

Walking under **DANGER**

NISHAT TASNEEM

On 22 January, a 40-year-old man was standing beside a tea stall in Gulshan when a steel rod reportedly fell from an under-construction building and killed him. There was no warning, no protective net, no barrier separating the work above from the public space below. Just negligence and another life quietly added to a growing list of preventable deaths. The incident

made headlines because Gulshan is not a remote worksite or an industrial zone; it is one of the most heavily policed, high-rent neighbourhoods in the country. Yet the risk that killed him is common across Dhaka and other fast-growing cities: falling construction debris hitting pedestrians on public roads. This is not a new story. Months earlier, a 22-year-old garment worker died after a brick fell from a building under construction as she was heading to work in Jatrabari.

Over the years, similar reports appear after every major construction boom: rods, bricks, concrete chunks, glass, tools, and loose materials tumbling down onto footpaths that are already narrow and crowded.

These deaths are often described as 'accidents.' But when the same type of incident keeps repeating, it is no longer an accident. It is a pattern. The bottleneck is that Bangladesh does not lack safety protocols for construction sites; it lacks compliance and monitoring.

SEE PAGE J2



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Walking under danger



Behind every headline is a family left grieving. The victims are not construction workers who knowingly entered hazardous sites; they are pedestrians using public roads.

FROM PAGE J1

A CITY EXPANDING UPWARDS, EXPOSING THOSE BELOW

Dhaka is building vertically at an extraordinary pace. Old residential houses are being replaced with multi-storey apartments and commercial towers. Construction sites appear almost overnight and sit directly beside schools, markets, offices, and bus stops. In many neighbourhoods, pedestrians are routinely forced to walk inches away from active construction zones.

Footpaths are often encroached upon or unusable, forcing people closer to buildings under construction. Above them, workers move materials manually, stack bricks near open edges, and hoist steel rods several floors high. Without protective nets or overhead covers, any mistake or slip can turn deadly for someone passing below.

WHAT THE LAW ACTUALLY REQUIRES

Bangladesh's construction safety framework clearly anticipates these risks. The Bangladesh National Building Code (BNBC) includes provisions requiring construction sites to be enclosed with proper fencing when located near public spaces. It also specifies the use of protective netting around buildings under construction. The code further calls for warning signs, controlled work zones and safe methods of material handling and disposal.

protective measures reflects a systemic failure in urban safety management,"

WHY ENFORCEMENT FAILS IN PRACTICE

The persistent failure lies in enforcement. Oversight of construction sites is divided among multiple agencies, including planning authorities, city corporations, labour inspectors and law enforcement. This fragmented system often results in weak coordination and unclear accountability.

Inspections are irregular and frequently reactive, occurring only after a fatal incident has already taken place. When violations are found, penalties are often minor and inconsistently applied. Responsibility tends to fall on site-level workers, while developers, contractors and building owners, those with decision-making power, are rarely held accountable. There is also a strong economic incentive to ignore safety.

THE HIDDEN COST OF HUMAN LIVES

Behind every headline is a family left grieving. The victims are not construction workers who knowingly entered hazardous sites; they are pedestrians using public roads. Their deaths are sudden and deeply unjust. These incidents rarely result in long-term consequences for those responsible. Media attention fades, legal cases stall, and construction continues. For families, there is often little compensation and even less closure.

WHAT REAL PREVENTION WOULD LOOK LIKE

Preventing these deaths does not require new laws; it requires seriousness. Pedestrian protection must be treated as a non-negotiable condition of construction permits. Before work begins, developers should be required to submit and implement site-specific safety plans that include fencing, netting, debris containment, and protected pedestrian corridors. Inspections must be frequent and empowered. Authorities should have clear stop-work powers when safety violations are found. Work stoppages create real consequences in a way that small fines do not. Finally, citizens should be able to report unsafe construction sites through a transparent system that triggers inspections. Public participation can act as an early warning mechanism before tragedy strikes.

A QUESTION OF URBAN PRIORITIES

As Dhaka continues to grow, the question is not whether construction will continue, but whether pedestrian lives will be protected and treated as a priority in the process. Falling debris deaths are not freak accidents; they are predictable outcomes of neglect. Until safety rules are enforced properly and accountability reaches those who profit from construction, the danger will remain overhead. And the next falling brick or steel rod will not be an accident. It will be a failure we already knew how to prevent.

