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MANIFESTO EXPECTATIONS

With the national election just 16 days away, political parties are finalising their manifestos. The Daily Star spoke to young people to identify issues that should top the agenda for parties

Safety, freedom and job on young voters' mind

ARAFAT RAHAMAN

Young voters want political parties to put citizens' safety and security at the core of their election manifestos, with a special focus on safeguarding freedom of expression and protecting the rights of minority communities.

They also wish to hear clear and credible commitments to create decent jobs, curb extortion, rein in soaring prices, and ensure a justice system that works for all.

The Daily Star spoke to more than a dozen students from colleges, public and private universities, madrasas, and polytechnic institutes, as well as young professionals, to better understand their expectations and priorities

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

YOUNG VOTERS' EXPECTATIONS

- An end to mob violence
- Safeguarding freedom of expression
- Curbing corruption and extortion
- Stronger health and education systems
- Protection of minority communities
- A fair and impartial justice system
- Employment opportunities, fair recruitment

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

The 'youth vote', from the ground

SHAKEEL ANWAR,
from Begum Rokeya
University, Rangpur



there would have been no question of an election at all.

Yet, 18 months later, the students into a nationwide uprising are no longer on the streets. They are watching campaigns, listening to promises and judging quietly.

who turned a protest against job quotas into a nationwide uprising are no longer on the streets. They are watching campaigns, listening to promises and judging quietly.

I sat down with three students who were active during the movement: Bayezid Bostami from the Department of English; Mustansir Muaz, a third-

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

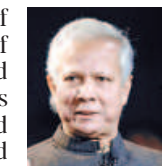
POLLS DUTY

Exercise 'maximum caution'

CA asks armed forces

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus advised the armed forces to exercise "maximum caution" so that even a minor deviation does not undermine public trust during the February 12 referendum and the national election.



SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

Adani deal pegged to S Alam's flawed contract

Finds national committee on power, energy sector

ASIFUR RAHMAN

When the lop-sided deal with Adani Power was signed, a newly inked deal with the controversial S Alam Group's power plant was used as the pricing benchmark -- even though that contract's pricing structure was itself unusually expensive and riddled with contractual anomalies.

The deal with SS Power was a "compromised" one and "a project architecture characterised by severe fiscal asymmetries that disproportionately favoured the joint venture of S Alam Group", said the final report of the national committee to review unsolicited power contracts signed during the Awami League regime.

Chattogram-based S Alam Group was a major beneficiary of the ousted Awami League regime.

Contract designed to guarantee profits for investor

Risks transferred to govt, PDB

Opaque pricing of coal

Agreement for one unit carried over to second unit

Annual capacity payment of \$428m, \$10.6b over the lifetime of contract

The investigation found that the project is designed to guarantee profits for the investor, protecting it from losses caused by market volatility, currency fluctuations and operational challenges, while shifting substantial sovereign, financial and operational risks onto the government and the Bangladesh Power Development Board (PDB).

"The SS Power I project serves as a definitive case study in how standard project finance structures can be engineered to systematically transfer risk to the sovereign while privatising returns," the report said.

The anomalies identified include the use of proxy freight formulas, fixed and indexed capacity payments, broad pass-through provisions and limits on sovereign rights -- suggesting the state's negotiating

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

CHANKHARPUL KILLINGS

Ex-DMP chief Habibur, two others to die

5 cops get varying jail terms; victims' families unhappy with ICT verdict

SHARIFUL ISLAM and
SIRAJUL ISLAM RUBEL

Three former senior police officials, including ex-DMP commissioner Habibur Rahman, were sentenced to death yesterday for the killing of six people in Dhaka's Chankharpul area during the July uprising.

The three-member International Crimes Tribunal-1, headed by Justice Md Golam Mortuza Mozumder, also handed down varying jail terms to five other former policemen in the case.

Besides Habibur, the other two condemned are former DMP joint commissioner Sudip Kumar Chakraborty and former additional deputy commissioner Shah Alam Mohammad Akhtarul Islam.

Meanwhile, former Ramna zone assistant commissioner Md Imrul was sentenced to six years' imprisonment; former Shahbagh Police Station inspector (operations) Arshad Hossain to four years; and constables Md Sujan Hossain, Imaz Hossain Imon and Md Nasirul Islam to three years' imprisonment each.

MORE ON PAGE 3

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4



CAMPAIGN
COVERAGE ON
PAGE 2

আকিজ এসেনসিয়াল

সুগন্ধি চিনিগুঁড়া চাল

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Clockwise from top left: A huge crowd attends the BNP campaign rally in Noakhali's Hatiya upazila; Jamaat Ameer Shafiqur Rahman addresses a rally at Shahid Abrar Fahad Stadium in Kushtia town; NCP spokesperson Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuyain speaks at a rally in Chattogram's Boalkhali upazila; activists and supporters of Islami Andolan Bangladesh attend a rally at the Nur Muhammad High School ground in Jamalpur's Bokshiganj; Dhaka-6 BNP candidate Ishraque Hussain gets blessings from an elderly woman while campaigning in Dhaka's Sutrapur. All photos were taken yesterday.

PHOTOS: STAR



Certain group conspiring to obstruct polls

Tarique warns Noakhali rally, urges party leaders to remain cautious

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman yesterday urged his party leaders and activists to remain cautious as “a group is conspiring to obstruct the national election”. “Were you able to vote for the last 15–16 years? You weren’t. Those who did that have left the country. But another group is now conspiring to obstruct the polls,” he told a campaign rally held on a college ground in Noakhali’s Hatiya upazila. Addressing the rally virtually from Dhaka, he told his party supporters to offer Tahajjud prayers and go to the polling centres, where they should offer Fajr prayers. “People from other religions will also go. Everyone can line up early in the morning and cast their votes properly,” he said, adding, “But voting is not enough.... You must stay there [at the polling centres] after voting and make sure your vote is counted properly. Can you do that?” The crowd unitedly replied, “Yes!” Tarique further said that people of all religions – Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and Christians – must all work together and build the country. “This is our nation... our first and last destination.” Apologising for not being able to attend the rally in person, he said, “The Election Commission gave us very little time for poll-related activities, which has

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

‘Jamaat’s politics is for people’s welfare’

Shafiqur says all past rulers ransacked the country

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman yesterday said his party practises politics for the welfare of people, not for personal or organisational gain. “Our politics is neither to feed ourselves nor to fill the stomachs of party workers. Rather, we pursue politics to ensure food for the poor, hungry, and destitute people of this country,” he said. He made the remarks while addressing a rally as the chief guest, organised by the district unit of Jamaat at Shaheed Abrar Fahad Stadium in Kushtia town.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Defeated, new fascist forces now united to ensure ‘no’ vote

Asif tells Ctg rally

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

National Citizen Party spokesperson Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuyain yesterday said “defeated and new fascist forces” have reached a tacit unity to ensure the victory of the “no” vote in the upcoming referendum. “If elected, we [the NCP] may get the opportunity to serve you for the next five years. But if the ‘yes’ vote wins in the referendum, its benefits will not be limited to you or me. It will shape the future of your children and generations to come,” he told a campaign rally held in support of the ‘yes’ vote and the 11-party alliance candidate in Chattogram’s Boalkhali upazila. He alleged that the pattern of repression witnessed before August 5 -- marked by enforced

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

Past rulers have nothing new to offer: IAB chief

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jamalpur

Ameer of Islami Andolan Bangladesh Mufti Syed Muhammad Rezaul Karim yesterday said past rulers who have governed the country since independence have nothing new to offer. “Those who have governed the country since independence have already ruled for 53–54 years and have nothing new to offer on the path of development,” he said at a rally at the Nur Muhammad High School ground in Bokshiganj of Jamalpur. “If there are good policies, good leadership, and morality, then ideal leaders can establish governance like that of Caliph Umar,” the IAB chief told the gathering,

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6



“Vote for Islamic Andolan, enjoy peace in this world and attain peace in the hereafter as well.”

Mufti Syed Muhammad Rezaul Karim IAB ameer

The ‘youth vote’, from the ground

FROM PAGE 1

year Mathematics student; and Lamiya Irshad, a first-year English student. They were articulate and measured in their responses. This campus carries a valiant and tragic connection to the July uprising. Abu Sayed, a student here, was shot dead by police during a demonstration and later became a symbol of the uprising. Bayezid still struggles to talk about that day. “Abu Sayed was a student of our department,” he said. “Sometimes I still feel emotional. And I feel worse when I see that even now his trial has not been completed.” For him, that failure is not procedural; it is political. “The interim government largely failed to uphold the spirit of July,” he said. “They forgot their mandate.” Asked what drove them to the streets in the first place, Mustansir answered without hesitation. “We wanted democracy restored. We wanted opportunities based on our merits and qualifications. We wanted justice and freedom of speech,” he said. Those words were written on walls across the country during and after the July uprising. Faded slogans still remain, particularly around campuses. Do they feel those demands are being fulfilled? Lamiya shook her head. “Hardly,” she said. “I don’t see any headway.” Bayezid believes the problem lies in continuity rather than rupture. “The people making policies are largely the same,” he said. “Look at the trials of killings during the July movement. What percentage has been completed? Even Abu Sayed’s case is unfinished. You can imagine the fate of the others.” Mustansir was blunter. “Is there negotiation going on with political parties?” he asked. “Is the police administration stopping the trials because they were involved? We don’t know and that insecurity remains.” He pointed to the killing of Osman Hadi, which shocked the country. “We never thought this kind of murder

would happen after 2024,” he said. “And then we hear advisers making outlandish claims like ‘the killers fled the country’. These excuses are not convincing.” Mustansir believes such incidents are happening because critical state institutions were not reformed. When asked what matters most to her after finishing her education, Lamiya answered immediately. “A job.” Does she feel confident she will get one? She paused before answering. “Not really. We still see corruption and irregularities in recruitment.”



SCAN THE QR CODE TO WATCH VIDEO



The quota movement that erupted into a mass uprising in 2024 was rooted in students’ deep anxiety over dwindling employment prospects after graduation. That anxiety, I found, continues to shape how they listen to election campaigns. All three said they are paying attention, but without much faith. “Young people and students are being ignored,” Mustansir said. “Political parties focus on rural and low-income groups because they are vote banks. But look at me, a student of Begum Rokeya University. Are we being given the facilities so that we can contribute to the country?” He gestured towards the campus. “This university spreads over 75 acres. We have only two dormitories. No proper lab facilities. I don’t even consider this a complete university.”

Yet parties continue to promise more colleges and universities. “We’ve seen this before,” Bayezid said. “Universities mushroomed during the Hasina period. But did they produce skilled people?” The emphasis on numbers, they argue, misses the point. “If we could turn young people into skilled human resources, that would be better than handouts like interest-free loans,” Bayezid said. “Do they even think about budgetary capacity when making these lofty pledges?” On the BNP’s promise of millions of new jobs, Mustansir laughed. “Where will those jobs come from?” he asked. “Are we being made skilled first? They want to give me a job without making me capable. Isn’t that laughable?” Jamaat-e-Islami’s proposal of monthly interest-free loans for graduates sounded more practical to them, but trust remains thin. “We are in a situation where we cannot trust anyone,” Bayezid said. “Commitments are made and forgotten. We’ve seen that too many times.” Before leaving, I posed a hypothetical question. If party supremos from BNP or Jamaat, Tarique Rahman or Shafiqur Rahman, were sitting across the table, what would be their number one demand? “For me, it’s good education,” Lamiya said. “Education that makes me a skilled and worthy citizen.” Bayezid leaned back before answering. “An education system that produces skilled and honest citizens,” he said. “And let me tell you, I will vote only for those who think about protecting the country’s sovereignty.” Mustansir did not hesitate. “Freedom of speech,” he said. “That solves many problems. And I want the guarantee of a normal death. Insecurity still haunts us.” As I left the campus, it was clear that the students who once filled the streets are no longer chanting slogans. They are weighing choices. The election that exists because of their movement now faces their quiet but ruthless scrutiny. (Shakeel Anwar is a former BBC journalist)

Safety, freedom and job

FROM PAGE 1

The voices of young voters carry particular weight in this election, as they form a significant share of the electorate. According to Election Commission data, 5.56 crore voters are aged between 18 and 37, accounting for 43.56 percent of the total electorate. Those aged between 18 and 35 are defined as youth in the National Youth Policy 2017. For many young voters, the foremost expectation is the assurance of basic security. Rupaiya Srestha Tanchangya, a postgraduate student at Dhaka University, said people felt a heightened sense of vulnerability in the months since July 2024. “Whoever comes to power must put an end to this culture of mob violence. The social and human dignity of every individual must be protected,” she said. Rupaiya, a voter in Rangamati, also spoke of lingering fear in the hill districts. “Since the mass uprising, we have witnessed killings in the hills and seen our homes burned and looted at the slightest pretext. We do not want to see this again.” She stressed the need to uphold freedom of speech to prevent the return of “mob rule”. “Every citizen – whether a member of an indigenous or a minority community – must feel safe and protected. Even those with opposing views must be free to express themselves without fear.” Echoing her sentiment, Onneshwa Chakrabarty, an undergraduate student of anthropology at Jahangirnagar University, said the security of minority communities must be a priority. “As a member of a minority community, I hope the new government prioritises our safety,” she said. Md Sajib Hossain, a master’s student at DU, said, “Our primary expectation in post-July uprising Bangladesh is a change in our overall political culture. We want our state structure to be more people-friendly. The fundamental rights and dignity of every citizen must be protected.” Expressing concern about job scarcity, Aysha Tofail, a final-year student of mass communication and

journalism at DU, said, “Political leaders should pay attention to fair recruitment, digital education, and mental health support.” Young professionals argue that law and order cannot improve unless political interference in various government agencies ends. Sajal Kundu, a private bank employee, said the police force must remain independent and free from political influence. “I expect the new government to do whatever is necessary to stop extortion and the reign of local thugs. I want to see an end to the brandishing of weapons by criminals,” said the 28-year-old banker. Some young voters said they want more than arrests after headline-hogging crimes; they want a justice system that functions impartially. Tamanna, a higher-secondary student at Lalmohon Islamia Kamil Madrasa in Bhola, alleged that money sometimes dictates outcomes in the justice system, enabling those with financial power to escape accountability. “Those who speak out against injustice must be provided with safety and the right to express themselves.” She pointed out that activists who have spoken publicly against corruption now feel increasingly vulnerable to reprisals. Faimun Noman, a student of accounting and information systems at Islamic University, said he wants a government that believes in accountability, transparency and justice. “I want to see a government that takes an effective and neutral stance against corruption, and a system where state institutions operate above partisan influence,” said Faimun, a first-time voter from Lalmonirhat-3. He hoped the next administration would take measures to control spiralling living costs, create jobs and ensure good governance in the health sector. Benzir Ahammed Shawon, a master’s student at North South University, said the next government should be “social-development-oriented.” “It should take up projects that reduce inequality and curb the commercialisation of education,” he said, calling for economic measures to address the recession and

unemployment. “Freedom of the media and publishers must be ensured,” he added. Sumaya Akter Ripa, an MBA student at Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP), said, “The next government must focus on improving the wages and living standards of the most neglected workers. We need to reduce reliance on imports and utilise our domestic assets.” She also hoped that there would be reforms to modernise the judiciary and ensure corruption-free recruitment exams. Md Nayim Howlader, a master’s student at Dhaka College and a first-time voter, said, “No matter which party forms the next government, it must be people-friendly. It must show zero tolerance for all forms of injustice and corruption.” He further said the future administration should prioritise healthcare and education and work to develop domestic industries. Madrasa students highlighted that they are being left behind in terms of skills. Habibur Rahman, a higher-secondary student at Darunnajat Siddiqiya Kamil Madrasa in Dhaka, said manifestos must address the “digital divide.” “The madrasa education system is still lagging behind, especially when it comes to ICT. While the country is moving towards digitalisation, there are no major initiatives in this sector for us. This leads to discrimination in the job market.” Tamanna of Lalmohon Islamia Kamil Madrasa called for curriculum reforms, compulsory classes and the early introduction of ICT-based subjects. During interviews, young voters also weighed in on the referendum, with opinions divided. Those leaning towards “Yes” described it as a necessary firewall against future authoritarianism and a rare chance for citizens to have a direct say in major state reforms. Those intending to vote “No” described the single-question ballot as misleading, and argued that the proposed changes should be passed by parliament. [Shamima Rita, Tangila Tasnim and Sakib Ahmed contributed to this report]

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ইসলামী ব্যাংকিং সেবা প্রদানে 'ইসলামী ব্যাংকিং কর্ণার' পূবালী ব্যাংকের প্রায় সকল শাখা এবং উপশাখায়



Speakers at a roundtable, titled 'Advancing Indigenous Rights in the Chittagong Hill Tracts: Progress, Challenges, and Political Commitments,' at the CPD office in Dhaka yesterday. The event was jointly organised by the Nordic Embassies in Bangladesh, the Centre for Policy Dialogue, and The Daily Star.

PHOTO: STAR

Recognising indigenous rights key to peace in CHT

Say speakers at discussion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Recognising indigenous peoples and addressing long-standing governance, justice, and human rights issues are essential for sustainable peace, said speakers at a discussion yesterday.

They also highlighted persistent challenges in implementing the 1997 Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Peace Accord.

They said progress in the CHT is not merely a local concern but a national issue that requires political will, institutional reform, and genuine dialogue with all stakeholders, including the security forces.

The roundtable, titled "Advancing Indigenous Rights in the Chittagong Hill Tracts: Progress, Challenges, and Political Commitments," was held at the CPD office in Dhaka.

The event was jointly organised by the Nordic Embassies in Bangladesh, the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), and The Daily Star.

CHT Affairs Adviser Supradip Chakma said recognition of hill peoples as human beings must come first.

"The majority has to recognise whether we are human beings. If we are human beings, then the process starts," he said.

He described demographic change in the CHT as politically driven rather than electoral.

"This is not election engineering," he said, adding that the indigenous population has declined from 22 percent in 1971 to less than half today.

➤ **Fully implement 1997 CHT Peace Accord**

➤ **Address land grabbing, strengthen land governance**

➤ **Ensure justice, end impunity in CHT**

➤ **Engage security forces in rights-based dialogue**

➤ **Strengthen local institutions, administration**

Criticising weak law enforcement and justice, he pointed to land grabbing and the repeated release of accused persons on bail. "Police arrest them, but the next day they are on bail. What can justice do then?" he asked.

He called for equity rather than equality

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

CHANKHARPUL KILLINGS

ICT verdict brings grief, not closure, for families

SHARIFUL ISLAM and SIRAJUL ISLAM RUBEL

For one and a half years, Sheikh Jamal Hasan counted each day, waiting for justice for his only son, Sheikh Mahdi Hasan Junaid.

Yesterday, that long wait ended, but not with relief. Instead, it brought a deep ache of dissatisfaction and grief.

The International Crimes Tribunal-1 delivered its verdict in the case over the killing of Junaid and five others at Chankharpul during the July 2024 uprising, leaving families with more sorrow than closure.

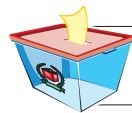
Standing outside the courtroom, Jamal struggled to hold back tears and anger. "My son brought a new sun and a new Bangladesh," he told reporters. "Now it feels as if he committed a crime. What kind of verdict is this? You tell me."

Junaid, along with five others, was shot dead by police in Dhaka's Chankharpul area on August 5, 2024, as police indiscriminately fired on students and people heading to the Central Shaheed Minar as part of the "March to Dhaka" programme.

The tribunal sentenced three accused senior police officers – former Dhaka Metropolitan Police commissioner Habibur Rahman, former joint commissioner Sudip Kumar Chakraborty, and former additional deputy commissioner Shah Alam Mohammad Akhtarul Islam – to death.

Five other policemen received lighter sentences: former

SEE PAGE 5 COL 3



FEBRUARY 12 ELECTION | DHAKA-13

Mugging woes, new promises and a race for change

SHARIF M SHAFIQUE and SADI MUHAMMAD ALOK

An election procession began at Mohammadpur Beribadh, passed Mockbul Hossain College in Katasur, and ended in front of the Mohammadpur bus stand.

Nearby, students of Lalmatia Mohila College were discussing the upcoming polls. Although campaigning is in full swing, many of these first-time voters are still unfamiliar with the candidates contesting from Dhaka-13.

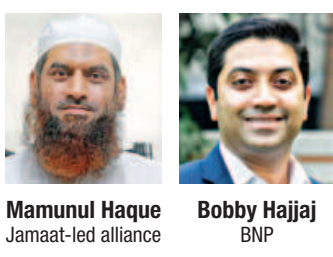
Speaking to them, it emerged that they are still assessing their options. "We want to know who is capable of bringing change," one student said.

Dhaka-13 comprises wards 28 to 34 of Dhaka North City Corporation, covering Mohammadpur, Adabor and Sher-e-Bangla Nagar thana.

The constituency includes areas such as Lalmatia, Asad Gate, Shyamoli, Beribadh, Dhaka Udyan, Bosila and Rayerbazar, as well as neighbourhoods around Bangladesh Betar, the National Institute of Neurosciences, the

Liberation War Museum and the Passport Office.

Talking to The Daily Star, residents identified mugging, teen gang violence, and drugs as major concerns. Illegal land grabbing and footpath encroachment were also frequently mentioned.



Mamunul Haque
Jamaat-led alliance

Bobby Hajjaj
BNP

Md Ibrahim, 35, a businessman at Krishi Market and a resident of Tikkapara, said he hopes the market – destroyed by a fire in 2023 – will be rebuilt after the election.

"The affected traders have received nothing so far. I want the elected MP to resolve this," he told The Daily Star.

Nasir Hazari, a resident of Madrasa Road, said he is hopeful

about youth-led politics. "We are waiting for something new. We have a soft spot for the students' party, but they must stay away from corruption. A stable government is necessary for peace," he said.

The constituency also includes the Geneva Camp, home to around 30,000 voters, where permanent rehabilitation remains the core demand.

A member of the Stranded Peoples General Rehabilitation Committee, speaking anonymously, expressed doubt.

"Every government treats us like pawns. After the July uprising, many of our people are facing cases and jail. I don't think this government will solve our problems," he said.

Despite "eyewash" anti-drug drives, the trade continues, he added.

Camp residents, he said, will support whoever promises rehabilitation in their manifesto.

Rashed, a university student from Rayerbazar, said public safety should be the top priority. "I never saw previous MPs in the area. This

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

July fighters get legal indemnity

Govt issues ordinance



AT A GLANCE

Ordinance grants legal protection

➤ **All cases linked to movement to be withdrawn**

No fresh cases can be filed

➤ **NHRC to assess allegations of murder**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has issued the July Mass Uprising (Protection and Liability Determination) Ordinance, 2026, granting legal protection and indemnity to students and people who took part in the movement that toppled the Sheikh Hasina regime in 2024.

