shakib Al Hasan for selection, provided there is availability, fitness and his accessibility," BCB media committee chairman Amzad Hossain told reporters after a board of directors' meeting in Mirpur.

Amzad added that the board recently had been in contact with Shakib, and he has expressed desire to retire on home soil and informed he is available for both home and away series.

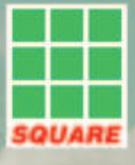
Addressing concerns regarding Shakib's legal and personal matters, the board maintained that these were issues for the government and the courts. "The board wants Shakib in the team purely as a player," a BCB official said, adding that BCB president Aminul Islam Bulbul will discuss the administrative and security aspects with high-level government officials.

During the press conference, a heated exchange took place between journalists and BCB officials, with questions raised over whether Shakib's issue was being brought up to divert attention from Bangladesh being replaced by Scotland in the upcoming ICC T20 World Cup.

The board rejected the claim, claiming Shakib's name surfaced during routine discussions on players' central contracts. "This was not linked to any other issue," an official said.

Shakib, a former MP from Awami League, has not returned to Bangladesh following the fall of the Awami League government in the face of a mass uprising in July 2024.

He last played for Bangladesh in the Kanpur Test in India in September 2024. He wanted to play his farewell Test in Dhaka against South Africa in October 2024, but could not return amid protests and wider security concerns. In a recent interview, Shakib said he has not retired from any format of international cricket yet.



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