In addition to the BNBC, legal accountability exists through other laws. The Building Construction Act provides authorities with enforcement powers over unsafe construction. The Penal Code allows for criminal liability when death occurs due to negligence. The Bangladesh Labour Act outlines safety responsibilities within construction sites as workplaces. Sadman Hasan, a road safety activist reflecting on this matter says, "Construction work should not come at the cost of human lives. The lack of designated pedestrian paths and



NEXORA

Smart toilet for urban living

BHL Group highlights Perla Sanitary Ware's Nexora Smart Toilet as a locally made, affordable smart solution that fills Bangladesh's urban demand for hygienic, water-efficient bathroom fixtures and reduces reliance on costly imports.

The toilet uses a reinforced ceramic body and secure floor anchoring to ensure stability. Electronic modules are tolerant of vibration and building movement. The construction supports performance in mid- and high-rise buildings and in seismic conditions. Materials are non-combustible and follow low-voltage wiring standards for safety.

Advanced Hygiene and Safety
Automatic hands-free flushing reduces germ transmission and saves water. Self-cleaning nozzles and multiple cleaning modes maintain hygiene without manual contact. Deodorisation systems and a built-in night light improve comfort and user experience. Heated seats and adjustable water temperature increase comfort for occupants.

Efficient Water and Energy
Sensor-based flushing and optimised flush volumes lower daily water consumption. Dual flush options further conserve water in regular use. These measures help reduce operating costs and decrease environmental impact. The toilet design balances comfort features with energy-conscious operation.

enables faster delivery and standardised installation protocols. Spare parts and after-sales service are available through domestic channels to reduce commissioning delays. End-to-end quality control includes raw material inspection and functional testing of sensors and electronics. This approach improves reliability at installation.

Durability for Coastal Climates

High glaze nano-coated ceramic surfaces resist staining and microbial growth in humid environments. Corrosion-resistant fittings and moisture-sealed electronic housings extend service life. These measures ensure long-term performance in coastal and polluted urban settings.

Compliance and Market Application
Nexora aligns with national BNBC hygiene and plumbing principles and with international sanitary benchmarks. The toilet is suitable for residential, hotel and commercial projects. Developers can adopt the product without compromising design intent or regulatory compliance.

Value Across the Lifecycle
Although the product may appear premium initially, the total cost of ownership can be lower. Reduced water bills, minimal maintenance and a long operational lifespan decrease lifecycle cost. Local production also avoids import duty and long replacement delays for assets.

BHL Group produces Nexora and offers technical support to architects, developers and contractors to simplify specification and project delivery across urban developments in Bangladesh.

Nexora demonstrates that locally engineered sanitary ware can meet modern expectations. The product offers practical benefits for urban housing, hospitality and commercial construction. Wider adoption can support local manufacturing while improving hygiene and resource efficiency.



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Automation transforming construction safety

ADRIN SARWAR

For decades, the construction site has been a place of grit, sweat, and significant risk. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), construction accounts for a staggering 20 per cent of workplace fatalities worldwide. But a "robotic reformation" is underway. From the skyscraper projects to bridge repairs, robots are becoming the new "safety shield" for human workers.

ELIMINATING THE RISK

The primary goal of these robots is to remove humans from the "danger zone" completely. This is the most effective form of safety: if the worker isn't near the hazard, they can't be hurt. Whether it is exploring a deep tunnel or entering a crumbling structure, a machine is now sent to do the dangerous work while the human operates it from a safe distance.

BROKK AND HUSQVARNA DXR

In traditional demolition, a worker is seen with a jackhammer, exposed to falling concrete, heavy vibrations, and

toxic dust. Today, remote-controlled robots like the Brokk or Husqvarna DXR are the industry standard. These machines crawl into dangerous, unstable buildings while the operator stands up to 300 feet away with a joystick. If the roof collapses, a machine is crushed, but a life is saved.