The Legislative and Parliamentary Affairs Division of the law ministry published a gazette notification in this regard on January 25.

The draft of the ordinance was approved at an Advisory Council meeting on January 15.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

Publish white paper on 'three zero' performance

TIB asks interim govt



STAR REPORT

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has called for the publication of a white paper at the end of the interim government's tenure to inform the public about the extent to which the government, formed under the leadership of Prof Muhammad Yunus, has fulfilled its responsibilities in line with the internationally promoted concept of "three zero".

"Alongside the international advocacy surrounding the 'three zero' concept, I believe people of the country will want to know the extent to which responsibilities have been fulfilled nationally in relation to these three issues," said Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh, while speaking at a human chain on Dhaka's Manik Mia Avenue yesterday.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2



A cloud of smoke envelops the Aminbazar landfill site along the Dhaka-Aricha highway as household waste collected from nearby areas is burnt indiscriminately. Such activities contribute to Dhaka's continuous ranking among the world's most polluted cities, severely impacting the health of residents. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Jamaat, NCP allege election code breaches

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami and National Citizen Party yesterday alleged widespread violations of the electoral code of conduct ahead of the 13th national election and referendum scheduled for February 12.

Jamaat leaders claimed their female activists have faced harassment and targeted attacks in several areas, including incidents of veil removal, phone snatching, and alleged inaction by law enforcers.

"Assaults have been deliberately carried out on our activists over the past few days. They [female Jamaat activists] are being harassed, humiliated, and in some places, asked to remove their veils. Many have had their mobile phones snatched," Jamaat's Assistant Secretary General Ehsanul Mahboob Zubair told reporters following a meeting between a Jamaat delegation and the chief election commissioner at the Election Commission headquarters in Agargaon.

Such incidents are repeatedly occurring in the Dhaka-15, as well as in other constituencies in the capital and across the country, he added.

Zubair, also head of the party's

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

July fighters get legal

FROM PAGE 3

Signed by the president under the powers granted by Article 93(1) of the Constitution, the ordinance is deemed to have come into effect retrospectively from July 1, 2024, and covers actions carried out during the movement from July to August 2024. The ordinance designates students and members of the general public who participated in the movement as “revolutionaries” (Ganabhuthankari).

It states that all civil and criminal cases filed against participants for incidents occurring during the movement will be withdrawn, and that no such cases may be filed in the future. It also outlines procedures for disposing of pending cases.

If any case or legal proceeding is active against a participant, the relevant court will immediately withdraw it upon an application by the public prosecutor or a government appointed lawyer, subject to certification by the government. Upon such application, the accused will be immediately discharged or acquitted. The ordinance draws a distinction between acts of “political resistance” and what it terms “criminal misuse of chaotic situations”.

It states that during July and August 2024, taking defensive measures became inevitable to resist indiscriminate killings and armed attacks ordered by the then government.

Citing Article 46 of the Constitution, the ordinance notes that it is the duty of the state to protect those who took part in such resistance.

Article 46 provides that parliament may, by law, indemnify any person in the service of the Republic or any other person in respect of acts done in connection with the national liberation struggle or the maintenance or restoration of order, or validate any sentence, punishment, forfeiture or other act done in such context. However, the ordinance specifies that allegations of murder against any participant cannot be filed directly in court.

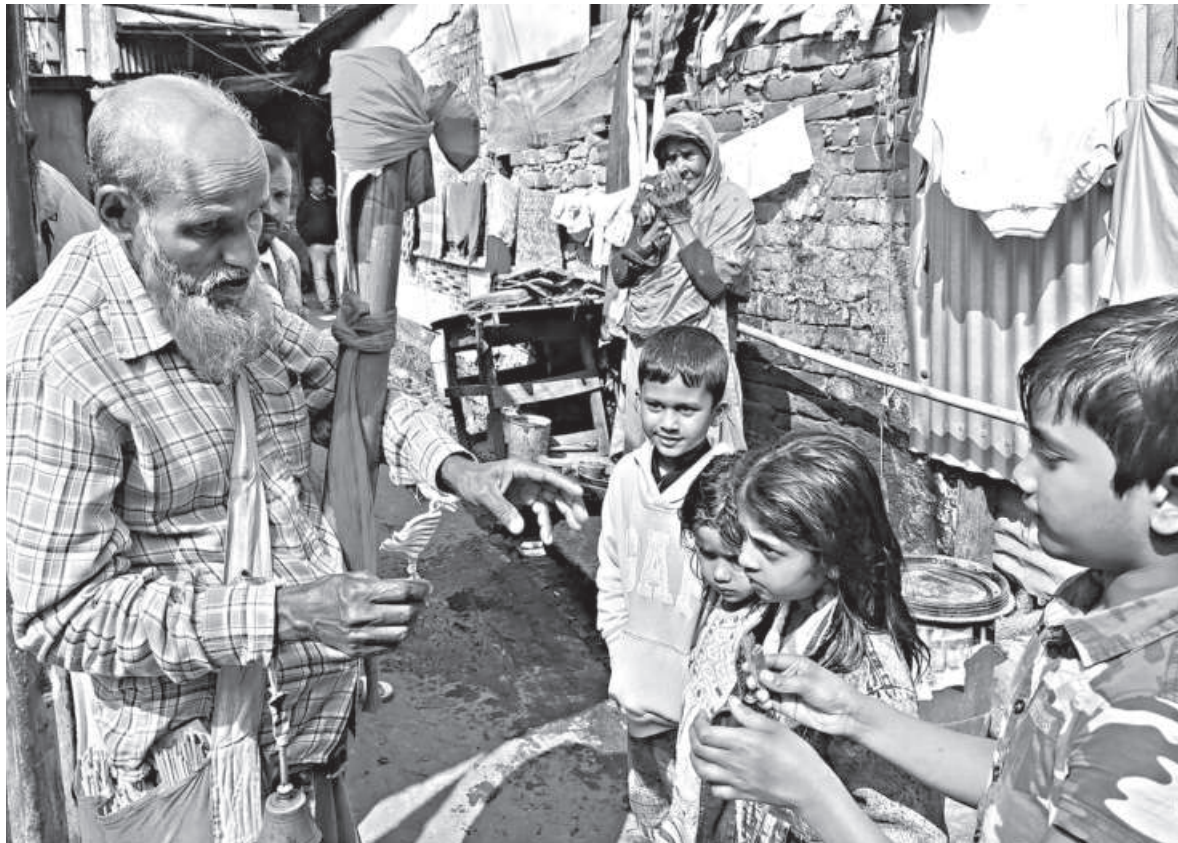
Instead, such complaints must be submitted to the National Human Rights Commission, which will conduct an investigation to determine the nature of the

act.

If the commission finds that the act constituted “political resistance”, no legal action will proceed against the accused. The commission may, however, direct the government to provide compensation to the victim’s family, and the ordinance states that such a decision cannot be challenged in any court.

If the investigation determines that the killing was committed for personal interest or amounted to a “criminal misuse” of the chaotic situation, the commission will submit a report to the relevant court. The court will then treat the report as a police report and initiate judicial proceedings.

The ordinance also imposes a specific condition regarding investigations. If the victim is a member of the police or any other disciplined force, no serving or former officer of that force may be assigned to investigate the matter. It further states that the government may formulate new rules as necessary to implement the objectives of the ordinance.



Md Selim sells the now rarely found kotkoti, a traditional sweet treat made from sugar and mustard oil, to children on the Band Road of Barishal city. The 75-year-old shapes them into toy ducks and sells each for Tk 10, earning a daily profit of about Tk 800.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Publish white paper

FROM PAGE 3

TIB organised the programme marking the UN-declared International Clean Energy Day 2026.

Yunus promotes the global vision of zero poverty, zero unemployment and zero carbon emissions. However, Iftekharuzzaman said after assuming office, the interim government has acted in ways that contradict his advocacy on these three fronts. “As a UN member state, Bangladesh’s interim government has failed to observe Clean Energy Day,”

39 noted citizens

FROM PAGE 5

The statement was signed by Sultana Kamal of Human Rights Protection Council, Shirin Parvin Haq of Naripokkho, Khushi Kabir of Nijera Kori, Dr Iftekharuzzaman of TIB, Rasheda K Chowdhury of Campaign for Popular Education, Supreme

he said.

He questioned whether the government has taken any initiative that a future elected government could carry forward.

Iftekharuzzaman criticised the interim government’s draft Energy and Power Sector Master Plan (EPSMP 2025), saying the plan remains dependent on fossil fuels. He alleged that the absence of a participatory approach is one of the defining features of the interim government’s activities.

Court lawyer ZI Khan Panna, photographer Shahidul Alam, Barrister Sara Hossain, Shamsul Huda of ALRD, Shaheen Anam of Manusher Jonno Foundation, Dr Shahnaz Huda, Dr Samina Luthfa and Dr Sumaiya Khair of Dhaka University, among others.

Mugging woes, new

FROM PAGE 3

time, I want young leaders who can bring real change,” he said.

In this constituency, the main contest is between BNP’s Bobby Hajjaj and Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis candidate Mamunul Haque, both of whom are campaigning actively.

Mamunul Haque, contesting with the “Rickshaw” symbol, is holding “Jagaroni Padajatra” (awakening marches) in the constituency.

Bobby Hajjaj, who recently resigned from the Nationalist Democratic Movement (NDM) to join the BNP, is campaigning with the “Sheaf of Paddy” symbol through exchange meetings and door-to-door visits.

Mamunul, contesting under the II party alliance led by Jamaat-e-Islami, told The Daily Star that he is receiving an overwhelming response. “People of all ages are welcoming me. Students and professionals often ask for selfies, which I enjoy,” he said.

He said his priorities include curbing extortion and drugs while rehabilitating teen gang members.

Claiming that the constituency has been represented by “outsiders” for decades, Mamunul said being “a son of the area” gives him an edge.

He added that there is no personal rivalry with Hajjaj, as they often meet at social gatherings.

Hajjaj said he joined the BNP due to changes in the RPO, which made contesting with the party symbol strategically necessary.

He said he plans to return to the NDM after the election. “I am receiving full cooperation from local BNP leaders and a positive response from voters,” he said.

Md Yusuf, joint convener of Dhaka City North BNP and chief coordinator of Hajjaj’s campaign, said the

party is fully backing him and expressed confidence of victory.

Hajjaj described the contest against Mamunul as a “battle to protect democracy”.

He identified terrorism, traffic congestion, drainage problems, and gas and water shortages as key local issues.

“I have already started work, including forming volunteer security cells, installing CCTVs, and developing a special app for residents,” he said.

Also, traffic management training for students and canal-cleaning programmes have already begun, he added.

Both candidates outlined plans for the Geneva Camp.

Hajjaj said preliminary discussions have started on permanent rehabilitation through alternative means, while Mamunul promised initiatives to ensure dignity and rehabilitation for camp residents.

The constituency has 4,08,791 voters — an increase of 13,355 from the previous election. Of them, 2,09,812 are male, 1,98,971 are female, and eight are hijra.

Other candidates contesting for this constituency include Mizanur Rahman (Gono Odhikar Parishad), Md Shahabuddin (Bangladesh Minority Janata Party), Md Khalekuzzaman (BSD), Shahriar Iftekhar (Bangladesh Muslim League), Fatema Akter Munia (Insaniyat Biplob Bangladesh), and independent candidates Sohel Rana and Sheikh Md Rabiul Islam.

PRAYER TIMING
JANUARY 27

| | | | | |
|--------------|-------|------|---------|------|
| Fazr | Zohr | Asr | Maghrib | Esha |
| AZAN 5-35 | 12-45 | 4-15 | 5-46 | 7-15 |
| JAMAAAT 6-10 | 1-15 | 4-30 | 5-50 | 7-45 |

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

Recognising indigenous rights

FROM PAGE 3

and stressed the need for quality education and livelihood development for indigenous communities.

TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said meaningful progress is impossible without engaging the security forces.

“Peace will never be established in CHT nor will justice be promoted... until... they have engaged with the forces of Bangladesh,” he said, adding that indigenous rights concern the rights of the entire nation. He also said the issue cannot be resolved by any single political party or government without addressing the mindset of the forces controlling the region.

CPD Executive Director Fahmida Khatun said the CHT remains a test of whether Bangladesh can translate policy commitments into lived rights and dignity.

She identified gaps in land and resource governance, effective local administration, and trust in the security and justice systems, calling for sequenced priorities and visible outcomes.

Barrister Sara Hossain,

honorary executive director of Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST), said the CHT Peace Accord remains unresolved and legally contested, noting that those who challenged the accord are now politically influential. She stressed that addressing discrimination must be a starting point and said commitments in this area have weakened in recent months.

On land rights, she said the Land Commission can only move forward if it recognises the community land rights of indigenous people.

Sara Hossain also cited the disappearance of Kalpana Chakma as “the emblematic case of impunity in Bangladesh — 30 years and no investigation, no results”.

Former Dhaka University professor Amena Mohsin described the CHT as a complex political issue and pointed to a culture of impunity surrounding violence against women.

She said there is “absolutely no trust” between communities and the state, and called for reforming and strengthening local institutions in an ethnically

plural society.

Pallab Chakma, executive director of Kapaeng Foundation, said the CHT conflict should be treated as a political problem rather than a security or economic one. He also said forming a credible body to investigate recent incidents in Rangamati and Khagrachhari could help set an important precedent.

Swedish Ambassador to Bangladesh Nicolas Linus Ragnar Weeks said recognition of indigenous peoples “is not symbolic, it is foundational”, and a prerequisite for justice, meaningful participation, and sustainable peace.

Danish Ambassador Christian Brix Møller said indigenous rights are universal human rights, while Norwegian Ambassador Håkon Arald Gulbrandsen said indigenous communities pose no threat to border areas and often struggle simply to preserve their identity and avoid cultural extinction.

The discussion was moderated by Tanjim Ferdous, in charge of NGOs and Foreign Missions at The Daily Star.

Agrani Bank PLC.
Head Office
Procurement and Common Services Division (Common)
9/D, Dilkusha C/A, Motijheel, Dhaka-1000
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9566153-54 (2 Lines) 02-9513293 (Division)
Email: dgmcscd@agranibank.org

Invitation for e-Tender

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<https://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the following works:

| Tender ID | Lot No. | Lot description | Last selling date | Closing & opening date | Procurement method |
|-----------|-------------------------------|--|-----------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| 1206209 | ABPLC/PCSD-COMM ON/Vehicle/04 | Engine Major Overhauling, Clutch and Brake System Overhauling, Fuel System Repairment, Suspension System Overhauling, A/C System Repairment, General Servicing and Full Body Denting & Painting of 2350 cc Mitsubishi Pajero Jeep at Agrani Bank PLC., Head Office, Dhaka-1000 | 15-02-2026 16.00pm | 16-02-2026 15.00pm | OTM |

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted.

To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (<https://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. The fees for downloading e-Tender documents from the National e-GP Portal has to be deposited online through any registered bank’s branches. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP Portal and e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

Nahid Sultana Chowdhury
Deputy General Manager

GD-195

edcc এসেনসিয়াল ড্রাগস্ কোম্পানী লিমিটেড
৩৯৫-৩৯৭, তেজগাঁও শিল্প এলাকা, ঢাকা-১২০৮।

দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি

ইডিসিএল নিম্নোক্ত আইটেমগুলি প্রকৃত স্থানীয় প্রস্তুতকারী/সরবরাহকারীদের (সংশ্লিষ্ট ব্যবসার সাথে জড়িত) নিকট হতে সীলমোহরকৃত দরপত্র আহবান করছে:

| ক্রমিক নং | দরপত্র নং ও তারিখ | বিবরণ | পরিমাণ | আর্নেস্ট মানি | দরপত্র শিডিউলের মূল্য (অফারের যোগ্য) | দরপত্র গ্রহণের শেষ তারিখ ও সময় | দরপত্র খোলার তারিখ ও সময় |
|-----------|---|--|---------------|---------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| ০১। | ইডিসিএল/ক্রয়/স্থানীয়/দরপত্র/২০২৬/৩৬ তারিখ: ২৬/০১/২০২৬ইং | বিভিন্ন উইডথ পিভিসি ফিল্ম (Different Width PVC Film) (সিডিউল মোতাবেক) | ২৭,৯০০ কেজি | ২.৫% | টাকা ১৫০০.০০ প্রতি সেট | ০৫/০২/২০২৬ইং বেলা ০৩-০০ ঘটিকা | ০৫/০২/২০২৬ইং বেলা ০৩-১৫ ঘটিকা |
| ০২। | ইডিসিএল/ক্রয়/স্থানীয়/দরপত্র/২০২৬/৩৭ তারিখ: ২৬/০১/২০২৬ইং | বিভিন্ন প্রকার প্রিন্টেড ওপেন এবং ক্লোজ মাউথ গ্র্যাম্পল ফর টোল ম্যানুঃ (Different Kinds of Printed Open and Close Mouth Ampoul) (সিডিউল মোতাবেক) | ৫১,৩০,০০০ পিস | ২.৫% | টাকা ২,৩০০.০০ প্রতি সেট | ০৫/০২/২০২৬ইং বেলা ০৩-০০ ঘটিকা | ০৫/০২/২০২৬ইং বেলা ০৩-১৫ ঘটিকা |

সকল কার্যদিবসে অফিস চলাকালীন সময়ে উপরোক্ত কার্যালয় হইতে শর্ত ও নিয়মাবলীসহ দরপত্র সিডিউল ক্রয় করা যাবে। উল্লেখ্য যে, যাদের ভাট রেজিস্ট্রেশন নাই তাহাদের দরপত্রে অংশগ্রহণ করার প্রয়োজন নাই।

দরপত্র খোলার দিনে কোন দরপত্র শিডিউল বিক্রয় করা হবে না। কর্তৃপক্ষ যে কোন দরপত্র গ্রহণ বা বাতিল করার ক্ষমতা সংরক্ষণ করেন।

উপ-মহাব্যবস্থাপক, প্রকিউরমেন্ট (চলতি দায়িত্ব)
পক্ষে: ব্যবস্থাপনা পরিচালক

(৪" X ৫)

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার
নির্বাহী প্রকৌশলী, সওজ, এর কার্যালয়
সড়ক বিভাগ, চাঁপাইনবাবগঞ্জ।
১০২৫৮৮-৮৯৩১০১
E-mail-eenaw.rhd@gmail.com
ফ্যাক্স নং- ৩৫, ১০০০, ৪৫৪, ৩২, ০০১, ২৬-০১৪(৩০) তারিখ: ২৬/০১/২০২৬ খ্রিঃ

“সেতুর ইজারা কোটেশন আহবান বিজ্ঞপ্তি (১ম অস্থানীয়)”

| | | | |
|-----|---|----|---|
| ০১। | ইজারা কোটেশন নং | ১। | ০১- এন.জে. আর, ডি/ ২০২৫-২০২৬ খ্রিঃ। |
| ০২। | ইজারার বিবরণ | ১। | সওজ, চাঁপাইনবাবগঞ্জ সড়ক বিভাগীয় কার্শিনাখর - দারুলিয়া - নাটোর- রাজশাহী - নবাবগঞ্জ - কানসাত- সোনামসজিব- বালিয়াবিলী বর্ডার সড়ক (সড়ক নং- এন-৬) (নবাবগঞ্জ- কানসাত- সোনামসজিব সড়ক) অবস্থিত “শহীদ ক্যাপ্টেন মহিউদ্দিন জাহাঙ্গীর বীরশ্রেষ্ঠ (মহানন্দা) সেতুর” উপর দিয়ে পারাপারকারী যানবাহন হতে টোল আদায়ের নিমিত্তে ইজারা প্রদানের ব্যপকল্প। |
| ০৩। | ইজারা চুক্তির মেয়াদ | ১। | ৩ (তিন) অর্থ বৎসর (০১/০৭/২০২৬ হতে ০৩/০৬/২০২৯ খ্রিঃ পর্যন্ত ১০৯৫ দিন)। |
| ০৪। | ইজারা কোটেশনের সিডিউল মূল্য | ১। | টাকা ৫০০০.০০ (পাঁচ হাজার টাকা মাত্র)। |
| ০৫। | যানবাহন টাকার পরিমাণ | ১। | উক্ত সেতুর ১০% (শতকরা দশ ভাগ) ব্যাংক ড্রাফট/ পে-অর্ডার আকারে |
| ০৬। | ইজারা কোটেশন বিক্রয়ের শেষ তারিখ ও সময় | ১। | ০৬/০২/২০২৬ খ্রিঃ তারিখ বিকাল ৪.০০ পর্যন্ত। |
| ০৭। | মুখবন্ধ অবস্থায় ইজারা কোটেশন গ্রহণের শেষ তারিখ ও সময় | ১। | ১০/০২/২০২৬ খ্রিঃ তারিখ দুপুর ১২.৩০ পর্যন্ত। |
| ০৮। | ইজারা ভাঙে অংশ গ্রহণের যোগ্যতা | ১। | ভাট ও আরবর সনদযুক্তি প্রতিষ্ঠান/নাগরিক, সরকারী/বেসরকারী/ স্বায়ত্বশাসিত সকল প্রতিষ্ঠানের ঠিকাদার। |
| ০৯। | যে সকল কার্যালয়ে ইজারা কোটেশন ক্রয়ের জন্য পাওয়া যাবে | ১। | জেলা প্রশাসক, চাঁপাইনবাবগঞ্জ/নির্বাহী প্রকৌশলী, সওজ, সড়ক বিভাগ, চাঁপাইনবাবগঞ্জ/ রাজশাহী/নওগাঁ/পরিষ্কানা বিভাগ-১/সেতু ডিভাইন বিভাগ-১, পূর্ববঙ্গ, সড়ক ভবন, তেজগাঁও, ঢাকা/ উপ-বিভাগীয় প্রকৌশলী, সওজ, সড়ক উপ-বিভাগ, চাঁপাইনবাবগঞ্জ/সিগঞ্জ/বিভাগীয় কমিশনার, রাজশাহী। |
| ১০। | যে সকল কার্যালয়ে ইজারা কোটেশন মুখবন্ধ অবস্থায় গ্রহণ করা হবে | ১। | (ক) নির্বাহী প্রকৌশলী, সওজ, সড়ক বিভাগ, চাঁপাইনবাবগঞ্জ। (খ) বিভাগীয় কমিশনার, রাজশাহী (গ) জেলা প্রশাসক, চাঁপাইনবাবগঞ্জ। |
| ১১। | ইজারা কোটেশন খোলার স্থান, তারিখ ও সময় | ১। | স্থানঃ নির্বাহী প্রকৌশলীর কার্যালয়, সড়ক ও জনপথ অধিদপ্তর, সড়ক বিভাগ, চাঁপাইনবাবগঞ্জ। তারিখঃ ১০/০২/২০২৬ খ্রিঃ। সময়ঃ বিকাল ৩.০০ ঘটিকা। |
| ১২। | ইজারা আহবানকারী যে কোন সময় যে কোন কোটেশন / সকল কোটেশন বাতিলের ক্ষমতা সংরক্ষণ করেন। | | |

GD-199

(মোহাম্মদ মাহবুবুর রহমান)
পরিচিতি নং- ৬০২৩৪০
নির্বাহী প্রকৌশলী (সে ডায়), সওজ, সড়ক বিভাগ, চাঁপাইনবাবগঞ্জ।

DEATH OF WIFE, SON 39 noted citizens condemn denial of parole to Saddam

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In a joint statement yesterday, 39 rights activists, legal experts and academics condemned what they described as the inhuman denial of parole to former Chhatra League leader Jewel Hossain Saddam, even after the death of his wife and child.

They demanded that the government identify those responsible through a high-level, impartial investigation and take strict action against the officials concerned.

Saddam, former president of the Subarnadanga upazila unit of BCL in Bagerhat, has been in jail for the past 11 months in several cases filed after the July uprising last year.

He was initially held at Bagerhat District Jail, but was transferred to Jashore Central Jail in December 2025. On January 23, Saddam's wife, Suborna Swarnali, and their nine-month-old son were found dead at their home.

Family members said Swarnali had been suffering from depression as Saddam was not being granted bail.

After the deaths, Saddam's family rushed from Bagerhat to Jashore with a parole application. However, due to what the statement described as bureaucratic indifference and the excuse of weekly holidays, no steps were taken to assist them.

Instead, according to media reports cited in the statement, police submitted a report claiming that bringing Saddam out could worsen the law-and-order situation due to a possible gathering of thousands of people, and advised the district administration not to consider the application positively.

Eventually, the family brought the two bodies from Bagerhat to Jashore Central Jail so that Saddam could see them for the last time. He was allowed only five minutes.

"We strongly condemn and protest this incident. We denounce the inhuman, thoughtless and cruel behaviour of the bureaucracy," it said.

SEE PAGE 4 COL.2

10 journos hurt in attack in Narsingdi

STAR REPORT

At least 10 journalists were injured in an attack on members of the Bangladesh Crime Reporters Association (CRAB) in front of Dream Holiday Park in Madhabdi, Narsingdi, yesterday.

The incident occurred around 7:30pm as CRAB members were returning from their annual picnic.

Police detained two suspects from the scene, said Madhabdi Police Station OC Kamal Hossain. According to police, CRAB members from different Dhaka-based media outlets had parked their cars in a privately owned space outside the amusement park, which is commonly used as a parking area.

While no extra fee was mentioned in the morning, attendants later demanded additional charges when the vehicles were being taken out. An argument broke out, leading to the attack. Ten journalists were injured; one was admitted to Narsingdi Sadar Hospital and nine were sent to Dhaka for treatment.

OC Kamal said the arrested individuals had faced previous complaints for collecting excessive fees from the same spot, which is not owned by the park authorities.



Unscrupulous traders openly sell squirrels at a weekly bird market, in violation of the Wildlife Conservation Act. Under the law, hunting, selling and transporting squirrels are punishable offences. These traders trap squirrels from nearby forests and villages, threatening the species' survival, and sell them for Tk 500 to Tk 2,000 depending on age. The photo was taken recently at the Noyabati bird market in Khalishpur, Khulna.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Uneven access, weak financial protection plague healthcare

Experts tell policy dialogue on Universal Health Coverage

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Although Bangladesh has made measurable progress in several health outcomes, including immunisation and maternal healthcare, the country is lagging in many indicators for achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC) by 2030, health experts and professionals said yesterday.

They said access to quality health services remains uneven, while financial protection against health-related expenditures continues to be limited for a large segment of the population.

They emphasised the need for targeted initiatives, expansion of quality primary healthcare and an increase in the health budget, among several other interventions, to achieve the targets.

The observations came at a policy dialogue titled "Monitoring Progress on Universal Health Coverage", held yesterday at the CIRDP Auditorium in the capital.

The Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) and the UHC Forum organised the dialogue with support from Unicef.

Aminul Hasan, member secretary of the UHC Forum, gave a detailed presentation on progress and challenges, citing recent data.

According to service coverage indicators, Bangladesh's score stands at 54 out of 100, driven mainly by gains in childhood immunisation at 98 percent and tuberculosis treatment at 95 percent.

However, the country is lagging in the management of non-communicable diseases, including hypertension and diabetes, as well as in the people-to-



SUGGESTIONS

- **Increase allocation for health budget**
- **Expand quality primary healthcare services**
- **Reduce out-of-pocket health expenditure**
- **Improve access for low-income, marginalised groups**
- **Strengthen NCD prevention, treatment**

healthcare worker ratio.

Although access to services is increasing, healthcare is becoming more expensive for service seekers due to high out-of-pocket expenditure – the money people pay directly from their own pockets – which has reached 73 percent, he said.

There are also significant gaps in access to healthcare based on financial status,

geographic location and gender, he added.

Giving a regional comparison, Aminul said Bangladesh's score stands at 54, compared to 69 for India and 78 for Sri Lanka, while Pakistan's score is 48.

"Bangladesh has made commendable but uneven progress towards UHC, with strengths in maternal and child health, immunisation and reduced mortality since 2015. However, as of 2025, the country remains substantially far from the 2030 goals," he said.

Prof MA Faiz, former director general of the Directorate General of Health Services, said, "The reality indicates that we are not doing well."

He said people from the lower quintile of society, who need services the most, are the ones most deprived of them.

Hossain Zillur Rahman, executive chairman of PPRC and convener of the UHC Forum, stressed the need to move from discussion to strategy and decentralisation at the institutional level.

He said the dialogue focused on how to operationalise identified priorities and chart a clear way forward, and highlighted the growing importance of engaging political actors in health reform.

Ashadul Islam, former health secretary, Prof Abul Kalam Azad, another former director general of DGHS, Mohammad Touhidul Islam, national professional officer (health financing) of WHO Bangladesh, Shamim Hayder Talukder, chief executive officer of Eminence, Aftab Uddin, country director of Hope Foundation for Women and Children of Bangladesh, and Shishir Moral, special correspondent at Prothom Alo, also spoke at the programme.

'Safe water a universal right'

Convention adopts 12-point Khulna Declaration

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

The third Coastal Water Convention 2026 concluded in Khulna yesterday with a strong call to recognise safe water as a universal right and to adopt integrated, ecosystem-based approaches to address Bangladesh's deepening water crisis.

Held from January 24 to 26 at the CSS Ava Centre, the three-day convention brought together policymakers, researchers, development practitioners and community representatives to discuss water insecurity, climate change impacts and governance challenges in coastal and other vulnerable regions of the country.

The convention ended with the adoption of the 12-point Khulna Declaration, which outlines a comprehensive roadmap to address water scarcity, salinity intrusion, waterlogging, ecosystem degradation and livelihood insecurity across coastal and inland regions.

The declaration emphasises that water should not be treated merely as a resource, but recognised as a fundamental component of ecosystems.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Adopt ecosystem-based water management

○ **Formulate water policy, action plan**

○ **End waterlogging, saline water intrusion**

○ **Free rivers from encroachment**

○ **Promote community-based water management**

Among its key recommendations, the declaration calls for the formulation of a distinct national water policy and action plan that reflects the ecological sensitivity of Bangladesh's diverse agro-ecological zones. The declaration stresses the need for community-based water and wetland management, combining indigenous knowledge with modern technology to protect biodiversity, livelihoods and cultural practices.

To address environmental degradation, the declaration calls for an end to human-induced waterlogging and saline water intrusion in agricultural lands, and for a ban on unplanned, saline-water-dependent shrimp farming. It also highlights the importance of restoring river connectivity by freeing rivers from encroachment and reconnecting canals and other wetlands to prevent prolonged waterlogging.

The Khulna Declaration further recommends forming a parliamentary caucus on water and ecosystem protection. Special emphasis is placed on protecting the livelihoods of fishers dependent on rivers, wetlands, estuaries and the sea, as well as safeguarding fish breeding ecosystems.

It also advocates ecosystem-centred coastal settlement planning, focusing on reducing land, air and water pollution and conserving critical habitats through sustainable development strategies.

The closing message of the convention was delivered by Dr Md Khairul Islam, regional director for South Asia at WaterAid. "If local political leaders are engaged and demands are raised through them, and if those demands are presented in parliament through policy-making processes, some level of resolution will be possible," he said.

The closing plenary was moderated by Prof Dr Kazi Maruful Islam of Dhaka University.

Jamaat, NCP allege ICT verdict brings grief

FROM PAGE 3

publicity and media wing, said, "In the past four days, we have observed with concern and anxiety that if these issues are not controlled, the situation may worsen further before the election."

Criticising law enforcement agencies, Zubair said complaints were lodged immediately in affected areas, but no visible action was taken.

Jamaat leaders also demanded the installation of CCTV cameras at all polling centres and urged the EC and administration to play a stronger role in ensuring a level playing field.

Meanwhile, NCP leaders also claimed that opposition groups in several constituencies are flouting regulations with little administrative intervention.

They said their Dhaka-18 candidate's campaign came under attack and warned that such incidents send a "negative signal" to the electoral process.

Following a meeting with the CEC, NCP Chief Organiser (South) Hasnat Abdullah said such assaults challenge the EC's ability to

ensure a level playing field until polling day.

Meanwhile, NCP leader Ayman Raha voiced concern over security risks, saying that attacks occurring "even in the presence of candidates were deeply troubling".

He alleged that they are complying with electoral codes while their opponents are flouting the rules and that the administration remains inactive.

Ayman accused BNP's Dhaka-8 candidate of using government vehicles, saying, "When such things happen openly and no action is taken, the public becomes fearful... we realise we are not getting a true level playing field."

Earlier, in the afternoon, EC Senior Secretary Akhtar Ahmed said a "level playing field" is in place ahead of the votes.

During a press briefing at the EC, Akhtar, when asked about a level playing field in the election, replied, "Of course it does. The very fact that candidates can lodge complaints and run campaigns shows that a level playing field exists. If it didn't, what would have happened?"

FROM PAGE 3

Ramna zone assistant commissioner Mohammad Imrul was sentenced to six years, former Shahbagh Police Station inspector Arshad Hossain to four years, and constables Md Suján Hossain, Imaz Hossain Imon and Md Nasirul Islam to three years each.

Among those present in the courtroom were the parents and maternal grandfather of one of the six victims, Shahriar Khan Anas, a Class 10 student. Before leaving home that day, Anas had written a heartbreaking letter to his mother. As the verdict was read out, his mother, Sanjida Khan, broke down. "This verdict has not delivered justice for our children," she said. "We wanted the death penalty for the accused. Is this even a verdict?" she asked.

Outside the court, her anguish deepened. "Even when there is video footage of my child's killer, he has been sentenced to only three years. Is that really justice? I lost my child. If the sentence is only three years, what message does that send? That people can kill and walk free after three years? I cannot accept this."

Grief and despair were also visible among the families of the convicted

policemen. As the verdict was announced, constables Suján and Nasirul were seen crying in the dock, while their family members wept silently.

Rahima Akhter, who lost her only son Yakub in Chankharpul and had earlier lost her husband, stood quietly among the crowd. "Since my son's death, I have lived in constant grief," she said. "The accused have been given three-year sentences. After three years, they will come out of jail. Then they will be a threat to our safety."

Chief Prosecutor Tajul Islam said the prosecution believed the sentences were inconsistent with justice.

"Considering the way our young people sacrificed their lives in the July uprising, and after the guilt of those who directly opened fire has been proved, such light sentences are not consistent with justice."

"We will appeal and seek the death penalty for each of them. This was not ordinary murder. In crimes against humanity, it is not necessary to prove whose bullet killed whom – no one can escape punishment simply because that was not proved," he said while briefing journalists after the verdict was pronounced.

DIGITAL DEVICE & INNOVATION EXPO

BAHANGDAH TO THO WORLD

ORGANISER

The Largest Exhibition of Digital Devices, Innovation, and Technology in Bangladesh

Date: 28–31 January 2026

Venue: Bangladesh–China Friendship Conference Center (BCFC), Agargaon, Dhaka

Time: 10:00 AM – 8:00 PM

Chief Guest

Dr. Muhammad Yunus

Honorable Chief Adviser

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

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- ★ E-Sports competitions
- ★ PC battle, keyboard battle, Cosplay show
- ★ Innovation and startup zone
- ★ Seminars and panel discussions (with participation of local and international experts)

Discounts and Attractive Prizes on Computers, Laptops, and Mobile Phones

For Registration:

<https://ddiexpo.com.bd/#register> | www.facebook.com/ddiexpo2026/

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China, India are ‘friends, partners’ Says Xi Jinping

REUTERS, Hong Kong

China's President Xi Jinping said China and India were "good neighbours, friends and partners" as he wished President Droupadi Murmu congratulations on the South Asian nation's Republic Day, the official Xinhua news agency reported yesterday.

Xi said that over the past year, China-India relations have continued to improve and develop and are of "great significance for maintaining and promoting world peace and prosperity," according to Chinese state-media Xinhua.

Xi said China has always believed that being "good neighbours, friends and partners" is the right choice for both China and India.

He referred to China and India as the "dragon and the elephant dancing together," Xinhua said.



Rescuers search for victims of a landslide in Pasirlangu village, Cisarua, Bandung, West Java, yesterday. The death toll from the massive Indonesian landslide rose to 17 as crews used heavy equipment to look for dozens still missing after days of heavy rain unleashed a torrent of mud.

PHOTO: AFP

Israel agrees to reopen Gaza’s Rafah crossing

Passage limited to pedestrians; Israeli forces raid West Bank town of Kafr Aqab

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel said yesterday it would only allow pedestrians to travel through the Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt as part of its "limited reopening" once it has recovered the remains of the last hostage in the Palestinian territory.

Reopening Rafah, a vital entry point for aid into Gaza, forms part of a truce framework announced by US President Donald Trump in October, but the crossing has remained closed since Israeli forces took control of it during the war in the Palestinian territory.

Visiting US envoys had reportedly pressed Israeli officials to reopen the crossing during talks in Jerusalem over the weekend.



WAVE OF IRAN PROTESTS US-based rights group confirms deaths of 5,848

Says 17,091 possible fatalities under probe; Rubio warns Iraq on pro-Iran govt

AFP, Paris

A US-based rights group said yesterday it had confirmed the deaths of 5,848 people in a wave of protests in Iran suppressed by security forces, warning that it was still investigating thousands more potential fatalities.

The protests started in late December sparked by economic grievances but turned into a mass movement against the Islamic republic, with huge street rallies for several days from January 8.

NGOs tracking the toll have said their task has been impeded by a now 18-day internet shutdown, warning that confirmed figures are likely to be far lower than the actual toll.

The US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) said it had confirmed that 5,848 people had been killed, including 5,520 protesters, 77 minors, 209 members of the security forces and 42 bystanders.

But the group added it was still investigating another 17,091 possible fatalities. At least 41,283 people have been arrested, it said.

Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio warned Iraq on Sunday against a pro-Iranian government as the expected return of Nouri al-Maliki as prime minister stirs Washington's concern.

JUNTA-RUN POLLS Myanmar pro-military party declares victory

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's dominant pro-military party has won junta-run elections, a party source told AFP yesterday, after a month-long vote that democracy watchdogs dismissed as a rebranding of army rule.

The military snatched power in a 2021 coup, ending Myanmar's experiment with civilian rule and triggering civil war, but pledged a three-phase vote, which finished on Sunday, would return power to the people.

With massively popular democratic figurehead Aung San Suu Kyi detained and her party dissolved, critics say the ballot was stacked with army allies to prolong their grip on power.

Voting was not held in huge patches of the country controlled by rebel factions fighting in the civil war -- another hurdle cited by those questioning the poll's mandate.

North Sea nations look to wind to resist Russian energy ‘blackmail’

AFP, Hamburg

Nine European nations yesterday vowed to build up North Sea offshore wind power with the aim of boosting climate-friendly energy while reducing dependence on Russia and other foreign powers.

Germany, France, the UK and Denmark were among the countries which signed an agreement pledging to turn the North Sea into the "world's largest clean energy reservoir".

The EU's Commissioner for Energy and Housing, Dan Jorgensen, said at the signing ceremony that the agreement was a "very clear signal to Russia".

"No more will we let you blackmail member states of the European Union and no more will we help indirectly fund the war in Ukraine".

The European Union has been scrambling to wean itself off Russian energy imports since Moscow launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Leaders and ministers were meeting in the German port city of Hamburg for the third North Sea summit, after they pledged in 2023 to develop 300 gigawatts of clean energy capacity in the North Sea by mid-century. An intermediate target of 120 GW by 2030 was also set at the time, although experts have said this will not be met on current trends.

The "Hamburg Declaration" signed on Monday envisages that 100 GW of the targeted 300 GW will be quickly delivered through an "unprecedented fleet of joint offshore wind projects".

Venezuela frees 104 political prisoners

AFP, Caracas

More than 100 political prisoners were freed Sunday in Venezuela, where detainees are slowly being released under pressure from the United States, the non-governmental organization Foro Penal said.

"At Foro Penal we have verified 104 releases of political prisoners in Venezuela today," the NGO wrote on social media.

Foro Penal had earlier reported 80 political prisoners being released Sunday.

Director Alfredo Romero said on X that the group was verifying the identities of those released from jails nationwide.

Foro Penal attorney Gonzalo Himiob said the initial releases had taken place in the early hours of the day.

"This figure is not yet definitive and could increase as we proceed with verifications," he said, also on X.

The government of Venezuela's interim leader Delcy Rodriguez, who took power after leftist president Nicolas Maduro was captured by US special forces early this month, has promised to release a "large number" of the hundreds of Maduro opponents languishing in prison.



Office of the Project Director
Mosque Based Child & Mass Literacy Program
for the development of Morality and religious values
Islamic Foundation
Ministry of Religious Affairs
Agargaon, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207

Memo No : 16.01.0000.025.15.028.25.853

Date: 26/01/2026

Invitation of e-Tender
(Open Tender Method)

e-Tender has invited in the National e-GP system Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of following Goods as stated below:

| Tender ID | Name of Goods | Tender publication Date & Time | Tender last selling Date & Time | Tender closing & opening Date with Time |
|-----------|--|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|---|
| 1212249 | Purchase and supply of Educational materials (Signboard)-73768 nos for all upazilla of 64 districts. | 26 January-2026 at 12.00 | 18 February-2026 at 17.00 | 19 February-2026 at 12.00 |
| 1212353 | A) Purchase of Educational materials (White Board with Duster)- 73768 nos for all upazilla of 64 districts. B) Purchase of Educational materials (White Board Marker)- 885216 nos for all upazilla of 64 districts. | 26 January-2026 at 12.00 | 18 February-2026 at 17.00 | 19 February-2026 at 12.00 |

This is an online tender where only e-Tender will be accepted in e-GP portal and no offline/hardcopy is accepted. To submit e-Tender please register in the National e-GP portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>).

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP system and from e-GP helpdesk (helpdesk@procure.gov.bd). The procuring entity reserves the right to reject all applications.

(S. M. Tarikul Islam)
Project Director (Joint Secretary)
Mosque Based Child & Mass Literacy Program
for the development of morality and religious values
Phone: 02222218288

GD-194

Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh
Office of the Executive Engineer, RHD
Patuakhali Road Division, Patuakhali.
☎: 0441-62216
Fax: 0441-65108
e-mail: cepat@rhd.gov.bd

"Quotation Invitation for Lease of Toll Collection of RHD Boga Ferry Ghat"

| 01. | Lease Quotation No. | PRD (Lease Quotation)/01/BF/2025-2026 (3 rd Call) |
|-----|--|--|
| 02. | Name of Work | Lease for Toll Collection of Boga Ferry ghat at 14th km of Lebukhali-Bauphal-Golachipa-Amragachia Road (Z-8806) under Patuakhali Road Division. |
| 03. | Time Limit for Lease | For Boga Ferry Ghat : 1073 days (24.07.2025 to 30.06.2028). |
| 04. | Price of Lease Quotation Schedule | Tk. 5,000.00 (Taka Five thousand only) Per group. |
| 05. | Earnest Money | 10% (Ten percent) of quoted price within Bank Draft/Pay Order. |
| 06. | Last Selling Date & Time of Lease Quotation | 16.02.2026 Up to 5.00 P.M. |
| 07. | Date & time of Receiving Lease Quotation in seal condition | 17.02.2026 Up to 12.30 P.M. |
| 08. | Eligibility to Lease Quotation | VAT and TAX Certified Company/Person, All Contractor's of Government/Private/Autonomus Body. |
| 09. | Offices of Selling Lease Quotation | (a) Office of the Divisional Commissioner, Barisal. (b) Office of the Deputy Commissioner, Patuakhali. (c) Office of the Executive Engineer, RHD, Road Division, Patuakhali. (d) Office of the Executive Engineer, RHD, Road Division, Barguna. (e) Office of the the Sub-Divisional Engineer, RHD, Patuakhali/Kuakata Road Sub-Division/1st Line Workshop Sub-Division, Patuakhali. |
| 10. | Offices of Receiving Lease Quotation in seal condition | (a) Office of the Additional Chief Engineer, RHD, Barisal Zone, Barisal. (b) Office of the Divisional Commissioner, Barisal. (c) Office of the Deputy Commissioner, Patuakhali. (d) Office of the Executive Engineer, RHD, Road Division, Patuakhali. |
| 11. | Place, Date & Time of Opening Lease Quotation | Place : Office of the Executive Engineer, RHD, Road Division, Patuakhali. Date : 17.02.2026 Time : At 3:00 P.M. |
| 12. | The Procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject all Quotation/Lease. | |

(Md. Juwel Hossain)
Assistant Engineer (A.C.), RHD
Road Division, Patuakhali.

(Md. Zamil Akter Limon)
ID No: 602346
Executive Engineer (C.C.), RHD
Road Division, Patuakhali.

GD-192

Salman Shah films return to big screen at Lion Cinemas

Nearly three decades after his untimely death, Salman Shah continues to hold a powerful place in the collective memory of Bangladeshi cinema audiences. Celebrating the enduring appeal of the late actor, Old Dhaka-based multiplex Lion Cinemas has launched a special week-long screening programme titled *Fire Dekhi Salman Shah*.

The initiative features three of his most popular films—*Shopner Prithibi*, *Ontore Ontore* and *Sotter Mittu Nei*—directed by Badol Khondoker, Shibli Sadik and Chhatku Ahmed. According to the organisers, each film is being screened twice daily, with the programme running until January 29. Lion Cinemas said Salman Shah shaped an entire generation's cinematic sensibility, a legacy reflected in the strong audience turnout and continued emotional connection with his films.