BOSTON DYNAMICS' "SPOT"

On massive sites or projects, a bright yellow, four-legged robot is often seen wandering the site. This is Spot. Equipped with 360-degree cameras and LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging), Spot performs site inspections and "hazard mapping." It can enter confined spaces or gas-filled areas to check for safety before humans set foot inside.

TYBOT

Tying rebar (the steel mesh inside concrete) is one of the most back-breaking jobs in construction. It can lead to chronic spinal injuries. A robot called TyBOT, created by Advanced Construction Robotics, is now used on major bridge projects. It autonomously identifies rebar intersections and tying

them with steel wire.

ICON'S VULCAN

3D printing is moving from the lab to the job site. Companies like ICON use the Vulcan printer to "print" the walls of entire homes using a concrete composite. This removes the need for workers to climb high scaffolding or lift heavy masonry blocks. It reduces the risk of falls, one of the leading causes of death on construction sites.

THE NEW RISK

While these machines save lives, they aren't perfect. Despite becoming industry standards, the risk of accidents during Human-Robot Interaction (HRI) remains. If a robot's sensors are blocked by dust or a software glitch occurs, the machine could collide with a worker. To avoid this, competency-based training is essential. Workers are now being trained in Virtual Reality to communicate with robots. Safety in this era isn't just about the machine; it's about prevention. Predictive maintenance can stop accidents before they occur.



ILLUSTRATION: ADRIN SARWAR

WALTON LIFT setting standards for safety



We live in a country where frequent load shedding is a daily reality. The prospect of being trapped in a stalled elevator can trigger significant anxiety. For individuals prone to claustrophobia, a sudden power failure is a distressing experience that can lead to panic. Walton addresses these concerns by equipping every lift with a standard Automatic Rescue Device (ARD). This system ensures that in the event of a power cut, the cabin does not simply shut down between floors; instead, it automatically navigates to the nearest floor and opens the doors, allowing passengers to exit safely. This system is backed up by TÜV-certified progressive mechanical safety gears. These are designed to prevent free-fall or sudden drops during mechanical glitches. It ensures passenger's safety regardless of power stability or technical faults.

SEISMIC AND FIRE PROTECTION

Safety remains the cornerstone of Walton's engineering philosophy, particularly given that Dhaka sits in a high-risk seismic zone. Walton Lifts are equipped with integrated seismic sensors that automatically navigate the cabin to the nearest floor during an earthquake,



preventing the nightmare scenario of passenger entrapment. This commitment to safety extends to fire protection as well; Walton's landing doors meet the rigorous EN 81-58 fire-rating standards. EN 81-58 is the European standard for testing the fire resistance of elevator landing doors to prevent fire and smoke from spreading from a building floor into the elevator shaft.


Walton has domestic manufacturing infrastructure and dedicated Research and Innovation (R&I) team. By operating its own Lift Testing Tower and adhering to TÜV-prescribed checklists, Walton ensures every unit complies with EN 81-20 standards. This local presence

allows for a level of customisation, from adjusting cabin sizes for older architectural renovations.

IOT BASED SMART LIFTS

The technological prowess of Walton is further evidenced by its leap into the future of "Smart Lifts." The company has successfully integrated IoT-based remote monitoring and destination control systems, allowing for high-traffic management and predictive maintenance. This innovation is already operational in several landmark projects across the country, including Bangladesh Bank, Dhaka Medical College, and various government installations under the PWD and MES. With the capability to install lifts reaching speeds of up to 4 meters per second and capacities of 2000 kg, Walton is proving that local engineering can handle even the most demanding high-rise requirements.

As we move through 2024 and 2025, the perception of locally made lifts has undergone a radical transformation. By prioritising safety certifications, lifecycle costs, and rapid after-sales support, Walton Lift has established itself as a dependable partner in the nation's infrastructure development.



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STEEL HOMES

The future of housing

Bangladesh occupies a unique but challenging geographical position. As a nation sitting atop major fault lines and facing the annual wrath of cyclones and rising temperatures, the traditional approach to housing is being forced to evolve. In this landscape, KY Two Tone's Light Gauge Steel (LGS) structural system has emerged not just as a construction alternative but as a sophisticated engineering solution.