I am exploring, taking on challenges: PARSA EVANA

With her infectious smile and effortless charm, Parsa Evana has been quietly, yet confidently carving out a space for herself in the OTT landscape. After making her Chorki debut last year with *Dimlight*, the actress is now set to appear on Hoichoi this Eid with the one-hour film, *Ekshathe Alada*.

With back-to-back projects under her belt and more in the pipeline, The Daily Star caught up with Parsa to talk about her journey so far, her creative choices, and what lies ahead.

"I have always wanted, as an artiste, to work on strong platforms and be part of big-canvas projects. I am drawn to better productions and higher-quality work. OTT projects, in particular, are very well organised, and that makes the whole process truly exciting," said the actress.

Parsa has also been drawing attention for her fresh on-screen pairings. She was recently seen opposite Mosharraf Karim in *Dimlight* and will next be paired with Yash Rohan in *Ekshathe Alada*. Speaking about audience acceptance of new pairings and how an artiste should approach them, she shared, "An artiste should work with everyone. Roles should be portrayed in a way that feels believable. Pairing is actually a crucial thing, and chemistry does not click equally with everyone. But that does not mean an actor should limit themselves to working with only one or two people. That would be a weakness. Actors should explore, take

on challenges, and push their boundaries—and that is exactly what I am doing."

Reflecting on her experience of working with Mosharraf Karim, Parsa had nothing but praise. "Mosharraf *bhai* is like an institution. Working with him is always a great experience. The audience has really liked Nayra, and I have received very positive feedback," she added.

Speaking about her character in *the project*, the actress said, "In *Ekshathe Alada*, I am playing the role of a wife—someone who is married, yet very independent. It is a very urban story, and I have not played this kind of character before. Yash is a good co-actor, and it was a great experience working with him."

When asked about her upcoming projects for Valentine's Day and Eid, Parsa said, "I am actually prioritising the story. There may be a project coming this Valentine's Day. Besides that, *Ekshathe Alada* is set to release this Eid. I haven't taken on any new projects yet. I choose my work based on the script, the director, and the strength of the story, giving more importance to quality. Hopefully, something good will come out of it. Please keep me in your prayers."



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED



Actomania stages Ibsen's final play at Shilpakala Academy

Actomania is set to return to the Dhaka stage with its third production, staging Henrik Ibsen's final play *When We Dead Awaken*, translated into Bangla as *Punurutthaner Din*. The play will premiere today at 7:00pm at the National Theatre Hall of Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, with a second show on January 28 at the same venue and time.

The opening performance will be attended by Norwegian ambassador Håkon Arald Gulbrandsen. Written in 1899, Ibsen's last work explores artistic ambition, unrealised desire and the tension between creation and human connection. The Bangla translation is by Shahidul Mamun, while direction is by Nowrin Sazzad Bristy. Featuring a large ensemble cast, the production continues Actomania's commitment to experimental, idea-driven theatre.

WHAT'S THE HAPS? 'Wednesday Showcase'

Stand Up Dhaka transforms midweek monotony into laughter with its *Wednesday Showcase*, featuring the city's sharpest, most unpredictable comedians. A stage for real stories, wit, and spontaneous humour, the evening invites audiences to immerse themselves in Dhaka's thriving comedy scene and experience the energy of live, unscripted performance.

DATE: WEDNESDAY | JANUARY 28, 2026
TIME: 8:00PM ONWARDS
VENUE: THE NEST, 1/6 NURJAHAN ROAD, MOHAMMADPUR



NEWS

A witness to Bangladesh's Liberation War

FROM PAGE 16

that tumultuous time, the authoritative voice of Sir William Mark Tully became synonymous with the broadcaster's reporting and lent it the credibility for which the BBC is admired across the world.

His broadcasts were a vital source of information for millions, exposing the atrocities committed by the Pakistani army in East Pakistan and providing credible news when local media had been silenced by the military.

With Tully's passing, Bangladesh remembers not only a veteran British journalist but also a steadfast friend of the nation. For this country, his contribution went beyond reporting. His commentaries inspired freedom fighters at the frontlines and strengthened the resolve of a people fighting for independence abroad, reminding them that not everything was alright.

The Connected Histories of the BBC project showcases the corporation's remarkable archive of oral history interviews with its staff. As part of this initiative, the team interviewed Tully.

During the conversation, the BBC's coverage of the 1971 events came up, and the interviewer asked Tully about accusations that the broadcaster had been biased in favour of Bangladesh.

Tully responded: "Well, I think it's a bit like the Pakistan story, it's very difficult because there's no – the government has clamped all information down, we get information, we know things are happening, so we report them, and that is our job to report them. And one answer to this criticism is to say, well, the Pakistan government should have stopped the incidents happening. And no-one – I can't remember a time when any of our reports were challenged."

He continued: "And I remember when I went to Bangladesh I was among the party of journalists, the first party after the military crackdown who went there and were free to report. And, you know, I found the situation was quite as bad if not worse than we had been reporting it."

In the interview, conducted in May 2018, Tully emphasised that there was clear evidence supporting what had been broadcast. It was also telling of his methodical and sincere approach that he validated and verified what had already been reported.

One of his accounts was translated and published by Prothom Alo on March 26, 2024.

After the military crackdown, Tully was among the first group of journalists permitted to enter East Pakistan. They were allowed to travel across the country with relative freedom, unlike an earlier group of journalists who had been tightly restricted.

Tully recalled: "Thus, I was among those journalists who were able to assess the impact of the army's assault, to gauge the feelings of the people around us. At the same time, I tried to calculate what might happen in the future."

"What we saw and heard at that time was evidence of the attack. We clearly understood that the soldiers had come out of the barracks firing. We saw the destruction they had caused. We saw the damage done to the university. Especially when we went outside Dhaka – Rajshahi, for instance – we found that almost every village along the roadside had been burned down."

"It was evident that, in their sheer desire to establish control over the land, the Pakistani army had set fire to the villages. By force, they had driven the residents away so that no resistance could be organised against

them."

Tully, long known as the BBC's "voice of India", passed away on Sunday at a hospital in India at the age of 90.

His death carries deep significance for Bangladesh's history, especially at a time when falsehoods about the Liberation War continue to circulate even 54 years after the country's hard-fought victory over marauding Pakistani forces.

In recognition of his role, the Bangladesh government awarded him the "Friends of Liberation War Honour" in 2012.

The citation noted: "Through his reports, the true picture of the war situation and the importance and justification of the Liberation War was made clear and this resulted in getting worldwide support for our struggle for freedom."

During the Liberation War, Bangladesh had to work tirelessly to garner international support at a time when the world was divided by the Cold War. The US, leading the capitalist Western bloc, sided with Pakistan.

In 1971, portraying the true picture of the Liberation War was crucial. That need has not diminished with time. Even today, both national and foreign quarters continue to spread false and unfounded narratives. Some still attempt to overturn even thoroughly documented truths of Bangladesh's struggle for freedom.

Against this backdrop, Bangladesh needs credible international voices to confront distortion and denial. The clarity and courage of journalists like Mark Tully remain invaluable, offering undeniable evidence of what the Pakistani military did.

His reporting had that rare quality of transcending journalism and rising to the level of testimony.

Observers

FROM PAGE 16

The 2014 and 2024 elections were condemned as "one-sided", as almost all opposition parties boycotted them. Even 153 MPs were elected unopposed in the 2014 polls.

In the 2018 national polls, ballot boxes were reportedly stuffed on the eve of voting. BNP and other opposition parties did not take part in the 2014 and 2024 polls. In 2018, BNP contested under the "Jatiya Oikyafront" banner but faced widespread intimidation and received little redress from the Election Commission.

Of the local observers monitoring the February 12 election, 7,997 will be stationed in Dhaka and 47,457 others across the country.

Among the international observers, the European Union has planned to deploy up to 200 observers for the polls. Of them, 56 are long-term observers, who are in Dhaka, marking the first such mission since 2008.

The Commonwealth mission, whose pre-election team visited Bangladesh in October last year, will comprise 14 observers.

Bangkok-based Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) conducted a pre-election assessment mission in Bangladesh from November 21 to December 5, 2025. It will send a 28-member mission.

International Republican Institute (IRI), a US-based think tank, will send at least 10 observers. An IRI pre-election delegation visited Bangladesh in October last year and published its report.

The number of observers from the US, including the IRI delegation, can increase, said EC officials.

Besides, 25 international freelance observers, including the former Nepalese chief election commissioner, have also shown interest in monitoring the polls, they added.

The EC has invited representatives from election authorities around 50 countries and international organisations to observe the polls.

Munira Khan, president of the Fair Election Monitoring Alliance (Fema), told this newspaper, "International interest in how free and fair election will be has grown compared to previous years, as the last three polls were not credible."

Another reason for the increased attention is the interim government led by Nobel laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus, she added.

Defence industrial zone

FROM PAGE 16

partners, with potential for private sector participation in later phases.

Shortages are often seen in basic military supplies and not just advanced weapon systems, Chowdhury said, emphasising the importance of having captive production capacity.

The zone will be developed gradually over a long-term horizon and only a small portion of the land will be utilised in the initial five years.

In response to questions from reporters, Chowdhury declined to name specific partner countries or potential defence products, describing such discussions as diplomatic and bilateral matters.

He, however, expressed confidence that the project would remain on course regardless of political changes, calling defence industrial capacity a national, non-partisan priority.

The meeting also approved Bangladesh's first free trade zone in Anwara, Chattogram on 600 to 650 acres of land.

Inspired by Dubai's Jebel Ali Free Zone spanning more than 14,000 acres, the zone aims to facilitate storage, manufacturing and re-export of goods, particularly raw materials like American cotton, without the burden of regular customs regulations.

The zone, which will be open to both domestic and foreign investors, would function as a de facto overseas territory, helping to resolve time-to-market challenges that global investors often face, Chowdhury said.

However, implementation will require amendments to eight laws and regulations, including customs and foreign exchange rules.

The next government is expected to oversee this process, with authorities hoping for a functional launch by the end of the year, he said.

The board also approved a plan to repurpose Kushtia Sugar Mill into an economic zone under BEZA's supervision, making use of existing infrastructure to attract investment and generate employment.

BEZA will now be allowed to establish economic zones within municipalities, reversing a restriction under the 2012 Act, Chowdhury said.

This aims to revive unused industrial spaces in urban areas while reducing pressure on agricultural

land.

A new incentive scheme has been approved for non-resident Bangladeshis (NRBs) who bring in foreign direct investment, said Chowdhury, also the executive chairman of the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA).

NRBs will receive cashback up to 1.25 percent of their equity investment, following a model similar to remittance incentives.

The government has ratified the merger of six investment promotion agencies – BIDA, BEZA, the Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority, the Hi-Tech Park Authority, the Public-Private Partnership Authority and Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation – into a single unified body.

An independent third-party consultant will design the new organisational structure to ensure fairness and efficiency.

Chowdhury defended the merger, arguing that current decentralisation forces investors to navigate through multiple agencies with inconsistent policies.

A centralised structure would streamline services and create a more investor-friendly environment.

Plans were also announced to establish BIDA offices abroad, starting with China, followed by South Korea and an EU country, he said, adding that the offices will operate on a commission-based model, where local agents will be incentivised to bring in investment.

Speak up

FROM PAGE 16

US President Donald Trump told Wall Street Journal in an interview published on Sunday that his administration is "reviewing everything and will come out with a determination" about the fatal shooting in Minneapolis.

Trump also signalled a willingness to eventually withdraw immigration enforcement officials from the Minneapolis area, the report said.

With tensions high, protesters gathered Sunday in Minneapolis, denouncing Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). One person held a cardboard sign that read: "Be Pretty, be Good."

BCL leader gets bail

FROM PAGE 16

On Friday, police recovered the bodies of Saddam's wife, Kaniz Suborna Swarnali, 22, and his nine-month-old son Najim Hossain. Swarnali was found hanging, and the child, dead on the floor, at a house in Sabekdanga village of Bagerhat Sadar upazila around noon.

After post-mortem at Bagerhat District Hospital, the bodies were handed over to the family. The

mother and child were laid to rest in Sabekdanga early Sunday.

Speaking to reporters, Swarnali's brother, Shubho, earlier said his sister had married Saddam around five years ago.

"My sister had been mentally distressed since her husband's imprisonment. She tried in many ways to secure his release... This caused severe mental stress and depression. Out of frustration, she drowned her nine-

month-old child in a bucket of water and later took her own life," he claimed.

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.


Building Competent Learners in Bangladesh: Evidence on Foundational Skills

Bangladesh has expanded access to schooling; the harder work is ensuring children actually learn. On December 10, 2025, the Institute of Informatics and Development and The Daily Star convened a roundtable at The Daily Star Centre in Dhaka to examine what the evidence shows about children's foundational skills. Education experts, policymakers, development partners, academics, NGO leaders, media professionals and political figures assessed the scale of the learning shortfall, probed why private tutoring has become a parallel system, and debated what would move the needle. The discussion focused on practical reforms—stronger classroom teaching, assessments that reward understanding, and governance that makes schools accountable for learning, not just enrollment.



SYEED AHMED
CEO
Institute of Informatics and Development
Bangladesh's enrollment gains are

impressive, but our study points to a deep, system-wide learning crisis in primary education: many children finish primary school without mastering Grade 2-level skills. As a member of the People's Action for Learning (PAL) Network, IID conducted household-based, one-on-one assessments of children aged 5 to 16—whether in school or out—across all 64 districts, using a nationally representative sample provided by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. The study used ICAN-ICAR (International Common Assessments of Numeracy and Reading), which has been verified by UNESCO's Institute of Statistics for tracking SDG indicator 4.1.1(a). The results are stark. Scores rise with each grade, yet only about 47% of Grade 5 completers reach basic proficiency. More than 95% can recognize Bangla letters, but just 66% of Grade 5 students can answer a basic question about a short paragraph; only 52% can solve simple word problems. Rural children lag their urban peers by 10-15 percentage points. Even with 57% relying on private tutoring, Bangladesh ranks only mid-tier globally—an alarm bell for a reform-minded “new Bangladesh.”



DR. SUMERA AHSAN
Professor, Institute of Education and Research
University of Dhaka
A competency-based tool may favor children

who have been in school: textbook-style examples can disadvantage out-of-school learners, and disability can depress results when many children are excluded altogether. Grade-based findings should be separated from age-based ones—many 11-13-year-olds are still in primary grades—because the picture changes depending on the comparison. Gender gaps appear small, but the rural-urban divide persists. Widespread private tutoring signals a shadow system propping up weak schools. Reading performance remains poor even when assessed in Bangla, leaving no easy scapegoat. The report offers a snapshot, not a diagnosis, and should prompt deeper, context-specific inquiry into who is falling behind and why.



that reward understanding, not memorization.



SHERIN AKHTER
Program Officer,
Education Unit
UNESCO
After two decades of working with development partners,

Bangladesh is still asking the same question: why don't children learn? Recent SDG 4 discussions highlighted staffing gaps—about 8,000 secondary teacher posts vacant and roughly 34,000 head-teacher positions unfilled across 64,000 primary schools. But shortages are compounded by weak management and unreliable information. Policymakers cannot plan without credible numbers, yet BANBEIS, DPE and DSHE produce data that do not align, with little interoperability. Teachers described low pay, heavy workloads and limited support; many stay out of commitment, but mentoring and monitoring rarely improve practice. The priorities are clear: assess teachers and officials as well as students, create genuine career pathways, and fund education at least at UNESCO's recommended 4% of GDP.



KHANDAKER LUTFUL KHALED
Education Advisor
Institute of Informatics and Development
Children shouldn't need

a second school after school. About 58% depend on private tutoring, clear evidence that classroom instruction is failing and that low-income families pay the price. Teacher preparation needs an overhaul: pre-service training is limited, and in-service courses often fail to change classroom practice. Schools must expand remedial support so children can catch up without coaching, while the state considers steps to rein in the tutoring market. Teachers also need a stronger collective voice, alongside community oversight that makes parent-teacher groups and school committees more than names on paper. Covid-era digital gaps—only 18.7% could keep learning—and tea-garden schooling averaging 2.9 years underscore the inequality. Education should be treated as a constitutional right, backed by a Right to Education Act.



MUSHFIQ US SALEHIN
Joint Member Secretary
National Citizen Party
Bangladesh is grading

itself into complacency. The obsession with GPA-5 rewards inflated results and pushes schools to chase rankings instead of real comprehension. Primary education has been starved of incentives: low pay, weak facilities and economic pressure keep both teachers and students from staying the course. Question leaks also feed the coaching economy, reinforcing a system that prioritises exam tactics over learning. Political parties should put teacher pay and status, stronger training, and a stable, well-implemented curriculum at the centre of their manifestos. The stronger performance of some army- and missionary-run schools suggests that governance and corruption in school management bodies can make or break quality. Culture-war skirmishes distract from the basics—ensuring children actually learn.



BARRISTER NASREEN SULTANA MILY
Joint General Secretary
Amar Bangladesh
Bangladesh's teacher-quality

problem is rooted in mass decisions made without standards. The nationalisations of 1973 and 2013 brought large numbers of schools and teachers into the system without adequate vetting, weakening quality over time. Recent reforms aim to reverse that trend through more competitive recruitment, efforts to attract stronger candidates, and upgrades to pay and professional status. A nationwide school-feeding programme is also being used to support attendance and retention, while Dhaka is rebuilding 342 primary schools as modern multi-storey facilities. The pandemic exposed the limits of remote learning; the priority now is improving in-person instruction through better teachers, stronger management, and supportive infrastructure.



KAZI JESIN
Media Personality
Bangladesh's education crisis rarely makes news unless it comes with a fight. The national conversation

fixates on enrollment tallies and official sound bites, while the harder question—why schools fail to build real reading and maths—gets little investigative attention. Stories about teacher-student relationships, rural-urban gaps and the tutoring economy do not draw sponsors or clicks the way scandal and shouting do. But families absorb the cost, paying for coaching that should be unnecessary. Stronger teacher support and professional forums are needed, alongside research on changing student needs and an end to politicised hiring and school governance. When police crack down on teachers' protests, the state sends a damaging message: the profession has no dignity.



MD KHALID SAIFULLAH
Assistant Director
Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education
Quality education

begins with quality teachers, not higher enrollment charts. Bangladesh once chased “quantity,” but SDG-era commitments make foundational reading and numeracy the real test. A major obstacle is a chaotic, politicised teacher pipeline: multiple recruitment routes, uneven standards, and then automatic absorption into government pay scales. Training helps, but it cannot replace basic capacity, so policy must begin with selecting stronger candidates and treating education as a core state responsibility, not charity. A dedicated education commission—similar to those in other sectors—could standardise recruitment, grading, promotion and accountability, and help attract and retain qualified teachers. Enforcing school catchment areas would also ensure new schools are approved on need, not political pressure.



MAHBUBUR RAHMAN TUHIN
Senior Information Officer
Ministry of Information and Broadcasting
Bangladesh's teacher-quality

problem is rooted in mass decisions made without standards. The nationalisations of 1973 and 2013 brought large numbers of schools and teachers into the system without

adequate vetting, weakening quality over time. Recent reforms aim to reverse that trend through more competitive recruitment, efforts to attract stronger candidates, and upgrades to pay and professional status. A nationwide school-feeding programme is also being used to support attendance and retention, while Dhaka is rebuilding 342 primary schools as modern multi-storey facilities. The pandemic exposed the limits of remote learning; the priority now is improving in-person instruction through better teachers, stronger management, and supportive infrastructure.



DR. MD. HARUNUR RASHID
Assistant Director
National Academy for Educational Management
When children blame

their teachers, it is worth paying attention. UNESCO's 2024 Price of Inaction warns that 42% of learners fall below basic skills, and that narrowing the learning gap by 10% could raise annual GDP growth by 1-2%. In Bangladesh, 21% miss basic maths and science proficiency, and only 30% read Bangla well. NAEM research also suggests students consider 65% of teachers unfit—an aftershock of mass nationalisations that brought underqualified staff into classrooms, gaps that training alone may not fix. The response must include strict monitoring and an exit pathway for persistently ineffective teachers. Private tutoring is not a hobby; it is what families buy when schools do not teach, while mission- and army-run schools often perform through uncompromising administration.



DILRUBA AHMED
Director (Deputy Secretary)
National Academy for Primary Education
Bangladesh has built

more classrooms; now it has to build better teaching. NAPE will pilot a redesigned 10-month Diploma in Primary Education in 12 Primary Training Institutes in 2026 to attract candidates who choose teaching as a career. To strengthen early reading, the plan includes steps schools can implement immediately: a daily reading hour, stronger library routines, and improved training for Bengali instructors. NAPE also intends to use a cascade model—preparing strong teachers in each upazila to coach others through cluster-based support—and is testing a supplementary Bengali reader alongside Grade 1-2 texts in 30 schools before recommending wider rollout. The message is clear: quality will improve only if teachers are properly supported and all stakeholders remain engaged.



JENA KABIR SUCHONA
Senior Reporter
Channel 24
Bangladesh treats


education news like a calendar event: results day, admissions day, repeat. Most outlets spotlight board exam scores and a handful of “good” schools, while the deeper crisis—especially in Bangla-medium classrooms—goes largely unreported. Special reporting on frequent curriculum changes, teaching methods, and who should be held accountable remains rare, even though these are the questions parents raise on the ground. Part of the problem is access: schools and authorities often will not speak on record, and visual media depends

on willing voices and permissions. Still, the media's role is to act as a public watchdog—using its “third eye” to track policy zigzags, teacher readiness, and school management until reform becomes unavoidable.



KAZI FERDOUS PAVEL
Senior Joint Director
Institute of Informatics and Development
Benchmarks don't

teach children; they should tell teachers what to change. ICAN-ICAR were designed as a common framework used in roughly 12-15 countries, allowing comparison without ignoring context. The global report is only a starting point; the next step is a Bangladesh-specific analysis, followed by a South Asia comparison to identify shared constraints and opportunities. The urgent task is to strengthen comprehension in reading and mathematics—so skills connect to meaning, not memorisation. That requires work at both system and community levels, including catch-up approaches such as Teaching at the Right Level. Progress toward 2030 will depend on producing consistent, actionable data and building partnerships that turn measurement into reform.



DR. MANZOOR AHMED
Professor Emeritus
BRAC University
Bangladesh doesn't

lack evidence; it lacks follow-through. The household lens of ICAN-ICAR is valuable, but SDG 4's promise of universal, quality schooling through Grade 10 will remain out of reach without political commitment. The 2010 education policy is still largely unimplemented, replaced by piecemeal, centralised directives. Multiple assessments—from the National Student Assessment and Education Watch to international measures—keep returning the same verdict: roughly half of children complete primary school without basic reading, writing and numeracy. “Weighing the cow” won't make it grow; assessment must be designed to trigger action, identify struggling schools, and support them locally as communities of teachers, parents and students. Continuity requires a permanent education commission—and a social compact that holds leaders to delivery, not rhetoric.