SEISMIC RESILIENCE

Bangladesh lies in a moderate to high seismic risk zone. Traditional Reinforced Cement Concrete (RCC) structures are heavy and brittle, during an earthquake, their mass attracts immense inertial forces, often leading to sudden, catastrophic failure. KY Two Tone's LGS system flips this logic. By utilising high-strength, cold-rolled steel, these structures boast a high strength-to-weight ratio. Being significantly lighter than concrete, they attract far lower seismic forces. The LGS frames are engineered to flex and dissipate energy without collapsing.



MULTI-LAYERED SHIELD AGAINST FIRE

Fire safety is a non-negotiable priority in modern residential design. KY Two Tone employs a "defence-in-depth" strategy to protect lives and property. The interior walls are lined with fibre cement boards, while exteriors feature 0.5mm steel siding. These materials act as primary thermal barriers.

DEFYING CYCLONES AND HUMIDITY

KY Two Tone structures are designed to withstand wind gusts of up to 180-210 km/h,

adhering to the BNBC's regional wind speed requirements. This makes them significantly safer than traditional semi-permanent structures during cyclone seasons. KY Two Tone utilises Galvanised or Galvalume-coated steel. This layer of Zinc and Aluminum provides a robust shield against corrosion.

PRECISION MANUFACTURING

In conventional construction, safety is often compromised by on-site improvisation, poor mixing of materials, or lack of oversight. KY Two Tone shifts the majority of the construction process into a

controlled factory environment. To maintain digital Accuracy 70 per cent of the manufacturing is handled by computerised roll-forming machines.

THERMAL SAFETY AND INDOOR COMFORT

Bangladesh's extreme heat can make traditional brick homes feel like ovens. KY Two Tone addresses this through a high-performance "layered shield" of reflective steel siding, bubble insulation, and internal glass wool. This system offers superior thermal resistance compared to high-thermal-mass bricks.

A SAFER ENVIRONMENT

Safety is also about the future of our environment. Traditional brick kilns are a major source of CO2 emissions and topsoil degradation in Bangladesh. KY Two Tone's dry construction method:

- Saves thousands of litres of water usually required for concrete curing.
- Reduces material waste to nearly zero through precise factory cutting.
- Utilises 100 per cent recyclable materials, ensuring that the building's lifecycle has a minimal impact on the nation's ecological health.

While market scepticism toward steel housing existed in the past, the period of 2024–2025 has seen a massive shift in perception. Homeowners now recognise that the speed of construction (1-2 months for single-story homes) does not come at the cost of safety, but rather through the efficiency of engineering.



Demand rising for high-quality electrical cables

The country's economic transformation is driven by growth in power generation and distribution. Alongside the demand for electrical cables is rising too; it is yet to reach saturation. Despite the presence of numerous manufacturers in the market, the need for reliable, high-quality cables remains critical.

Tackling incidents of fire

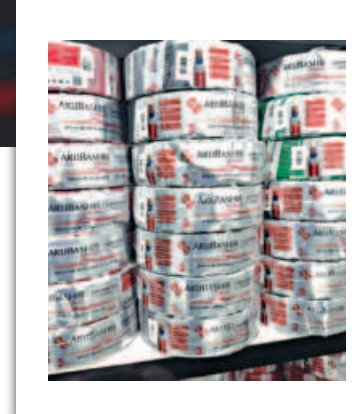
Lately, electrical safety has become a major concern in Bangladesh, particularly in urban and industrial areas. Approximately 39 per cent of fire incidents are caused by electrical reasons. The primary reasons include the use of low-quality cables, faulty circuit breakers, substandard switches and sockets, unsafe multi-plugs, and projects executed without proper technical supervision. When circuit breakers fail to operate effectively, excessive electrical loads can cause cables to overheat. This significantly increases the risk of fire. In industrial facilities, installation of excessive electrical equipment combined with inferior cabling is a leading cause of electrical accidents.

Ensuring building and workplace safety, therefore, requires careful cable selection. Recognising these challenges, AkijBashir Cables has introduced a triple-layer cable, designed to withstand temperatures of up to 105°C. This innovation offers protection against overheating and fire hazards.

Meeting quality standards

AkijBashir Cables follows both international and local standards throughout its manufacturing process. The company offers a comprehensive product portfolio that includes domestic cables, low-voltage and XLPE low-voltage cables, medium voltage cables, fire survival cables, communication cables, instrumentation and control cables, aluminium domestic and power cables, LSZH (Low Smoke Zero Halogen) cables, coaxial cables, flexible cords, service drop cables, copper strips and bus bars. The company is capable of manufacturing cables with ratings of up to 33 kV.

AkijBashir Cables operates a state-of-the-art in-house testing laboratory. All products are manufactured using 99.99



per cent pure copper and aluminium, combined with premium grade PVC and XLPE insulation materials. The company's current annual production capacity stands at 3,600 metric tonnes of copper and 2,400 metric tonnes of aluminium.

Landowner's guide to safety and quality control

ADRIN SARWAR

Building a home requires more than just hiring a contractor. Landowners need to monitor these things for ensuring the safety and longevity of their investment.

Structural Steel (Rod) Quality

- Ensure the use of Grade 500W (72.5 TMT) or Grade 400 (60-grade) rebars. Grade 500W is preferred for modern high-rises.
- Verify that the diameter (e.g., 10mm, 12mm, 16mm, 20mm, or 25mm) matches the structural engineer's drawing exactly.
- Rods should be free of heavy rust or scales.

Cement & Concrete Mix

- Use OPC (Ordinary Portland Cement) for columns and beams for faster strength gain, and PCC (Portland Composite Cement) for plastering and walls.
- Look for the BSTI seal on bags.

Check the manufacturing date (cement loses strength after 3 months).

- For standard RCC (Reinforced Cement Concrete), a common ratio is 1:1.5:3 (Cement:Sand:Stone chips).
- Use crushed stone chips for columns and foundations for higher load-bearing capacity.

Earthquake Resilience (Seismic Safety)

- Ensure "Stirrups" (the rings holding the main rods) are spaced closely near joints and have 135-degree hooks to prevent the column from bursting during a quake.
- Verify the depth matches the Soil Test Report.

Fire Safety Measures

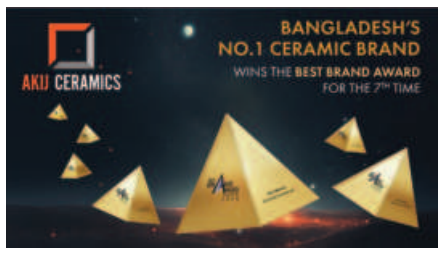
- Buildings over a certain height must have two exit points. Check if the stairwell width meets the code (min 1.1m to 1.5m depending on building type).
- Ensure high-quality FRLS (Flame

Retardant Low Smoke) cables are used to prevent toxic smoke during a fire.

- If building a high-rise (above 7 stories), fire-rated doors are mandatory for stairwells.
- Plumbing & Damp Proofing
- Ensure a DPC (Damp Proof Course) layer is applied at the plinth level to stop moisture from rising into the walls.
- Ensure sewage pipes have a minimum 1:80 slope to prevent clogs.

Documentation & Verification

- Ask the company for a steel tension test report from BUET or PCSIR for the specific batch of rods delivered.
- During casting the contractor should take samples to a lab to test "Crushing Strength" after 7 and 28 days.
- Ensure the construction matches the RAJUK (Dhaka), CDA (Chittagong), or Pourashava approved plan to avoid future demolition orders.



Taskforce for abolishing minimum taxes

B1



Maliki denounces Trump's 'blatant' interference

P5



Meaningful work brings mental satisfaction: Oishee

P8



Missing World Cup 'extremely disappointing'

P11

MANIFESTO EXPECTATIONS

With the national election just 14 days away, political parties are finalising their manifestos. The Daily Star spoke to women voters of different professions and backgrounds to identify the pressing issues that should top the agenda for parties.

Women demand action, not just promises

NILIMA JAHAN

As Bangladesh moves towards the February 12 national election, women, who make up half the electorate, say political rhetoric no longer moves them.

What they want from the next government, they say, is not another round of promises, but evidence that long-pledged commitments will finally be acted upon.