TANJIM FERDOUS
In-charge, NGOs & Foreign Missions
The Daily Star
(Moderator of the Session)
Access is no longer

Bangladesh's education problem; learning is. The ICAN-ICAR household assessment—run across all 64 districts—offers a chance to shift the debate from enrollment and exam scores to real reading and numeracy, while also placing Bangladesh's equity gaps in a global context. The discussion needs to move from diagnosis to implementation: what must change by 2030, how teacher quality and crowded classrooms constrain competency, and why teachers often teach better in private coaching than in school. That incentive problem cannot be solved by salary increases alone. The next step is practical and collaborative: share technical notes and research so the media, researchers and partners can turn evidence into sustained reporting, advocacy and reform.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- » Future-ready, comprehension-led learning: Keep Bangladesh's grade-wise benchmarks, but refocus them on literacy and numeracy plus problem-solving, reasoning and socio-emotional skills. Teach for meaning and application, and align classroom and public assessments to reward understanding over memorisation.
- » Reform tutoring incentives: Strengthen exam integrity and assessment design to reduce leaks, grade inflation and coaching dependence. Enforce conflict-of-interest rules and institutionalise in-school remedial learning, including skill-grouped “Teaching at the Right Level” models.
- » Accountability to communities: Make parent-teacher forums and school committees functional through clear authority, transparency and accessible grievance pathways. Use catchment planning so schools and resources follow need, not influence.
- » Target equity with smart financing: Direct funding to proven supports—books, teacher coaching, remedial time and meals where relevant—especially for rural and low-income areas. Strengthen identification and support for children with functional difficulties and other marginalised learners.
- » Fix the data spine: Harmonise education data across agencies and ensure it is usable for planning and accountability. Repeat household-based measurement (including out-of-school and over-age children) and sustain oversight to track progress beyond 2030.



SAMIR RANJAN NATH
Programme Head
BRAC Institute of Educational Development
Bangladesh's tutoring

boom isn't a quirky parental choice; it reflects a market engineered by failure inside schools. In one Dhaka school, students did poorly in Bangla midyear and then flocked to the same Bangla teacher for paid coaching—until the Islamiyat teacher followed suit, issuing low marks to recruit clients. When teachers can profit from not teaching well, families will keep buying “help.” Tutoring also surged around the Grade 5 and 8 public exams, then fell when those exams were dropped during Covid. Centralized assignments sent from Dhaka to villages reinforced the sense that local teachers were not trusted to design their own lessons. The remedy is straightforward: fix classrooms, empower teachers, and design exams

The Gen Z guide to building a life outside of work

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

Gen Z stepped into adulthood during a time when everything felt accelerated. Careers began early. Opinions formed publicly. Identity unfolded online. We learned quickly that waiting for life to begin after milestones felt unrealistic. Meaning had to be built alongside responsibility, not postponed for later. For our generation, a full life feels expansive rather than impressive. It includes curiosity, relationships, rest, boredom, creativity, and contribution. It unfolds through small choices repeated over time. We design lives that feel inhabited, where days carry texture and seasons leave memory behind. Let's take a look at how Gen Z can quietly build that fullness.

Build a private inner world that belongs only to you

Gen Z lives visibly. Thoughts, reactions, and moments often take shape with an audience in mind. Building a private inner world creates balance. This space holds unfinished thoughts, evolving opinions, and experiences that exist without explanation. A private inner world forms through journaling without structure, long walks without documentation, or reflections kept personal. It allows curiosity to wander freely. Over time, this inner space strengthens intuition and emotional clarity. It offers grounding during moments of uncertainty, and life feels richer when part of it remains untouched by performance.

Let your weeks have personalities, not just schedules

Weeks often blur together. Gen Z brings clarity by assigning emotional tone to time. One week feels reflective. Another feels social. Some weeks encourage exploration. Others invite rest. This approach prioritises energy awareness. Planning aligns with emotional capacity. Activities match mood rather than forcing consistency. Calendars become expressive tools that reflect lived experience. Time feels intentional rather than mechanical. Weeks with personality become memorable. Life feels structured through feeling rather than obligation. This practice builds self-trust. Pressure reduces naturally. Fullness grows when time carries character and rhythm.

Treat friendships as ecosystems with many forms

Gen Z friendships thrive through diversity.

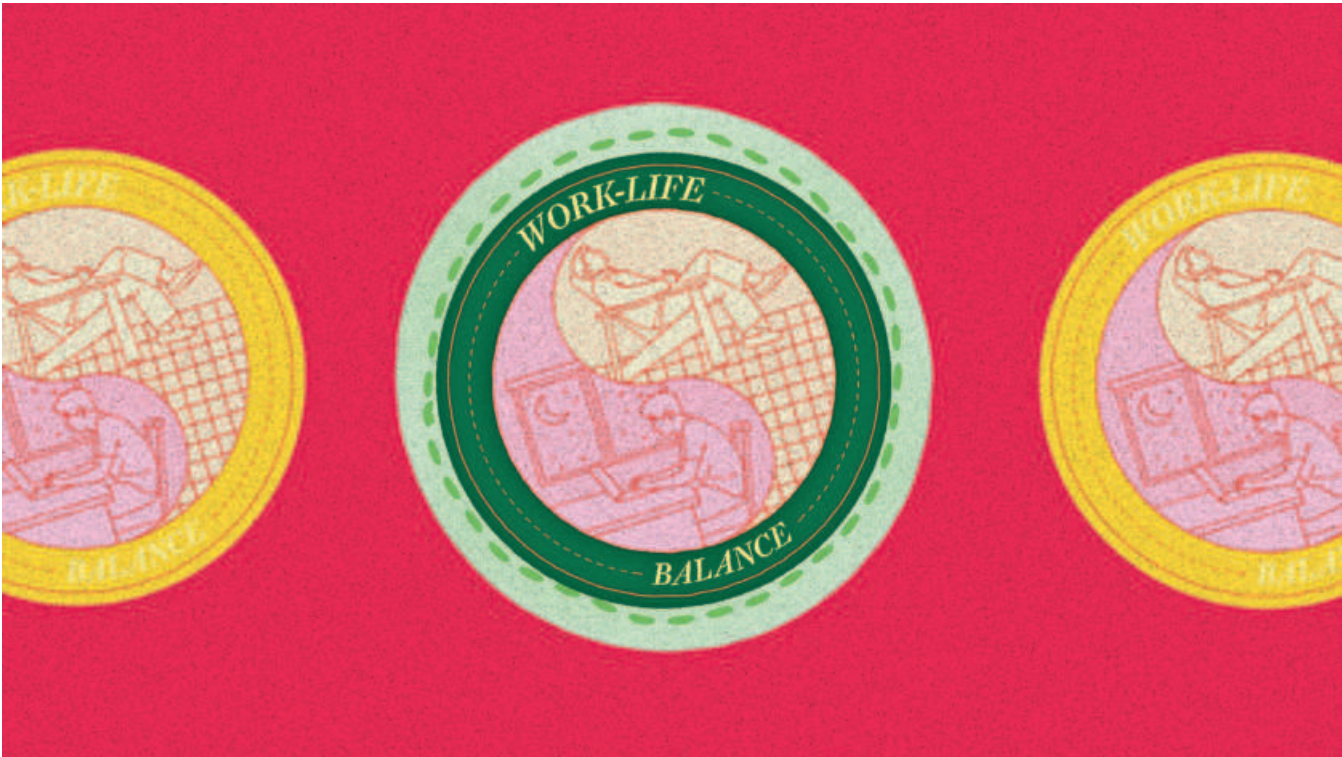


ILLUSTRATION: ZARIF FAIAZ

Each connection holds a different role. One friend offers intellectual curiosity. Another brings humour. Another provides a calm presence. This ecosystem approach removes pressure. Relationships feel freer and more sustainable. The community becomes layered and resilient. Each bond adds texture without expectation overload. Emotional needs distribute naturally. A friendship ecosystem supports balance. Life gains warmth through shared moments across varied connections. Fullness emerges through collective belonging rather than intensity.

Learn how to enjoy being alone with yourself

Solitude becomes a tool for clarity and self-awareness. Gen Z cultivates alone time intentionally. Sitting with thoughts, exploring ideas quietly, engaging in reflective walks, or practising focused creative activities develops comfort with personal presence. Alone time strengthens emotional literacy. Preferences, values, and perspectives surface naturally. Ideas develop without interruption or influence. Decision-making becomes more deliberate, and

confidence grows because presence does not depend on external validation. Solitude also enhances social experience. Relationships gain depth when alone time reinforces personal boundaries and emotional stability, and your life feels intentional and centred.

Collect small joys that repeat

Small, repeated pleasures create lasting satisfaction. Gen Z notices routines that generate quiet delight. Favourite beverages, walking routes, playlists, or casual rituals provide repeated opportunities for joy. Attention to these moments transforms ordinary days into emotionally rich experiences. Protecting these rituals within routine ensures continuity and stability. Over time, small joys accumulate, forming a baseline of contentment that supports engagement with larger experiences. These repeated pleasures shape memory, identity, and emotional resilience. They create consistency without rigidity, so life feels coherent, meaningful, and textured.

Protect slow mornings or evenings

Slow moments cultivate clarity, presence, and awareness. Gen Z designs mornings

or evenings that honour unhurried pace. These periods allow reflection, creativity, and emotional reset. Slowness anchors life rhythmically. It provides a counterbalance to fast-paced obligations, reducing internal friction. Observing the world calmly strengthens attention, intuition, and emotional stability. Life feels spacious when stillness is integrated intentionally. Gen Z values these practices as identity markers and moments of renewal. Fullness emerges from consistency in creating and protecting slow, reflective intervals where mind, body, and surroundings are harmonised.

Ultimately, building a life outside of work is about giving yourself permission to exist fully, to explore, and to connect on your own terms. It is about noticing the rhythms of your own energy, honouring the seasons of your interests, and recognising that meaning grows through consistency, curiosity, and care. Gen Z understands that fullness is cultivated in the everyday, in moments that quietly add texture, memory, and depth to life. The work of living fully is ongoing, evolving, and entirely worth the attention it receives.

Gen Z leads workforce anxiety over AI, survey finds

NEXT STEP DESK

Younger workers are the ones most concerned about AI affecting their jobs, according to a global survey by recruitment firm Randstad. The report found that four out of five workers overall expect AI to impact their daily tasks.

The annual 'Workmonitor' report, based on a survey of 27,000 workers and an analysis of job postings, revealed a generational divide in attitudes. Members of Gen Z expressed the highest level of concern, while Baby Boomers showed the greatest self-assurance

about adapting to the technology.

The data also showed a rapid rise in AI-related hiring, with job postings requiring 'AI agent' skills increasing by 1,587%. Randstad notes that AI and automation are increasingly replacing low-complexity roles.

Nearly half of all workers surveyed believe AI will benefit corporations more than the workforce. The report also highlighted a significant optimism gap: 95% of employers forecast business growth this year, compared to only 51% of employees.

The future of work is not automation; it is supervision

SHAMS RASHID TONMOY

For much of the past two years, the conversation around artificial intelligence and work has been dominated by a single fear: automation. As AI tools grow more capable, many workers have wondered whether their roles will eventually disappear altogether. But the 2026 Agentic Coding Trends Report by AI company Anthropic points to a more complex reality. Rather than removing humans from the loop, the next phase of AI adoption may make human judgment more central to professional work.

One of the report's key findings is that "human oversight scales through intelligent collaboration". In practical terms, this means AI systems are becoming better at recognising when they need human input, while people are learning to intervene only when their attention has the greatest impact.

The shift is most visible in software development. AI agents can now write code, run tests, debug failures, and generate documentation. Yet Anthropic's internal research shows that while engineers use AI in roughly 60% of their work, they report being able to fully delegate only 0-20% of tasks. Most AI-assisted work still involves active supervision, validation, and decision-making by humans.

This means that instead of reviewing every output line by line, engineers are increasingly relying on agentic systems to surface issues that genuinely require human judgment, according



ILLUSTRATION: ZARIF FAIAZ

to Anthropic. These include architectural inconsistencies, security risks, or decisions with business consequences. Routine checks are handled automatically, while uncertain or high-stakes situations are escalated to people. This is a clear shift from reviewing "everything" to reviewing "what matters". An important distinction.

This pattern is not limited to engineering. Anthropic documents similar dynamics emerging across legal, operations, and design teams, where AI is used to automate repetitive work while humans retain control over interpretation, risk, and final approval. AI reduces busywork, but responsibility and accountability remain firmly human.

That conclusion echoes findings from outside the technology industry. In a 2024 editorial by Ekkehard Ernst, Chief Macroeconomist at the International Labour Organization, argues that debates about AI have focused too narrowly on job losses

and gains. Instead, Ernst and his collaborators highlight how AI is reshaping job quality, managerial control, autonomy, and working conditions. Their analysis of labour markets across 23 OECD countries finds no clear link between AI exposure and overall employment loss, but significant changes in how work is organised and supervised.

In particular, Ernst points to evidence that AI often increases autonomy in supervisory roles while intensifying control over execution-level work. In other words, as machines take on routine tasks, human roles increasingly shift toward oversight, coordination, and decision-making, rather than direct execution.

A similar conclusion emerges from a 2025 article, 'Understanding Human-AI Augmentation in the Workplace', published in the journal Information Systems Frontiers, which examined human-AI augmentation across business and management research. The

authors describe AI adoption as a "double-edged sword" whose outcomes depend heavily on how collaboration between humans and machines is designed. Their review finds that there is no one-size-fits-all model for AI integration, but that successful adoption consistently relies on clear human roles in supervision, judgment, and accountability.

Anthropic's report highlights a related paradox. Despite dramatic productivity gains, AI has not reduced the importance of human experience. In interviews cited in the report, engineers say they trust AI most when they already know what the correct answer should look like. One Anthropic engineer notes that this intuition comes from having learned software engineering "the hard way", i.e. judgment cannot be automated without first being developed by humans.

As AI systems generate more output than ever before, the bottleneck in many organisations is no longer execution, but attention. Across industry research and academic studies alike, a common theme is emerging: the scarcest resource in AI-driven workplaces is skilled human oversight. Deciding what to prioritise, what to trust, and when to intervene is fast becoming a defining part of professional value.

As AI takes on more tactical execution, human work is shifting upward: toward supervision, judgment, and responsibility for outcomes. The future of work, it seems, is not about stepping aside for machines, but about knowing when, and how, to step in.

Most companies can't control their own AI, survey finds

NEXT STEP DESK

Most large companies lack visibility and control over the artificial intelligence systems operating within their networks, according to recent findings from the 2026 CISO AI Risk Report by Cybersecurity Insiders.

The report, based on a survey of 235 CISOs (Chief Information Security Officers), CIOs (Chief Information Officers), and senior security leaders across the US and the UK, found that AI is often deployed without approval. 75% of organisations have discovered unapproved 'Shadow AI' tools running in their systems, many with access to sensitive data. According to the data, 71% of CISOs confirm AI has access

to core business systems, but only 16% govern that access effectively.

The survey highlights a critical visibility gap: 92% of organisations lack full oversight of their AI identities, and 95% doubt they could detect malicious activity by an AI agent. Only 5% feel confident they could contain a compromised AI system.

Security leaders cited the rapid, decentralised adoption of AI tools like copilots as a key challenge. These systems act autonomously, making them difficult to track with traditional security tools designed for human users. The report notes 86% of leaders do not enforce access policies for AI, and just 25% use monitoring controls built specifically for AI.



IMAGE: PEXELS

JOBS SPOTLIGHT

MJL Bangladesh PLC

- Procurement & Production Planner

Deadline: January 31

Eligibility:

🔗 Bachelor's/ Master's degree in Engineering/ Business Administration/ SCM from any reputed public or private university.

Minimum experience: 5-6 years



Akij Venture

- Area Sales Manager (ASM)

Deadline: January 31

Eligibility:

🔗 Bachelor's/ Master's from any reputed public and private universities.

Minimum experience: 5-6 years



LankaBangla Finance PLC

- Officer/Senior Officer, Credit Risk Management

Deadline: February 5

Eligibility:

🔗 Bachelor/ Honours, with experience/ skills in banks, financial, and non-banking financial institutions.

Minimum experience: 2 years



BRAC University

- Lecturer, School of Pharmacy

Deadline: February 16

Eligibility:

🔗 Excellent academic credentials with minimum CGPA of 3.50 in M.Pharm./ Master's and B.Pharm.

Minimum experience: N/A



FOR MORE DETAILS AND THE APPLICATION LINKS, SCAN THE QR CODE BELOW.



Adani deal pegged

FROM PAGE 1

position was seriously undermined. The 1,320-megawatt plant is now operating in Chattogram's Banshkhali.

The plant has two units – SS Power I and SS Power II – of 660MW each, but the power purchase agreement was signed for just one unit: SS Power I.

On paper, the two units were merged in August 2017, creating a “single, massive financial obligation” even when the power generated is not needed.

The project requires a monthly capacity payment of \$35.7 million, or annually \$428 million, as a fixed sovereign obligation. This amount is payable to the sponsor solely for maintaining plant availability, regardless of whether a single unit of electricity is dispatched to the national grid.

Over the 25-year life of the contract, the fixed capacity charge alone could amount to over \$10.6 billion if no further inflation happens, said the report, mentioning it as a “capacity trap”.

The report analysed the bill of June 2024, which stated 58.3 percent of payment was fixed capacity charges and 41.7 percent was variables like fuel costs and others. The electricity price cost per kilowatt-hour at Tk 16.26, the highest among all local coal-based plants.

In the tariff negotiation meeting with Adani Power on March 12, 2017, SS Power's price was in discussion as the benchmark for evaluating the pricing scheme.

“How the choice of this benchmark was made is not documented. PDB

confirms that there is no evidence of any discussion and documentation using any other benchmark for the pricing of Adani Power, such as the Indian grid prices or Indian coal-fired power prices or any other.”

There was no discussion or documentation on why PDB should take the risk of treating a plant located in India effectively the same as a plant in Bangladesh, it added.

SS Power was itself positioned at the higher end of the power tariff spectrum. Its reference coal price was \$120 per tonne, compared with the average benchmark price for thermal coal at around \$85-100 per tonne in 2017.

The inland transportation cost for coal was set at \$10.67 per tonne assuming a calorific value of 6,600 kilocalorie per kilogram (kcal/kg).

Adani Power proposed coal with a lower calorific value of 4,600 kcal/kg, but this price was arrived at based on the rates for higher grade coal. The 4,600 kcal/kg coal is of inferior grade and trades at a fraction of the price of 6,332 kcal/kg coal. The cost effectively rose to about \$90 per tonne.

Based on this, the parties agreed on a capacity charge of \$0.038 per kWh and a levelised tariff of \$0.0861 per kWh.

A levelised tariff is the constant, average price per unit of electricity calculated over the entire life of a power project, designed to have the same present value as the total discounted cost of building and operating the plant. It facilitates long-term PPAs by smoothing out fluctuating annual expenses, such as

capital costs, fuel and operation, into a predictable, fixed rate.

For comparison, S Alam Power Plant's levelised tariff was \$0.08256 per kWh.

A forensic review of the invoice uncovers a significant contractual irregularity regarding the calculation of coal transportation (freight) costs. The PPA mentions the Baltic Dry Index but does not specify a formula.

Faced with this contractual gap, the billing committee made a decision to apply the freight formula from the Barisal Electric Power Company PPA as a “proxy” to calculate payments for SS Power.

The committee recommended an immediate audit of this proxy to check the real freight costs incurred by SS Power.

Meanwhile, section 8 of the implementation agreement mandates that the government ensure the availability of dollars for the investor.

The government has to ensure that the Bangladesh Bank provides dollars to SS Power's bank within six business days of an application for debt service, dividends or other foreign payments.

The clause creates a “super-priority” claim on the foreign currency reserves, the report said.

By contractually mandating dollar availability within six days, the agreement prioritises the private investor's liquidity needs over other national import requirements (such as fuel for other sectors or essential food imports), shielding the investor from the liquidity crisis affecting the broader economy.

Exercise ‘maximum caution’

FROM PAGE 1

He added that the referendum and the election will mark a critical juncture for Bangladesh's democratic future, stressing that the role of the armed forces is vital to ensuring a free, fair, impartial, and festive electoral environment.

He made the remarks while addressing an exchange of views with senior armed forces officers at the Army Headquarters' Helmet auditorium yesterday.

The chief adviser's press wing and the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) disclosed the update in separate press releases.

Yunus said the government is hopeful that, as a symbol of public trust, the armed forces will perform their assigned duties with professionalism, neutrality, and responsibility, as they have in the past.

He also paid tribute to the martyrs of the Liberation War and the July-August student-people's uprising, and recalled with gratitude the armed forces' contribution to safeguarding peace and stability in the country, the press wing said.

Referring to the post-fascism period, the chief adviser said the armed forces' role in keeping the law and order under control will remain memorable in the nation's history.

Calling the referendum and the parliamentary polls a significant turning point for Bangladesh's democratic transition, Yunus said voting in this election would be the ultimate expression of a long-deprived nation's aspiration, voiced through the July uprising of '24, to take responsibility for its own country.

He said people will use the

referendum to express their views on building a future state system, and use the parliamentary election to choose eligible representatives to implement that opinion, adding that the importance of the vote is greater than at any time in the past.

The chief adviser said a large segment of young people will be voting for the first time, while many older citizens were deprived of voting rights for a long period, and that ensuring a fear-free and festive voting environment for all voters is a shared responsibility.

Against the country's overall realities, he said, the armed forces are an important partner in carrying out that responsibility properly, expressing hope that a capable, professional, neutral, and people-oriented armed forces will play the highest supportive role in delivering a free, fair, and festive election.

Yunus said a free, fair, and acceptable election is the main foundation of a democratic state, and that the administration and the Election Commission must be supported to the maximum extent so that every citizen can exercise their voting rights in a fear-free environment, without any influence. On election-related duties, the chief adviser gave clear guidance to the top armed forces leadership, saying that all decisions at the field level must be lawful, restrained, and responsible.

He added that the participation of young people and citizens long deprived of voting rights gives this election special significance, and that ensuring every citizen's ability to vote in a fear-free environment is a historic responsibility of the state.

The chief adviser also called for

moving forward together towards a peaceful, stable, and democratic Bangladesh, the press wing said.

On wider defence preparedness, Yunus said the capabilities of the armed forces were neglected during the long fascist rule, but the interim government has initiated a broad change in a short time.

Since assuming office, he said, developing the armed forces' capacity and modernising them to face any aggression has been a major priority of the interim government.

The chief adviser said work is underway to establish factories, under domestic management, to produce military weapons and equipment as part of efforts to enhance self-reliance and capacity.

He also said defence cooperation memorandums have already been signed with the Netherlands and Malaysia, while processes are underway to sign similar defence cooperation memorandums with Italy, Japan, Thailand, and several other countries.

If these memorandums are concluded, he said, the armed forces' capacity and operational efficiency will increase significantly.

Yunus expressed hope that a future elected government will continue these initiatives to strengthen the armed forces' capability, the press wing added.

The chief adviser was received by army chief General Waker-Uz-Zaman, navy chief Admiral M Nazmul Hasan, air chief Marshal Hasan Mahmud Khan, and Armed Forces Division Principal Staff Officer Lt Gen SM Kamrul Hasan.

Senior officers of the army, navy, and air force, and invited guests were present at the meeting.

Sarba Mitra offers to resign

FROM PAGE 16

He said he would submit his resignation within a couple of days.

His decision came after two video clips went viral on social media showing him forcing some youths, whom he claimed were outsiders, to do squats while holding their ears at the DU central field and in the adjacent gymnasium.

Sarba, a resident of Rangamati, won an executive post from the Islami Chhatra Shibir-led panel in the Ducs election last year.

He has previously drawn attention for leading several controversial eviction drives against floating shops and vagabonds on campus.

The latest uproar erupted on January 25, when Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal leader Abidur Rahman posted a video showing Sarba holding a stick and forcing a group of youths to do squats for their alleged unauthorised entry into the central field.

Yesterday, another similar video surfaced, showing several young people subjected to the same treatment inside the gymnasium.

“I have decided to resign. I have not taken this decision out of resentment or provocation. Where working has become difficult, even impossible, there is no meaning in holding on to a post,” he wrote.

Explaining his actions, Sarba

said the central field lacked CCTV coverage and adequate security, and that incidents of harassment of female students and theft of mobile phones, money, and bicycles were frequent.

He claimed that a proposal to renovate the wall adjacent to Dhaka Medical College had been returned by the administration, allowing outsiders to enter the field by climbing over it.

He also said the incident occurred last month, when theft and snatching had increased on DU campus.

“Although my method was wrong, I felt that without such strictness it would not be possible to control outsiders and ensure students' safety, given the administration's inaction,” he wrote.

Stating that his intention was solely to ensure campus security, he acknowledged that he had acted beyond his official responsibilities.

“However, law is law. In performing this duty, I had to go beyond the law to deal with the situation. This has affected my personal life and mental health. I no longer have the capacity to continue,” he added.

However, several DU students alleged that Sarba had actively led moral policing since the Ducs election.

Dewan Rezwana, a student of the International Relations department,

accused the Ducs leader of assaulting a public bus staffer four or five days ago.

Another student, Rashidul Ibrahim of the Finance department, alleged that Sarba was involved in similar incidents, including “interrogating” a couple in the Shaheed Minar area.

Ibrahim said he had to delete photos of the incident after Sarba noticed him taking them.

Contacted, Ducs Vice President Md Abu Shadik Kayem said Sarba's actions were unacceptable, but added that he had not received any resignation letter.

Contacted, Sarba denied most of the allegations.

Regarding the alleged assault of a bus staffer, he said he entered the vehicle only to seize the staffer's mobile phone as he was recording. On the allegation of harassing a couple, he said students detained them first and later handed them over to the police.

DU Proctor Prof Saifuddin Ahmed said a show-cause notice had been served on Sarba Mitra Chakma, saying the incidents “tarnished the image and dignity of the university”.

“He was given 24 hours to submit his reply,” the proctor said.

After evaluating the response, the authorities will take action accordingly, the proctor said.

‘Jamaat’s politics is for people’s welfare’

FROM PAGE 2

Referring to Abrar Fahad, whose killing in 2019 by activists of the now-banned Chhatra League sparked nationwide outrage, Shafiqur said, “Shaheed Abrar Fahad is the symbol of freedom and sovereignty. He embodied rebellion and the spirit of a revolution. He was killed for raising his pen against hegemonism.”

Alluding to the previous regime, he said, “They behaved in a way no human being would... May every youth of Bangladesh become Abrar Fahad.”

“From the arms of countless mothers and sisters, their loved ones were taken away and kept in secret detention cells for years. We have gotten back most of them – either alive or as bodies,” he said, adding that some victims are still missing.

“Among them are two from the Islamic University. There are eight more like them [in the district] whose whereabouts we still do not know,” he said.

“I have stood up to speak on behalf of those mothers who have lost their children. I have come to their doorsteps,” he said, adding that he saw not only tears in their eyes but also resolve.

“They have killed Abrar; they have killed Abu Sayed. But remember that each death of a revolutionary gives birth to crores of them,” he added.

Shafiqur alleged that corruption under previous governments had turned Kushtia's two major rivers – the Padma and the Garai – into deserts.

Despite annual budget allocations for dredging, rampant corruption has nearly choked the rivers, he said.

“Not only rivers, during the past 54 years since independence, those who

came to power have also done the same, more or less, to every sector of the country,” he told the gathering.

“They have ransacked the country in whatever way they could – biting, gnawing, and scratching,” he said, adding that the country cannot expect better from these forces unless they change their character.

Despite repression under the previous regime, Jamaat did not resort to politics of revenge, Shafiqur said.

“We said we will not take revenge. We said we will not file any false cases against innocent individuals,” he said, claiming the party has kept its promise.

However, he alleged that some people have filed indiscriminate cases against thousands, including members of the security forces, creating scope for corruption.

After filing such cases, they extorted money from the falsely accused by offering to exclude their names from charge sheets, he claimed, adding that some people have engaged in widespread extortion across the country.

Urging those involved to return to the right path, he said, “Please stop hurting people, stop extortion.”

He said there are around 60 rice mills in Kushtia, with hefty extortion money being collected from each truck.

“Jamaat will end extortion, break syndicates, and improve the communication system if voted to power,” he said.

At another rally in Jhenaidah, the Jamaat chief reiterated his resolve to curb corruption.

“We will show a red card to corruption. We will bandage the hands of corrupt people and paralyse them. In this country, when someone

Certain group conspiring

FROM PAGE 2

he said it difficult to attend all programmes.”

He sought vote for Noakhali-6 BNP candidate Mahbubur Rahman Shamim.

Tarique is set to begin the third phase of his election campaign in Mymensingh today, after completing campaigns in the Sylhet and Chattogram regions.

He will address a rally at 2:30pm at the Mymensingh Circuit House field. Later in the evening, he is scheduled to speak at rallies at Gazipur's Rajbari ground and Dhaka's Azampur Eidgah field.

SEVEN PLEDGES

At the Noakhali rally, Tarique made seven pledges for district leaders.

He said if the BNP is voted to power, the party will undertake projects including the construction of barrages, permanent arrangements for the landless, and upgrading upazila hospitals to 150-bed facilities.

He said the party will ensure the construction of block barrages and sustainable embankments to prevent river erosion.

The BNP chief also said that if his party is in power, the Jahajmara union would be upgraded to an upazila, while Nijhum Dwip would

be developed into a modern tourist zone.

“Hatiya upazila is a naturally beautiful place, but riddled with myriad problems like limited access to safe drinking water.

“There are no proper schools and colleges here. Healthcare is inadequate. There are problems in agriculture, a lack of jobs, and economic challenges for women.... These problems could be solved if the Paddy Sheaf [the BNP's electoral symbol] is made victorious.”

Tarique said the family cards that the BNP plans to introduce would help women become financially solvent, while the farmer card his party will provide would help farmers access fertiliser, seeds and pesticides to help them build a strong economic base.

For youth and the unemployed, he said the BNP plans to establish vocational institutes to provide skills training. “Loans would be provided to help the youth start businesses, and training would be arranged for those seeking overseas employment to help them secure better jobs.”

He added that the BNP will also ensure that trained healthcare workers are deployed to deliver medical services to women and children right at their doorsteps.

Ex-DMP chief Habibur, two others to die

FROM PAGE 1

Arshad, Sujana, Imaz and Nasirul are currently in custody, while the remaining convicts are absconding.

The tribunal also ordered confiscation of properties belonging to those sentenced to death and directed the authorities to issue arrest warrants against the absconders.

Families of the victims present at the tribunal expressed dissatisfaction with the verdict, while Chief Prosecutor Tajul Islam said the prosecution would appeal against the jail sentences to the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, describing the judgment as “totally beyond expectations”.

While delivering the verdict, Justice Mortuza said, “The period of sentence of imprisonment of the absconding accused be counted from the date of their surrender or arrest, as the case may be.”

The period of sentence of imprisonment of the accused in custody shall be counted from the date of their being taken to custody in connection with this case, the tribunal added.

The tribunal found Habibur, Sudip and Akhtarul guilty under the ICT Act, 1973, observing that “they deserve to be awarded the maximum sentences”.

The judgement said the three senior officers held positions of superiority over the other accused and thus bore a legal and moral duty to prevent the killing and injury of protesters at any stage of the operation.

Their failure to discharge this superior responsibility made them additionally liable under the doctrine of command responsibility, the tribunal said.

The tribunal differentiated punishment for lower-ranking officers, citing extenuating circumstances such as coercion, institutional pressure and unequal power dynamics within the police hierarchy.

Reading out the judgement, Justice Mortuza said the impugned attack upon the protesting students and public and the killing of six of

them at Chankharpul was a part of a widespread and systematic attack, and thereby constitutes crimes against humanity under the ICT Act.

Referring to the charges, the tribunal chair said Habibur, a regular participant in nightly “core committee” meetings during the uprising, issued wireless orders instructing police units to use lethal force against peaceful protesters and personally monitored the operation.

Sudip was found to have ordered police to shoot protesters, kill them and leave bodies on streets and lanes to block the protest movement.

Akhtarul was held responsible for coercing subordinate officers to open fire, including forcibly handing firearms to constables who had not been issued lethal weapons.

The tribunal said that acting on wireless orders from Habibur and under on-site supervision by Sudip, Akhtarul and Imrul, police deployed around 40-50 personnel armed with rifles, shotguns, tear gas and sound grenades.

Among them, eight were issued Chinese rifles, 15 were issued shotguns, and two were issued SMGs, along with a substantial quantity of ammunition.

The official register indicates that only four or five officers returned the arms and ammunition issued in their names. No records exist for the weapons and ammunition issued to the remaining personnel.

Inspector Arshad instructed constables to fire indiscriminately at protesters marching towards the Central Shaheed Minar under the “March to Dhaka” programme, the tribunal chair said referring to the charges.

Between 12:30pm and 1:00pm, constables Sujana, Imaz and Nasirul opened fire, killing six protesters.

“They shot and killed six unarmed civilian peaceful protesters target-wise, who participated in the March to Dhaka programme,” the judgement said.

The victims were identified as

becomes a leader, his wealth increases five hundredfold within five years. If we come to power, we will change this system,” he said.

Meanwhile, security forces seized walkie-talkies, an electric shock gun, and steel batons from a vehicle belonging to the Meherpur district unit of Jamaat.

The seizure was made at an army checkpoint in the Hotel Bazar area of the town yesterday morning. Three people were detained in connection with the incident, said Meherpur Superintendent of Police Ujjal Kumar Roy.

Contacted, Meherpur district Jamaat Ameer Maulana Taj Uddin Khan said the vehicle is used for organisational purposes, and the equipment was meant to be used for the rally held in the town.

[Our Jhenaidah correspondent contributed to this report]

Past rulers have nothing new

FROM PAGE 2

urging vote for the party's electoral symbol, the hand fan.

Urging all, including members of minority communities, to support the party, he said that if IAB candidates are elected, people of Jamalpur will “enjoy peace in this world and attain peace in the hereafter as well.”

The rally was presided over by Abdul Rauf Talukder, the party's candidate for the Jamalpur-1 constituency.

Later, Rezaul Karim joined another election rally in Madarganj in support of Engineer Daulatuzzaman Ansari, the party's candidate for the Jamalpur-3 constituency.

Defeated, new fascist forces now united to ensure ‘no’ vote

FROM PAGE 2

disappearances, killings, and torture in prisons – has re-emerged over the past 16 months following the July uprising.

“From villages to city alleys, extortion and terror have once again taken root,” he said, adding that voters must support candidates of the July uprising alliance to break free from this cycle.

“On February 12, the 11-party alliance will be elected, and the unity of fascist forces will be defeated.”

Asif also criticised parties that speak of reforms but fail to act when given the chance.

The former adviser also spoke as the chief guest at a roadside meeting in the Fultala Bazar area of the upazila, in support of Chattogram-8 candidate Jobairul Hasan Arif.

The meeting was moderated by NCP Election Management Committee Secretary Monira Sharmin, and attended by NCP Chattogram Region Organiser Sagulta Bushra Misbah and Chattogram Chief Coordinator Advocate Tariqul Islam, among others.

Govt must rein in digital lies before poll

Ongoing trend offers grim glimpse of the future of political disinformation

An investigation by this newspaper reveals that the digital sphere in the run-up to the February 12 election has been overrun by fake content. Between mid-December and mid-January, the volume of AI-generated disinformation aimed at swaying voters more than tripled. For observers of democracy in the digital age, Bangladesh is becoming a distressing test case. The technology to warp reality, once the domain of state actors with hefty budgets, is now available to anyone with a smartphone and a political grudge. Our investigation identified nearly 100 distinct pieces of AI-generated content in a single month, garnering 1.6 million engagements within the first 24 hours of being posted.

These digital lies also offer a map of the country's fractured political landscape. The fiercest digital crossfire is, unsurprisingly, between unofficial pro-BNP and pro-Jamaat-e-Islami forces. Pro-Jamaat actors seem to be the most prolific, while the BNP's digital surrogates often return fire using AI avatars. Meanwhile, remnants of the Awami League have been seen to be using AI often to manufacture sexually compromising images of female politicians and student leaders associated with the interim government.

As separate fact-checking reports illustrate, the appetite for deception does not require high-tech tools. Recently, fact-checkers debunked a widely shared video of President Mohammed Shahabuddin appealing for a fair election. The video was genuine, but it was from 2023. Similarly, fake photocards bearing the logos of news channels are circulating with fabricated reports of violence. This deluge of fake content suggests that the algorithm does not care whether a video was made by a neural network or simply dragged out of a three-year-old archive. It cares only that it is shared, and shared widely. In Bangladesh, where digital literacy has failed to keep pace with digital penetration, the "harm threshold"—the point at which online lies spark real-world violence—is dangerously low.

Against this backdrop, the response from tech giants remains woefully inadequate. While platforms like Facebook possess the tools to detect coordinated inauthentic behaviour, their enforcement in non-Western markets like Bangladesh is lethargic. So the authorities must hold tech giants accountable for their own terms of service. Dhaka should immediately establish a high-level, transparent working group with Meta, TikTok and YouTube to demand robust content moderation, particularly for the election period. It must insist that tech companies apply the same speed and rigour to removing harmful content in Bangladesh—specifically deepfakes that incite violence or suppress voting—as they do elsewhere. This should include requiring companies to publish weekly transparency reports specific to Bangladesh, detailing exactly which political advertisements and networks were removed and why.

The authorities must treat disinformation not merely as a digital nuisance, but as a contagion requiring urgent intervention. To stem the tide, the Election Commission should also direct cyber-security agencies to de-platform serial offenders, while simultaneously enlisting independent fact-checkers to build a rapid-response defence. This proactive stance is vital to dismantling viral falsehoods before they ignite a real crisis at this crucial juncture in Bangladesh.

Curbing leprosy must be a priority

Address funding gaps, strengthen facilities, end stigma

It is very concerning that leprosy continues to affect thousands of people in Bangladesh annually, despite the country having eliminated the disease as a public health concern nearly 30 years ago. With around 3,000 new cases detected every year, our goal of achieving zero leprosy prevalence by 2030 now appears uncertain. The persistence of the disease, coupled with related stigma, funding shortages and institutional neglect, exposes serious gaps in our public health response. According to a recent report by this daily, 13 districts in the country are still heavily affected by leprosy infection. In the first nine months of last year, 2,640 new cases were reported, while 3,519 cases were recorded in 2024 and 3,639 the year before. The National Leprosy Programme under the health directorate has played a crucial role in identifying patients and providing treatment, and a national strategic plan for 2023-2030 is in place, but these efforts are being undermined by structural and financial constraints. Reportedly, after the sectoral programme expired last year, essential activities such as training, surveillance, and capacity-building have stalled, with operations continuing largely on interim support from the World Health Organization. Many sanctioned posts remain vacant, weakening field-level detection and follow-up. The consequences of this neglect are visible in the Sylhet Leprosy Hospital, the country's largest specialised facility to treat the disease, which operates under severe strain, with crumbling infrastructure and acute staff shortages. Only a fraction of its beds are usable and diagnostic services have been suspended due to a lack of personnel. Stigma remains another major barrier. Many patients are reluctant to disclose symptoms or seek care due to fear, superstition, and social exclusion. Tea garden workers and other vulnerable groups are still the hardest hit and need targeted awareness and support. As health experts have emphasised, eliminating leprosy requires more than medical treatment; it demands sustained awareness campaigns involving communities, the media, and local leaders. If the government is serious about meeting its 2030 target, it must treat leprosy elimination as a priority. This means ensuring stable funding for the National Leprosy Programme, filling vacant posts, strengthening surveillance, and urgently upgrading specialised facilities like the Sylhet Leprosy Hospital. At the same time, coordinated efforts between the government and NGOs to end stigma are essential.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

1996 military coup in Niger



On this day in 1996, Colonel Ibrahim Baré Maïnassara led a successful military coup in Niger against the democratically elected government of President Mahamane Ousmane.

Can we afford such a steep public-sector pay hike?



MACRO MIRROR
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FAHMIDA KHATUN

The Ninth National Pay Commission formed by the interim government recently recommended a salary increase for government employees in the range of 100-142 percent. While this increase is meant to bring huge relief to the government employees, policymakers must review a few important issues in this connection.

First, there is no denying that government employees have been hit hard by the inflation, persistently high for three years, as much as everyone else in Bangladesh. The last major revision that the government pay scale saw was in 2015; since then, the cost of living has risen sharply. A salary adjustment is, therefore, justified, but the scale and timing of the proposed increase require critical consideration. The proposed pay scale will cost the government an additional Tk 1.06 lakh crore every year. It is a major fiscal decision taken at a time when the country's public finances are already heavily strained; the economy is under pressure due to rising debt, weak revenue collection, and growing expenditure obligations. The key question here is whether the government can afford this additional expense.

Second, where will the funds for increased salaries come from? Bangladesh's current fiscal space is extremely limited. The tax-GDP ratio stood at only 6.8 percent in FY2025, one of the lowest in the world. Indeed, this ratio has been declining, indicating a weak domestic resource mobilisation capacity. During the first half of FY2026, the shortfall of revenue collection is Tk 46,000 crore. Given the National Board of Revenue's (NBR) current capacity, it is highly unlikely that this gap can be closed by the end of the ongoing fiscal year.

Meanwhile, public expenditure pressures are increasing. The government continues to take bank loans, which is building its debt burden. As of November 2025, net credit to the government sector is Tk 5,53,910 crore, which is 26.28 percent higher than that in November 2024. External debt stands at \$12 billion as of September 2025. State-owned enterprises, especially in the power sector, have accumulated huge unpaid bills. The Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) has to pay about Tk 20,000 crore to private power companies. In addition, the government has to inject Tk 20,000 crore into the newly merged Islami Bank to improve its financial health.

These commitments must be met.

Third, this pay scale increase will impact the composition of the national budget. A large share of Bangladesh's budget already goes towards operational costs, such as salaries, allowances, and pensions of government employees. As this share increases further, the space for development spending shrinks. This has been the trend over the last few years, and it directly affects funding for health, education, social safety nets, skills development, science, technology, and innovation. These sectors are



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

essential for improving productivity, reducing poverty, and preparing the country for future challenges.

Fourth, this salary hike also carries inflationary risks. When there is more cash in people's hands, overall demand in the economy rises. In an economy with existing supply constraints, this can push prices even higher. Such an inflation will hurt people outside the government payroll, particularly private sector workers, informal workers, farmers, and small businesses. It will also undermine the central bank's effort to curtail inflation through tight monetary policy.

Fifth, inequality is another major concern. While the government's main objective should be to reduce inequality through various fiscal measures, such a salary revision will cause more inequality. Government

cases, people are forced to pay bribes to receive even basic services. Evidence of corruption regularly emerges from various government departments and ministries.

To uproot corruption, institutions must be strengthened. Governance must improve. Rules must be enforced. Honest officials must be rewarded, and corrupt officials must be punished without political interference. Without accountability, higher salaries risk becoming an additional benefit on top of existing informal income from corruption, rather than a deterrence.

There is also a deeper issue of political economy at play. Successive governments appear reluctant to reform the civil service or hold powerful officials accountable. Politicians often seem wary of the bureaucracy. But

be to implement any salary revision gradually, in phases, linked to revenue performance and governance reforms. Lower-level employees may be paid first, given their economic circumstances. At the same time, urgent efforts are needed to strengthen tax administration, widen the tax net, improve public spending efficiency, and reform institutions. Without these steps, a large salary hike risks becoming a populist decision with long-term economic costs.

In the end, the debate is not about denying government employees a fair pay. It is about being fair to the entire population and responsible to the economy. Fiscal sustainability should be a key consideration in undertaking major fiscal decisions. Salary increase should be tied to broader economic conditions.

Why internet access should be recognised as a fundamental right



Syed Almas Kabir
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SYED ALMAS KABIR

In July 2024, Bangladesh experienced one of the most consequential internet shutdowns in its history. What began as a state response to escalating student protests quickly spiralled into a nationwide blackout that lasted for over two weeks, paralysing communication, commerce, education, and emergency services. The all-encompassing effect was a stark reminder that the internet is no longer a luxury, but the backbone of our daily life. The shutdown disrupted livelihoods, endangered lives, and exposed the fragility of rights in a digital-dependent society, resulting in revenue losses amounting to around \$1.2 billion.

So, should access to the internet be recognised as a fundamental right? The answer is an unequivocal yes.

The internet has evolved far beyond its origins as a mere communication tool. Today, it is the primary enabler of political, socio-economic, and legal rights. Citizens rely on the internet to engage in democratic processes, for accessing information, participating in public debate, monitoring government actions, and utilising government services. During the July 2024

shutdown, Bangladeshis were cut off from real-time updates, unable to verify information, and deprived of the transparency essential for democratic accountability. When political rights depend on digital infrastructure, denying internet access translates to political disenfranchisement.

From online classes to mobile banking, job applications to telemedicine, the internet is the gateway to opportunities. Bangladesh has built a thriving ecosystem of freelancers, entrepreneurs, and small businesses dependent on connectivity. The shutdown in July 2024 froze mobile financial services (MFS), halted online marketplaces, and left students stranded mid-semester.

Freedom of expression and the right to information are meaningless without access to the platforms where modern discourse takes place. The blackout silenced millions, not through censorship of content but through the elimination of the medium itself. In a digital-first world, the absence of connectivity becomes a direct assault on fundamental freedoms.