From domestic workers and students to professionals, entrepreneurs and activists, their demands converge around a few urgent priorities: safety without fear, justice without delay, secure livelihoods, accessible healthcare, and recognition as equal citizens.

These demands are not new. But rising violence, a shrinking civic space, job losses, economic insecurity, continued neglect of women's health, and the shelving of 423 recommendations by the Women's Affairs Reform Commission have widened the gap between promises and delivery, with women paying the price in their daily lives.

The Daily Star spoke to 20 women across professions and SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



Unscrupulous traders have been razing a red clay hillock in Tarafpur's Purbapara Rakher Chala area of Tangail's Mirzapur upazila over the last couple of days. Locals said the soil is being hauled away in dump trucks to brick kilns while the authorities turn a blind eye. The photo was taken recently. PHOTO: STAR

Rebels giving BNP run for its money

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

Rebel candidates from BNP ranks are mounting strong challenges to the party's nominated contenders in at least 72 constituencies, raising concerns over vote-splitting as the party heads into an election after more than 17 years out of power.

The scale of internal defiance has triggered questions about BNP's ability to enforce organisational discipline even as it confronts rival parties. According to party insiders, in more than three dozen constituencies, the principal contest is shaping up between BNP nominees and party rebels, rather than candidates from opposing parties.

Despite hectic negotiations, repeated warnings, and expulsions, the BNP leadership has failed to contain the rebellion. Instead, punitive action against rebel candidates and grassroots leaders accused of campaigning for them has deepened resentment at the local level, intensifying fears that divided votes could weaken the party's electoral prospects.

Abdul Monayem Munna, a member of BNP's Election Steering Committee, said disciplinary action was being taken strictly in line with party rules.

"Those who violate organisational discipline are being punished according to the rules. No action is taken out of anger or personal consideration," he said.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1



BNP-JAMAAT CLASH Brawl over front-row seats leaves Jamaat leader dead

Both sides claim 50 of theirs injured

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A Jamaat-e-Islami leader died last night after being injured in clashes between activists of BNP and Jamaat in Sherpur's Jhenaigati upazila yesterday afternoon.

The deceased was identified as Md Rezaul Karim, 42, secretary of Jamaat's Sreebardi upazila unit in Sherpur.

Rezaul was among around 50 Jamaat activists and supporters injured in clashes with BNP supporters, Jamaat leaders said.

The BNP nominee for the constituency, however, said Jamaat leaders and activists made a planned attack leaving around 50 BNP activists and leaders wounded.

Nuruzzaman Badal, Jamaat candidate for Sherpur-3 (Jhenaigati-Sreebardi), said Rezaul and two others, Aminul Islam and Tahirul Islam, were critically injured.

Rezaul died on the way to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital, he said, adding that the other two were later sent to Dhaka for treatment.

The clash erupted around 3:00pm over seating arrangements at a programme at the Jhenaigati Upazila Mini Stadium, leaving at least 65 people injured, locals and witnesses said.

They said the upazila administration organised the programme, where candidates for the Sherpur-3 constituency were invited to present their election manifestos to voters. Jhenaigati UNO Ashraf Alam Rasel was scheduled to preside over the event.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 5



Md Rezaul Karim

EU-INDIA TRADE DEAL Exporters here to face tougher days

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Bangladesh's garment exporters are set to face tougher competition and growing price pressure in Europe after the European Union and India reached a sweeping free trade deal that will grant Indian clothing manufacturers duty-free access to the bloc.

The agreement, announced on Tuesday, is expected to come into force in 2027, following vetting by the European Council, the European Parliament and India's parliament.

After it takes effect, the EU's tariff on Indian apparel products will drop to zero from the existing 12 percent, potentially eroding a long-standing advantage enjoyed by Dhaka.

Under the deal, the EU hopes to double its exports to India by 2032 through the elimination and reduction of tariffs on 96.6 percent of traded goods by value, generating estimated savings of €4 billion in duties for European companies. In return, the EU will cut tariffs on 99.5 percent of goods imported from India over a seven-year period.

Bangladesh currently ships garments duty-free to the EU, but that benefit will continue only for three additional years after its graduation from the least developed country (LDC) bracket, scheduled for November this year.