Several philosophical and legal

frameworks support the argument that internet access must be elevated to the status of a fundamental right. From a utilitarian perspective, universal internet access maximises societal welfare. Studies consistently show that connectivity boosts GDP, enhances labour productivity, and expands access to essential services. The 2024 shutdown demonstrated the effects of being completely cut off: economic losses ran into millions, supply chains were disrupted, and digital services collapsed. With the utilitarian tenet being "the greatest good for the greatest number," ensuring uninterrupted access becomes a moral imperative.

At present, one must be connected digitally to participate in society politically, economically, and culturally. Without internet access, individuals are effectively excluded from national conversation. Legal scholars argue that when the absence of an enabler (such as the internet) prevents the exercise of fundamental freedoms, the enabler itself becomes a right.

The shutdown also exposed the unevenness of Bangladesh's digital landscape. The digitally literate found workarounds, like virtual private networks (VPNs), alternative networks, or travelling to connected zones, while rural and marginalised communities were left completely cut off. This mirrors the digital divide seen in under-developed nations where lack of access entrenches structural disadvantages.

Governments often adopt a "wait and see" approach, treating connectivity as

a market-driven service rather than a public good. But the digital divide will not close on its own. States have an obligation to build infrastructure, ensure affordability, and protect access. In Bangladesh, where digital services underpin everything from remittance to education, this obligation is even more pressing.

International bodies, like the United Nations, have affirmed that internet access is essential for the enjoyment of human rights. Yet, these declarations remain "soft laws," normative but unenforceable. Without binding legal frameworks, states can continue to shut down the internet with impunity. If states claim sovereignty over digital spaces, such as via regulating platforms, taxing digital services, and policing online content, they must also guarantee citizens' access to those spaces. Sovereignty without responsibility becomes authoritarianism.

Recognising internet access as a fundamental right is not a symbolic gesture, it is a practical necessity. The consequences of disconnection are too severe to ignore. States need to treat connectivity as essential infrastructure, like water or electricity, protected by law and insulated from political manipulation. A rights-based approach to internet governance is the only way to ensure that every citizen, regardless of geography, class, or political context, can participate fully in the digital age. The future of democracy, development, and dignity depends on it.

SADDAM'S PAROLE FIASCO

A five-minute farewell is not mercy



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KHAN KHALID ADNAN

On January 24, an ambulance carrying the bodies of Kaniz Surbana Swarnali and her nine-month-old son, Nazim, reportedly arrived at Jashore Central Jail around 7pm. Six relatives were allowed to enter with it around 7:30pm and were escorted out five minutes later. During that brief interval, Jewel Hasan Saddam, a Chhatra League leader detained in multiple cases, was permitted to bid farewell to his wife and infant, after an earlier request for limited parole had been refused. The deceased were later laid to rest in his absence in Bagerhat.

The question here is not whether the state can impose strict conditions on a detainee accused of serious offences. It can and it should. The question is why the state chose a path that looked humane but operated as a denial of humanity. When mourning is administered like a privilege, compassion stops being a public duty and becomes political currency. That is how institutions lose legitimacy.

Parole in Bangladesh sits on a shaky foundation. There is no general parole statute enacted by parliament. Parole decisions have largely operated within the home ministry's administrative domain, guided by policy rather than law. A home ministry policy updated on June 1, 2016, allows for conditional, temporary release in limited circumstances—including the death of a close relative—generally for a period not exceeding 12 hours and under continuous police watch. But parole approval and management are not anchored in any prevailing law, and even the 2016 policy did not clearly articulate the legal basis for granting parole. For under-trial detainees, a court-supervised temporary bail for funeral rites would be the more principled route. However, in a climate where bail is routinely blocked, executive parole policy often becomes a substitute for judicial oversight.

Where discretion is broad, reasons are scarce, and review is weak, the rule of law becomes a slogan rather than a constraint.



ILLUSTRATION: BIPLOB CHAKROBORTY

Bangladesh's constitution promises more, however. Article 31 frames treatment only "in accordance with law" as an inalienable right, and Article 32 protects life and personal liberty. The point is not that every prisoner has an automatic right to leave custody. The point is that the state must be able to explain, in lawful terms, why it will allow one humanitarian request and refuse another, and that explanation must be open to scrutiny.

The timing of this incident makes the stakes higher. The UN Human Rights Office's fact-finding report on the July-August 2024 protests estimated that as many as 1,400

receive due process and basic humanity.

But the warning signs have been visible for a while. "Dubious" cases filed after the uprising, often murder cases naming large numbers of accused and stacked with non-bailable provisions, risk turning law into theatre while undermining justice for victims. Human Rights Watch, in a report published last year, documented complaints linked to the unrest that named scores of people, including a case filed against 180 accused, where the complainant later acknowledged he did not even know at least one prominent figure he had named. In an August 2025 blog, Jerry

buries real perpetrators under a mountain of low-quality litigation. There have been documented concerns that the strategic use of murder cases as instruments of reprisal can ultimately obscure responsibility, overwhelming investigations with mass accusations and counter-cases that bury factual truth and, paradoxically, allow genuine perpetrators to evade accountability.

In that environment, refusing humanitarian leave is not a neutral administrative choice. It signals that the process itself is intended to hurt. International minimum standards for the treatment of prisoners, widely known

as the Nelson Mandela Rules, underline that prisoners must be treated with humanity and should be able, under necessary supervision, to maintain contact with family. A state that cannot find a humane, controlled way for a detainee to mourn or bury their loved ones is not demonstrating strength. It is demonstrating fear dressed as policy.

Saddam's five-minute farewell should also remind us how easily Bangladesh swings from one form of selective justice to another. Under the previous regime, parole and bail debates showed how executive preference could eclipse legal principle. After the political transition, the Appellate Division's acquittal of Khaleda Zia in the Zia Orphanage Trust case, reported internationally, described the prosecution in terms that amounted to a malicious use of the criminal process.

What should change, then? Parole and humanitarian leave must be brought into the daylight through a clear statute debated in parliament, with published criteria, narrow grounds for refusal, strict timelines, and a duty to provide written reasons. A refusal should not be a shrug. It should be reviewable, so discretion is disciplined by law rather than insulated from it. The operative policy, whatever its current form, should be published in full, along with anonymised data on grants and refusals, so the public can see whether discretion is being exercised consistently.

At the same time, bail must be treated as a constitutional emergency. Courts must resist the reflex that "non bailable" ends the conversation. Prosecutors must screen post-uprising cases and insist on individualised allegations. Police reports and trials cannot be allowed to drift while people spend months, even years, in custody without meaningful progress. Justice for July's dead does not require a wider net. It requires a sharper one.

Finally, remedies matter. False and malicious cases must carry consequences, including sanctions for abuse of process, professional accountability, and compensation where the state has detained people without credible grounds. Otherwise, the incentives remain intact, and each new administration will inherit the same toolbox of repression. The five-minute farewell is a small scene with a large lesson: that we cannot build a "New Bangladesh" by reproducing old reflexes of humiliation, opacity, and selective mercy. If the spirit of July includes dignity for all, then dignity has to begin where the public rarely looks, including prison gates at 7:30pm.

Bangladesh's renewable ambitions aren't actually unrealistic



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SUDEPTO ROY

Bangladesh's energy transition is now at a point where execution matters most. The country's climate commitments, including the Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan (MCPP) 2022-2041 and the Integrated Energy and Power Master Plan (IEPMP) 2023, set ambitious targets for renewable energy (RE) capacity. MCPP has set renewable goals up to 40 percent by 2041. Bangladesh will need to invest between \$23.9 and 53.7 billion to build the necessary capacity and meet these goals. The implementation of solar-based projects will require most of the expenditure—over 65.6 percent. For the rest, wind-based power projects will require 15.8 percent of the expenditure, while hydro power projects will require 18.4 percent. However, despite clear goals, financing remains slow and uneven.

Our country currently uses two primary domestic channels to finance RE. Bangladesh Bank (BB) has operated a refinancing scheme since 2009, helping commercial banks extend loans to renewable and other green projects. Loan tenures extend beyond eight years, and the fund size doubled from Tk 200 in the beginning to Tk 400 crore. BB is

lending the money at interest rates from five percent to 12 percent.

The other domestic channel is the Infrastructure Development Company Limited's (IDCOL's) renewable energy financing scheme and programmes. IDCOL has so far implemented numerous refinancing schemes and coordinated programmes to diversify RE installations in solar micro and mini-grids, solar irrigation, biogas and biomass-based energy generation, and other commercial-scale RE projects. There was a major reform in July 2022, which made solar and other green projects eligible for loans at a rate of five to six percent, with refinancing ceilings of Tk 10 crore for rooftop solar and Tk 35 crore for large solar parks.

Besides these mechanisms, Bangladesh has begun experimenting with innovative financial instruments. For example, Tk 30 billion green *sukuk* issued by Beximco in 2021 to finance a 230 MW solar project demonstrated the potential of Sharia-compliant finance for large-scale renewable deployment. BB introduced a formal green bond framework in 2022. The framework

provides clear eligibility criteria and a national taxonomy for green market activities. These steps represent an important foundation for a domestic green capital market, but the scale remains small compared to what is needed.

But the problem lies in the lack of awareness of entrepreneurs regarding available financing options. Some concerns persist over banks' reluctance to provide long-term loans. On top of that, the loan disbursement process is slow. Many renewable projects fail not because they are technically unfeasible, but because financing structures do not adequately manage risk. Power producers face uncertainty over long-term costs. Additionally, lenders are concerned about exchange rate exposure. International investors also struggle to reconcile Bangladesh's regulatory environment with global risk standards. These challenges discourage the private sector from investing in renewable energy.

In 2024, the amount disbursed in green finance was Tk 30,653.78 crore, accounting for 13.29 percent of total term loan disbursement. In 2023, the amount was Tk 19,304.31. Despite the positive trend, these flows fall far short of the long-term financing needed to meet renewable energy goals. This gap highlights the importance of blended finance, where concessional public funds are combined with private capital through grants, equity, guarantees, and risk-sharing instruments. There are international programmes, such as the World Bank's Scaling Solar and the Inter-American Development Bank's sustainable energy initiative, which show how blended finance

can lower tariffs, accelerate deployment, and integrate renewables into national grid models.

With blended finance, green bonds present an opportunity for Bangladesh to mobilise long-term capital. The domestic bond market, as well as international institutional investors, could play a transformative role if supported by appropriate policy frameworks. Sovereign green bonds could finance grid upgrades and large-scale renewable parks, while corporate green bonds could support independent power producers.

International experience offers useful lessons for Bangladesh, particularly from Vietnam and India. After introducing feed-in tariffs and fiscal incentives, Vietnam's solar and wind capacity experienced a rapid transformation. By the end of 2023, combined solar and wind capacity reached about 21,664 MW, accounting for around 27 percent of total installed power capacity, up from virtually negligible levels just a few years earlier. Vietnam's corporate tax regime offers preferential rates as low as 10 percent for up to 15 years for qualifying renewable and environmental energy projects, along with tax holidays and reductions in the first years of operation. The government also provides land-use and land-rent exemptions and import tax relief for renewable energy investments. Together, these measures sharply improved project profitability and attracted large volumes of private investment in a short period of time.

In India, diversified financing has helped drive rapid renewable transformation. By 2025, the country's total installed renewable

energy capacity reached around 254 GW, including about 133 GW of solar and 54 GW of wind. At the same time, India's green finance market has expanded rapidly. In 2024, cumulative green and sustainability-linked debt issuance had grown to nearly \$55.9 billion, with most of the funds flowing into clean energy projects.

Encouragingly, the tone from Bangladesh's interim government on energy policy is signalling positive change. Instead of focusing almost entirely on building more capacity, there is a growing concern with financial discipline in the power sector, the performance of state-owned utilities, and the heavy fiscal burden created by inefficient contracts. There is also clearer recognition that renewable targets cannot be met through public spending alone.

Bangladesh's renewable ambitions are therefore not unrealistic. But they will only materialise if the way projects are financed changes just as fundamentally as the technology itself. Blended finance, green bonds, and *sukuk*, stronger use of institutions like IDCOL, and deeper engagement with development partners can create projects that investors are willing to fund. If this momentum continues, the energy transition will no longer be just a climate commitment. It will become part of the country's broader economic strategy, strengthening energy security, easing fiscal pressure, and supporting long-term growth. The decisions taken today on energy financing will therefore shape not only Bangladesh's climate future, but also the competitiveness and resilience of its economy for decades to come.

CROSSWORD BY
THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

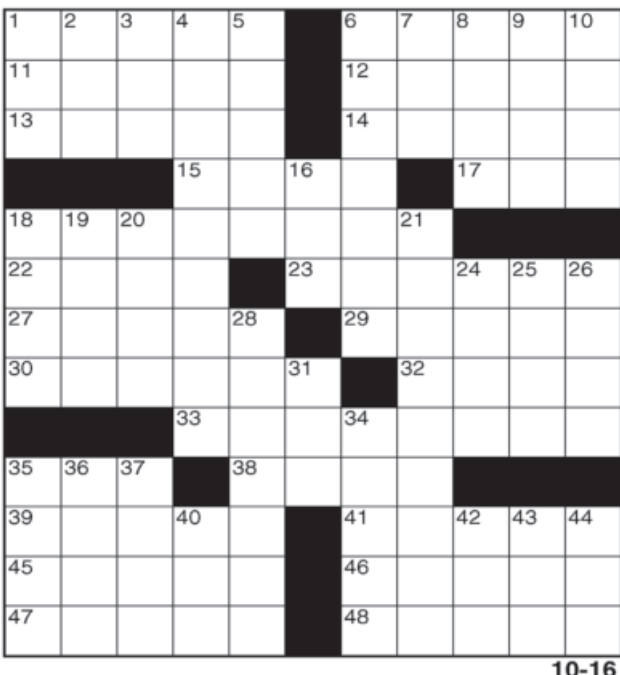
- 1 Puts on the wall
- 6 Family car
- 11 Left, on a liner
- 12 Runway sight
- 13 Sorceress of Greek myth
- 14 Muscular
- Japanese dog
- 15 Prayer finish
- 17 Ploy down
- 18 Like some return envelopes
- 22 "What ____ for Love" ("A Chorus Line" song)
- 23 Attack, in a way
- 27 Fizzy drinks
- 29 Andean animal
- 30 Sports spots
- 32 Sierra Club

DOWN

- 1 Deli meat
- 2 Gorilla, for one
- 3 Silent approval
- 4 Large dog
- 5 Philatelist's find
- 6 Droopy-eared dog
- 7 Caribou's kin
- 8 Speaker's stand

9 Opposed to

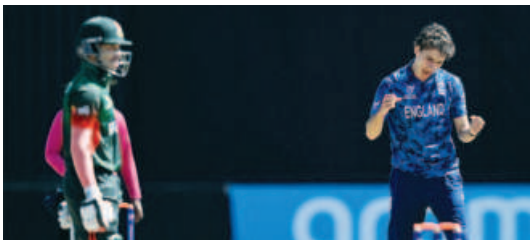
- 10 Orderly
- 16 Have lunch
- 18 Galileo's home
- 19 Smell
- 20 Flank
- 21 Spotted dog
- 24 Actor Julia
- 25 Surrounded by
- 26 Old salts
- 28 White dog
- 31 Sch. for priests
- 34 Chain of hills
- 35 Uneven hairdo
- 36 Contented cat sound
- 37 Movie pooch
- 40 Family
- 42 Cow's chew
- 43 Sense of self
- 44 Grass coater



SATURDAY'S ANSWERS



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U19s crash out of WC semifinal race

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's hopes of reaching the semifinals of the ICC Under-19 World Cup ended after a seven-wicket defeat to England in their opening Super Six Group 2 match at Queens Sports Club in Bulawayo yesterday.

In a must-win encounter, Bangladesh struggled with the bat after opting to bat first, getting bundled out for just 136 in 38.1 overs. Bangladesh made a promising start while defending the modest total as pacer Al Fahad struck twice early, removing England openers Joseph Moores (1) and Ben Dawkins (27) to reduce them to 39 for 2 in the ninth over. However, a decisive 78-run partnership between captain Thomas Rew and Ben Mayers steadied the chase and swung the momentum England's way. England reached 137 for 3 in 24.1 overs. The victory lifted England to the top of the points table with six points, with India second on four points and two matches in hand.

Bangladesh, who carried just one point from the group stage, are now mathematically out of semifinal contention. Even a win against Zimbabwe on January 31 in Harare would only take them to three points. Bangladesh won the tournament in 2020 and finished eighth and sixth in 2022 and 2024 respectively.



Sinner's statement win, Keys dethroned

Jannik Sinner stormed into the Australian Open quarterfinals with a commanding 6-1, 6-3, 7-6 win over close friend Luciano Darderi, firing 19 aces in Melbourne's sweltering 30°C evening. Fellow Italian Lorenzo Musetti battled heat and Taylor Fritz to face Novak Djokovic next, while Iga Swiatek powered through to meet Elena Rybakina. On the women's side, Jessica Pegula dethroned Madison Keys 6-3, 6-4, setting up a clash with Amanda Anisimova. As Melbourne braces for 45°C, the stage is set for blockbuster quarterfinals and a potential Sinner-Djokovic semi, with players navigating extreme conditions and high-stakes drama.

Will stagnation continue in the 'best time for cricket'?

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Bangladesh cricket finds itself in a state of drift. On Monday, the lush green outfield of the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium lay unusually quiet, while even the academy ground showed little sign of activity.

The loss of a World Cup place amid the ongoing impasse between the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and the International Cricket Council (ICC) over security concerns in India has added to the gloom. On-field cricket now faces uncertain days, with the First Division League continuing with a reduced 12-team format and even the Premier League clouded by uncertainty.

While walking through Mirpur, this reporter overheard two BCB officials discussing possible renovations of existing facilities. From their conversation, it appeared such plans may have to be put on hold due to the upcoming national elections.

Ordinarily, the period immediately after the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) would see the Sher-e-Bangla buzzing with activity. National team players would return to prepare for upcoming assignments, media attention would intensify and discussions around squad selection would dominate. This year, however, the absence of a World Cup has left a noticeable void.

The Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolis (CCDM) has organised a T20 Challenge Cup for players sidelined by the First Division League's club-versus-BCB conflict and those who went unsold in the



In this vacuum, rumour took over on Sunday night, with speculation swirling over BCB president Aminul Islam Bulbul's departure for Australia. The speculation subsided only on Monday morning when Bulbul appeared at the BCB premises to attend a training programme for match referees.

turned up at the stadium to lodge a formal complaint with the BCB president, claiming they are yet to receive 75 percent of their contracted payments from last season.

Following the BPL final, Test captain Najmul Hossain Shanto spoke candidly about the need to strengthen the domestic structure. BCB officials also view the current lull as a potential opportunity to push forward with tournaments.

BCB game development coordinator Habibul Bashar believes the coming weeks are crucial.

"From what I understand, the BCL [Bangladesh Cricket League] four-day matches were supposed to take place. We can start thinking of upcoming assignments," Bashar told The Daily Star, adding that with Pakistan home series in March, the BCL could also be played in one-day format.

For Bashar, failing to make use of this window would be a missed opportunity. "It wouldn't be right to let this time go to waste. This is the best time for cricket. Later on, it rains or gets hot. This is the best time to play cricket in Bangladesh," he added.

A senior BCB official, speaking on condition of anonymity, revealed that plans are being drawn up for February. "Given the present situation, we are planning for February and hope to have an overall plan within a week," the official said.

With national team assignments too facing significant risks after ICC's decision to remove Bangladesh from World Cup, the domestic scene and its improvement gains even more importance.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Pakistan delay final call on T20 WC participation

AFP, ISLAMABAD

Pakistan cricket chief Mohsin Naqvi said on Monday a final decision on the team's participation in next month's Twenty20 World Cup will be delayed by up to a week, keeping open a possible boycott over Bangladesh's withdrawal.

Naqvi met Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Monday to take his advice on the situation, after which a call was expected to be made, but the cricket board boss posted on X that "the final decision will be taken either on Friday or next Monday".

Describing a "productive meeting" with the premier, he said Sharif "directed that we resolve it while keeping all options on the table".

Naqvi threw the national cricket team's participation into doubt on Saturday, saying Pakistan could pull out after the International Cricket Council (ICC) replaced Bangladesh in the tournament.

Local media also reported that Pakistan could also boycott a February 15 match against arch-rivals India over political tension.

Pakistan's reaction comes after the ICC rejected Bangladesh's demands to relocate their World Cup matches from India to Sri Lanka over security fears.

On Saturday, the ICC replaced Bangladesh with Scotland as per the Twenty20 international rankings.

Pakistan backed Bangladesh's stance in Wednesday's ICC Board virtual meeting, saying there was a precedence of relocating India's matches on security fears from Pakistan in last year's Champions Trophy.

Milan stalemate with Roma leaves Inter five clear

REUTERS, ROME

AC Milan's title hopes suffered a blow as they were held to a 1-1 draw by AS Roma in a rain-soaked clash in the capital on Sunday that left Inter Milan five points clear at the top of the Serie A standings.

Second-placed Milan moved to 47 points, while Roma climbed to third on 43, level with Napoli, who suffered a 3-0 defeat earlier on Sunday.

Inter had cranked up the pressure in the title race with a 6-2 comeback win against Pisa on Friday.

Roma had several chances to grab the opening goal in the first half but Milan keeper Mike Maignan was in inspired form, producing a reflex save on the line to deny the hosts just before the break, with his performance earning him the Man-of-the-Match award.

Milan made the breakthrough in the 62nd minute when Koni De Winter rose to glance home a header from a cross.

However, the home crowd were roaring 12 minutes later when Lorenzo Pellegrini netted from the spot.



Barca reclaim LaLiga lead as race tightens



AGENCIES

Barcelona returned to the top of La Liga with a 3-0 win over bottom side Real Oviedo on Sunday, staying one point clear of Real Madrid in a tightly contested title race.

Goals from Dani Olmo, Raphinha and teenage sensation Lamine Yamal ensured the Catalans moved onto 52 points, after Real Madrid had briefly taken pole position with a win over Villarreal on Saturday. Atletico Madrid remain third on 44 points after a comfortable 3-0 victory over Mallorca.

Although Oviedo sit bottom of the table, Barcelona were made to work for their win, struggling to break through in the first half before their quality told after the break. The result kept Hansi Flick's side firmly in control at the top, with the pressure remaining on their closest rivals in the weeks ahead.

Elsewhere, Atletico strengthened their grip on third place with goals from Alexander Sorloth and Thiago Almada, alongside a David Lopez own goal, to beat Mallorca. Real Betis' push for European football suffered a setback with a 2-1 loss at Alaves, while Celta Vigo were beaten 3-1 at Real Sociedad.

With the title race tightening and European spots still up for grabs, La Liga heads into another decisive round of fixtures.

Carrick magic reshapes the competitive balance

AGENCIES

Arsenal remain top of the Premier League, but their grip on the title race has loosened after Manchester United beat them 3-2 at the Emirates on Sunday, halting the Gunners' charge toward a first championship in 22 years.

The defeat allowed Manchester City and Aston Villa – both winners this weekend – to close the gap to just four points, injecting fresh tension into what had been shaping up as a comfortable run-in.

Much of that shift in momentum has come from Manchester United's revival under Michael Carrick. United followed up their victory over Manchester City by beating Arsenal, lifting themselves into the top four and displacing Liverpool.

Having taken over a side that had won just once in seven matches, Carrick has quickly restored belief and direction, transforming United into genuine contenders for Champions League qualification.

Liverpool, by contrast, are heading in the opposite direction. Once steady in the race for European places, they have slipped to sixth after a damaging defeat in Bournemouth, exposing ongoing issues around fatigue, injuries and squad balance.

Despite heavy summer investment,



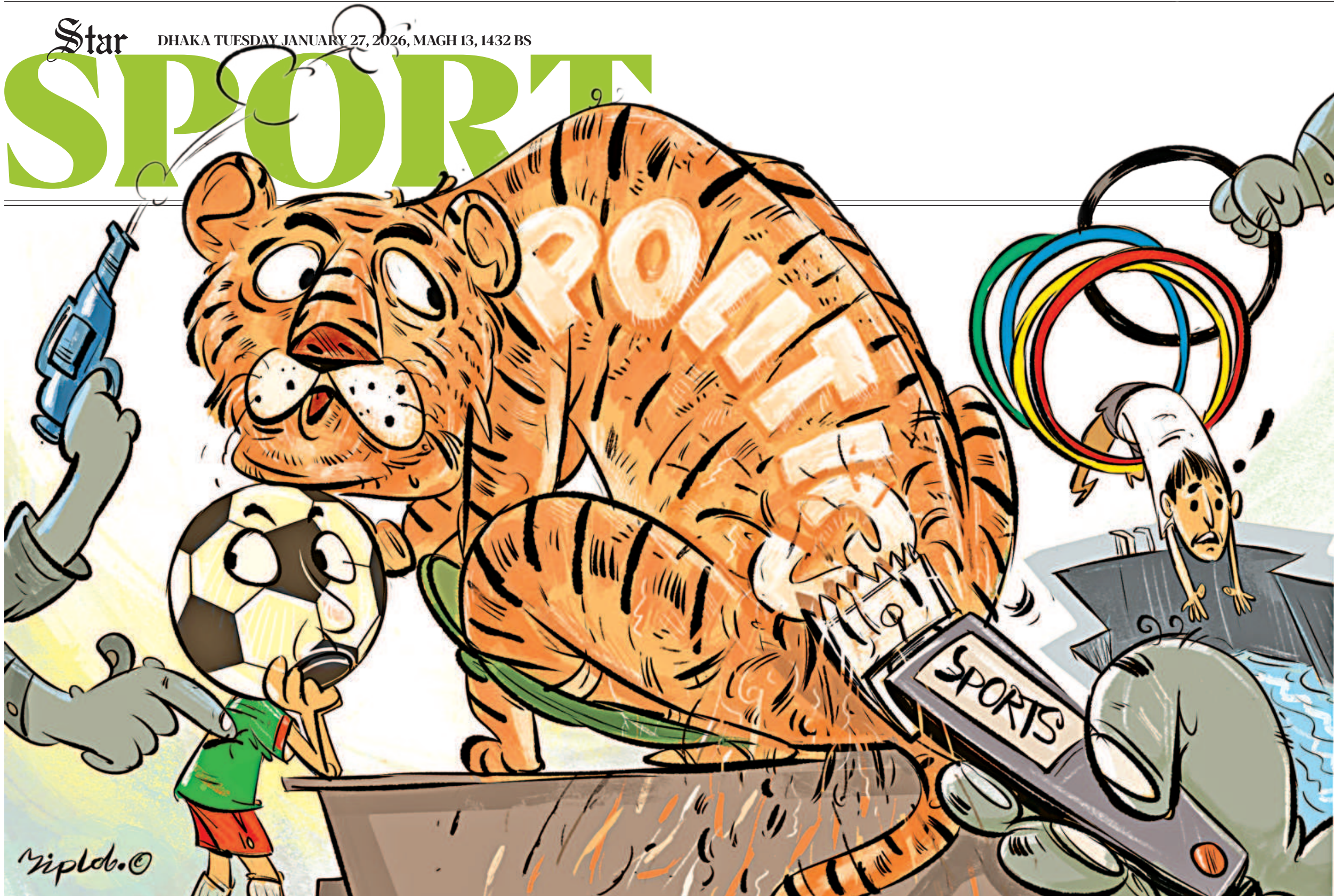
they find themselves short of depth in key areas, and the consequences are now reflected in their league position. With Champions League spots under threat, their room for recovery is shrinking.

Tottenham, meanwhile, are drifting further from the conversation entirely. A campaign that began with promise has unraveled into inconsistency and unrest, leaving Spurs marooned in mid-table. Patience with Thomas Frank is wearing thin, with supporters increasingly restless and results failing to offer reassurance.

The table now tells a story of renewed uncertainty. Arsenal remain in front but

no longer unchallenged, with City and Villa closing fast, United rising again, and Liverpool struggling to keep pace. What once appeared a settled hierarchy has been reshaped by managerial impact, squad depth and momentum swings.

Above all, Carrick's influence at Old Trafford stands out. Victories over both City and Arsenal have lifted United into the top four and restored a sense of purpose and identity. While it is far too early to crown him as the long-term answer, the transformation has altered the competitive balance near the top of the Premier League.



No ban, no boycott, STILL NO WORLD CUP

Bangladesh handed one-of-a-kind omission

ASHEAQ UL-ALAM

If international sports can be equated as pseudo-battles between two competing nations, mega sporting events like a World Cup or the Olympics can be thought of as an all-out war with honour at stake.

Unlike actual wars, where avoiding direct combat is often the most desirable outcome, in the symbolic battles of sport, absence brings shame, signalling a country's failure to produce athletes who can compete with the world's best.

In its 54 years of existence, Bangladesh have endured this ignominy repeatedly. It holds the unwanted record of being the country with the largest population to never win an Olympic medal, and it is far away from qualifying for the men's football World Cup or the hockey World Cup. In fact, it hasn't produced many athletes who can compete at the world level.

The sole exception to this culture of sheer mediocrity is cricket.

After trying for two decades, Bangladesh made its debut in the cricket World Cup in 1999. Including that maiden voyage in England, Bangladesh have so far competed in a total of 16 World Cups – seven ODI World Cups and nine T20 World Cups – in men's senior cricket.

Although their trophy cabinet remains empty after 16 attempts and they are yet to go past the quarterfinal stage in the World Cup, through consistent appearances, Bangladesh has positioned itself as part of the upper echelon of cricket, a sport played in 110 countries.

They were set to do it once again in the 10th edition of the T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka, scheduled to begin on February 7.

But not anymore, as they were replaced by Scotland on January 24, after weeks-long failed negotiations between BCB and ICC about the relocation of Bangladesh's matches from India amid security concerns.

This unexpected turn stemmed from an incident that set off the row,

underscoring a trait common to both pseudo and real wars: the tendency to erupt from a single spark.

THE SPARK

According to historians, the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, on June 28, 1914, in Bosnia at the hands of a Serbian teenager started a domino effect that led to the First World War, one of the bloodiest conflicts in human history that claimed around 20 million lives.

The row between the BCB and the ICC was triggered by what the ICC later referred to as an "isolated" and "unrelated" event, yet it ultimately pushed Bangladesh out of the T20 World Cup.

On January 3, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) instructed Indian Premier League (IPL) franchise Kolkata Knight Riders to release Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman from their squad without specifying any reason, only saying it was done "due to the recent developments."

The BCCI seemingly bowed its head to pressure from right-wing politicians and religious groups to remove Mustafizur without any cricketing cause, which was the foundation of Bangladesh's claims of security concern.

The BCB, under the guidance of the government, reacted strongly, sending a letter to ICC the very next day to request relocation of tournament matches from India – where the Tigers were supposed to play all four of their Group C matches.

What followed was weeks-long back-and-forth communications, differing speculations disseminated from online reports, and it eventually ended with both BCB and ICC staying unchanged in their respective positions.

ICC rejected Bangladesh's request while the BCB, as per the government's directive, said it can't travel to India under the current circumstances, which led to ICC eventually naming Scotland in their stead.

Bangladesh's exit from the T20 World Cup is unique in many ways. ICC never banned Bangladesh from competing, and neither the BCB nor the government ever said the Tigers don't want to compete.

There was no ban from the ICC, nor a boycott from the BCB, still, Bangladesh are no longer in the World Cup.

THE BANS

Sports and geopolitics have long been

intertwined, with wars often triggering exclusions from global competitions. The 1920 Antwerp Olympics, the first major event after the First World War, barred Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary and the Ottoman Empire for their roles in the conflict, with Germany excluded again in Paris. A similar pattern followed after the Second World War, when Germany and Japan were left out of the 1948 Olympics and the 1950 FIFA World Cup.

Wars have remained the most consistent cause for exclusion. Yugoslavia were banned from the 1992 Barcelona Games and the 1994 World Cup due to UN sanctions over the Balkan conflict, while Russia missed the 2022 World Cup and will sit out the 2026 edition over the Ukraine invasion. South Africa faced the longest ban, excluded from the Olympics, FIFA World Cup and international cricket from 1964 until the early 1990s due to apartheid. Afghanistan were barred from the 2002 Games under the Taliban, and Kuwait from the 2016 Rio Olympics over government interference, with their athletes competing as Independents – a route also taken by Russian athletes in 2022.

THE BOYCOTTS

Boycotts became a tool of collective protest, formalising the link between sport and politics. The 1956 Melbourne Olympics saw seven nations withdraw for political reasons: Egypt, Iraq and Lebanon over the Suez Crisis; the Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland against the Soviet invasion of Hungary; and China over Taiwan's inclusion. The first high-profile football boycott came when Uruguay skipped the 1934 and 1938 World Cups in protest over limited South American participation in Europe.

Subsequent decades saw further political boycotts. In 1966, African nations stayed away from the World Cup in England over FIFA's single qualification spot for Africa, Asia and Oceania. In 1976, 29 African countries boycotted the Montreal Olympics after the IOC declined to sanction New Zealand over its rugby tour of apartheid South Africa; 32 nations repeated the protest at the 1978 Edinburgh Commonwealth Games. The Cold War prompted the largest boycott in 1980, when over 60 countries, led by the US, skipped the Moscow Olympics; the Soviet bloc retaliated in 1984 with 15 countries missing Los Angeles.

In the 21st century, boycotts

have largely become symbolic, with diplomatic withdrawals by the US, UK, Australia, Canada and others at the 2014 Sochi and 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics over Russia and China's human rights records, while still allowing athletes to compete.

BANGLADESH'S UNIQUE SITUATION

Compared to other events, the cricket World Cup has been lucky in this regard, hardly ever facing a boycott nor has the ICC imposed any bans.

There have been instances when teams have refused to travel to a certain venue owing to security and other concerns during a World Cup.

It happened in the 1996 World Cup, when Australia and West Indies refused to go to Sri Lanka while in the 2003 edition, England and New Zealand refused to travel to Zimbabwe and Kenya, respectively.

In all these cases, the team that refused to travel had to forfeit that match.

When Australia cited it won't send its team to Bangladesh for the Under-19 World Cup in 2016, they were promptly replaced.

However, when India did the same before the 2025 ICC Champions Trophy, refusing to travel to Pakistan owing to security risks and government orders, the ICC staged multiple tri-party communications and introduced a hybrid model, as part of which India and Pakistan won't have to travel to the other country for any ICC event till 2027.

But when Bangladesh gave the same reasoning as India – security concerns and government order – they were strung along by the ICC for a few weeks before being outright rejected.

As said before, Bangladesh did not boycott nor were they banned from the upcoming T20 World Cup. The best way to describe their ousting, perhaps, would be term it a procedural exclusion.

PROCEDURAL EXCLUSION

Till 2016, ICC had set a decent precedent. It had been firm when a country refused to travel to another country for a World Cup match, by either making them forfeit that game or by replacing them from the tournament.

Had the India incident not happened in 2024, the ICC could hardly be questioned for how it dealt with the Bangladesh case.

In its media release where it announced Bangladesh's request has been rejected, one of ICC's reasoning were that it did not want to set a bad

precedent by accepting Bangladesh's last minute request.

But a poor precedent had already been set.

Yes, India had made their request months prior, before the tournament schedule had been announced. However, the schedule announcement was unusually delayed that year by the ICC, as if it had been expecting a rejection from the BCCI.

Furthermore, ICC had intentionally brought in PCB in the discussion as the hosts when India refused to travel. But in its discussions with the BCB, the BCCI was never involved, at least formally.

In that press release, the ICC referred to IPL as just "a domestic league," but everyone knows that it is in fact the biggest money-making machine of the richest cricket board in the world, through which it exercises its power over world cricket and for which even the ICC has allotted an international cricket-free two-month window every year.

From the looks of it, ICC took its time to follow its written procedures, made sure it kept no loopholes and excluded Bangladesh from the tournament after the BCB refused to budge from its position.

The BCB, undoubtedly, made errors in the negotiations. The current board's lack of diplomatic experience was evident as it has been reported that it failed to engage other boards in the issue, when it should have expected that the matter could go to a voting, as it did, where other than Pakistan the BCB found no support.

THE AFTERMATH

For Bangladesh, the die has been cast. The BCB reportedly faces a major earnings hit in the future and its relations with the ICC and the BCCI is expected to sour further.

The BCB is receiving some plaudits from home and beyond but when the financial strain begins, it would be interesting to see how the BCB manages the fallout.

For the ICC, the Bangladesh row is also not yet over. By refusing BCB's security concerns and choosing to ignore how the BCB cannot go against its government's directives, it has set a precedence of how to handle similar events in the future. Would it be able settle matters with an iron fist once again if the name of the team is India, Australia or England, instead of Bangladesh, it remains to be seen.



Sarba Mitra offers to resign after latest controversy

DU CORRESPONDENT

Amid criticism over repeated incidents of moral policing on the Dhaka University campus, Ducus leader Sarba Mitra Chakma yesterday announced his resignation.

In a Facebook post, Sarba apologised for his actions but defended them, saying, "I did not do it for any personal gain, but for the betterment of the campus."

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1



Braving a cold winter morning, two farmers in the Barind region are busy transplanting Boro seedlings. The photo was taken yesterday at Rajabari area of Godagari upazila in Rajshahi.

PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

Defence industrial zone to be set up in Mirsarai

Govt allocates 850 acres previously set aside for Indian economic zone

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government decided to earmark around 850 acres of land in Chattogram's Mirsarai for the development of a Defence Industrial Zone aiming to strengthen domestic military production capacity and tap into the growing global defence manufacturing market.

The decision was taken yesterday at a governing board meeting of the Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority (BEZA) chaired by Chief Adviser Mohammad Yunus.

The 850-acre land, currently vacant, had previously been designated for the Indian Economic Zone until the project was cancelled in June last year, said BEZA Executive Chairman Ashik Chowdhury at a press briefing afterwards.

The initiative is not intended to replicate the existing Bangladesh Ordnance Factories model by building multiple state-run facilities.

Rather, the focus will be on technology transfer, joint ventures and supplier arrangements with foreign

SEE PAGE 8 COL 5

TRIBUTE TO MARK TULLY

A witness to Bangladesh's Liberation War

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

Mark Tully was among the last of a generation -- not just in terms of the sweeping change they witnessed, from radio to television to the internet and the flood of social media, but also in terms of the respect and trust that reporters once commanded.

Beginning with radio, Tully was the BBC's voice from India for more than two decades, during which he covered South Asia. But for Bangladesh, he will forever be the voice that told the story of the Liberation War.

The BBC's coverage of the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971 is widely appreciated. At

SEE PAGE 8 COL 1



Observers return in droves to monitor this election

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR and AHMED DEEPTO

The February 12 election is set to be held under the watch of the largest contingent of local and international observers since the 2008 polls.

The extended presence of observers, from grassroots civic groups to seasoned international missions, reflects a surge in both domestic vigilance and global curiosity about the country's democratic transition.

They said this election is widely hoped to be the first competitive contest since 2008, when Bangladesh last witnessed largely accepted and participated polls.

International and local observers noted that their mandate extends beyond simply watching events on

| ELECTION OBSERVERS | | |
|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| ELECTION | LOCAL OBSERVERS | INT'L OBSERVERS |
| Feb 12, 2026 | 55,454 | 500 |
| Jan 7, 2024 | 20,773 | 158 |
| Dec 30, 2018 | 25,290 | 125 |
| Jan 5, 2014 | 8,878 | 04 |
| Dec 29, 2008 | 1,59,113 | 593 |
| Oct 1, 2001 | 2,18,000 | 225 |

election day. While short-term monitors focus on polling and counting, long-term international observers usually track the broader process -- examining preparations, the legal framework, and its enforcement, the conduct of campaigns, and the mechanisms for resolving electoral disputes, said EC

officials.

Election Commissioner Brig Gen (retd) Abul Fazal Md Sanaullah said 55,454 observers from 81 registered local organisations will be on duty. In addition, there will be around 500 foreign observers monitoring the polls.

A total of 1,59,113 local and 593 international observers

monitored the 2008 polls.

Polls expert Badiul Alam Majumdar, also chief of the now-defunct Electoral Reform Commission, told The Daily Star that the number of local and international observers has increased significantly as a competitive election is set to be held on February 12.

"Many international observers showed apathy in monitoring the three previous polls, as they were not contested. In many cases, they faced various obstacles, including being denied visa," he said.

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

SEE PAGE 8 COL 4

BCL leader gets bail 3 days after deaths of wife, child

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three days after the death of his wife and infant son, Chhatra League leader Jewel Hasan Saddam, who is currently at Jashore Central Jail, was granted bail yesterday.

The High Court granted him six months' ad-interim bail in a case filed under the Anti-Terrorism Act with Bagerhat Police Station on March 6 last year, Saddam's lawyer Sayed Ahmed Raza told The Daily Star.

The HC also issued a rule asking the state to explain why Saddam should not be granted permanent bail in the case.

The bench of Justice JBM Hassan and Justice Aziz Ahmed Bhuiyan came up with the order and rule following a petition filed by Saddam's lawyer seeking his bail in the case.

Raza said the court granted bail to his client on humanitarian grounds following the recent deaths of his wife and son.

He added that with this order, Saddam has now secured bail in all pending cases against him.

Saddam, president of now-banned student organisation Chhatra League's Bagerhat Sadar Upazila unit, was arrested in Gopalganj following the fall of the Awami League regime on August 5, 2024, and had been charged in several cases.

Earlier on Saturday night, Saddam was allowed to see his wife and son for the last time under police supervision at the gate of Jashore Central Jail. Family members said they had applied for his release on parole but then had to arrange for the bodies to be taken to the jail gate instead.

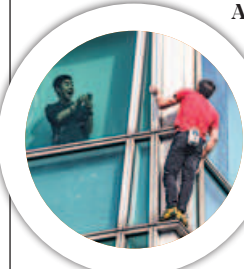
Witnesses at the jail gate had described scenes of profound grief during the final farewell. The incident later drew criticism across social media, with many arguing that Saddam should have been granted parole to attend the funeral.

SEE PAGE 8 COL 1



Daredevil free-climbs Taiwan's tallest building

AFP, Taipei



An American climber took on Taiwan's tallest building on Sunday, becoming the first person to scale Taipei 101 without a rope, harness or safety net.

Hundreds of spectators gathered at the base of the 101-storey tower to watch Alex Honnold, 40, embark on his daredevil feat, which was also broadcast live on Netflix.

After an hour and a half, he successfully made it up 1,667 feet before triumphantly rappelling down to reunite with his wife, Sanni McCandless Honnold.

Speaking at a press briefing afterwards, Honnold said "time is finite", and people should "use it in the best way".

"If you work really hard... you can do hard things," Honnold added. Honnold has conquered some of the world's most intimidating rock faces and rose to global fame in 2017 after he climbed Yosemite's "El Capitan", lauded among his peers as the pinnacle of technical difficulty on the massive granite monolith.



People take part in a demonstration in Minneapolis, Minnesota, US on Sunday, a day after Alex Pretti was fatally shot by federal immigration agents during an attempted detention. Billionaire Bill Ackman donated \$10,000 to a fundraiser for Pretti's family, the Wall Street Journal reported, citing his spokesman.

PHOTO: REUTERS

‘Speak up’ and take action

Obama, Clinton urge Americans after Minneapolis shootings; Trump says administration ‘reviewing everything’

AGENCIES

Two Democratic former presidents on Sunday condemned the scenes in Minnesota after Alex Pretti was killed this weekend, framing the tragedy as a pivotal moment that calls Americans to "speak up" and take action.

Former president Barack Obama and first lady Michelle Obama called Pretti's death a "heartbreaking tragedy" in a statement. "It should also be a wake-up call to every

American, regardless of party, that many of our core values as a nation are increasingly under assault," the Obamas wrote.

The Obamas criticised the "unprecedented tactics" the Department of Homeland Security has employed. White House spokesperson Abigail Jackson said Obama was exploiting the moment to "sow more division."

Former president Bill Clinton called the scenes in Minneapolis

"horrible" in a statement on social media. "Over the course of a lifetime, we face only a few moments where the decisions we make and the actions we take will shape our history for years to come. This is one of them," he wrote.

Clinton said "the people in charge" are lying to the public and telling them "not to believe what we've seen with our own eyes," reports NBC News online.

SEE PAGE 8 COL 6

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার
হাসপাতাল ও ক্লিনিক শাখা
স্বাস্থ্য অধিদপ্তর
টিবি গেইট, মহাখালী, ঢাকা-১২১২

বিজ্ঞপ্তি

৪৯তম বিসিএস (বিশেষ) পরীক্ষা-২০২৫ এর মাধ্যমে বাংলাদেশ সিভিল সার্ভিস (বিসিএস) (সাধারণ শিক্ষা) ক্যাডারের বিভিন্ন পদে নিয়োগের জন্য সাময়িকভাবে মনোনীত ৬৬৫ (ছয়শত পঁয়ষাট) জন প্রার্থীদের স্বাস্থ্য পরীক্ষার সময়সূচী dghs.gov.bd উল্লেখিত ওয়েবসাইটে পাওয়া যাবে।

২৫.১.২০২৬
পরিচালক
(হাসপাতাল ও ক্লিনিক সমূহ)
স্বাস্থ্য অধিদপ্তর, মহাখালী, ঢাকা

GO-198

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