"The implications will be significant, particularly for apparel," said Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD). He warned that Bangladesh will become less competitive in the EU market once India secures duty-free access.

Riding on preferential access to the EU since 1975 SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

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



Unfamiliar ballots for voters in Dakop-Batiaghata

SHAKEEL ANWAR, from Dakop, Khulna

I reached Dakop Batiaghata in Khulna on Monday, travelling through flat land crisscrossed by embankments and rivers. Compared to other constituencies, this seat has the highest number of Hindu voters, combining two upazilas, though a little short of majority. This is a political fact that has shaped voting behaviour here for decades. Until now, the choice had rarely been complicated.

Most Hindu voters here cast their votes for Awami League, with one exception: in 1996, they elected an Awami League rebel, belonging to their faith.

However, AL's absence from the February 12 elections has left behind a quiet unease. As I moved through bazaars and villages, one question kept ringing in my mind: whom will Hindus SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

Tarique to hold 3 rallies in the North today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman will join six election rallies in six districts - Rajshahi, Naogaon, Bogura, Rangpur, Sirajganj, and Tangail - during his three-day tour starting today.

During the visit, he will offer prayers at the shrine of Shah Makhdom (R) in Rajshahi and at the grave of July uprising martyr Abu Sayed in Pirganj, Rangpur.

According to BNP, Tarique will leave Dhaka for Rajshahi by air around 12:30pm today.

After reaching Rajshahi, he will visit the shrine of Shah Makhdom (R) around 1:30pm and then take part in his first campaign rally at the Rajshahi Madrasa playground around 2:00pm.

At the gathering, BNP candidates for 13 Rajshahi constituencies and all 39 seats in the northern region will be formally introduced.

Party leaders said this will be Tarique's largest public gathering in Rajshahi in more than two decades. For the last time, he had attended a conference for SEE PAGE 5 COL 6



Election camps of BNP and Jamaat candidates have been set up near the capital's Gulshan-2 roundabout. With the national election just 14 days away, leaders and activists of both parties were seen busy campaigning yesterday. PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

'If anyone harms women, we will not remain silent'

Says Jamaat chief

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman yesterday reiterated allegations of obstruction, violent attacks, and harassment of women activists of the Jamaat-led 11-party electoral alliance, and vowed to resist such actions.

"If anyone dares to harm women, we will not sit idly by. We are sons of our mothers - we will roar. At any cost, we will protect their dignity," he said at a women's rally at the Manipur High School and College premises in the afternoon.

Shafiqur Rahman spent the entire day campaigning in his parliamentary constituency, Dhaka-15 (Kafur-Mirpur).

"Those who have laid hands on mothers and humiliated them, seek forgiveness and repent. Allah will forgive you. But let me make it clear: the honour of our mothers is far more valuable to us than our own lives," he said. SEE PAGE 2 COL 4





PHOTO: STAR, COLLECTED

With campaigning going on in full swing, candidates had another busy day yesterday. From left, flanked by party leaders and activists, BNP candidate for Khulna-2 Nazrul Islam Manju distributes leaflets in Dak Bungalow area; Jamaat-e-Islami candidate for Chattogram-11 Shafiqul Alam waves at voters at Madarbari in port city; and Islami Andolan Bangladesh candidate for Barishal-5 Syed Muhammad Faizul Karim campaigns in Sadar Road area.

July uprising betrayers do not deserve a chance: IAB chief

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

People who still want to run the country under the same old laws and systems, betraying the sacrifices of the July uprising victims, do not deserve the opportunity, said Syed Muhammad Faizul Karim, ameer of Islami Andolan Bangladesh.

Addressing a rally in Kurigram, he said that in July 2024, crores of people rose against the existing laws and the old system. Thousands of people – young and old, including children – were killed, maimed, or lost their eyesight.

Despite such immense sacrifice and bloodshed, those who seek to continue governing the country under the same old laws and system are betraying July even before the election, he said, adding that such people must not be given any opportunity.

Rezaul Karim, known as Charmonai Pir, said the country became independent in 1971 to establish equality, human dignity, and social justice. However, despite achieving independence through an ocean of blood, the rulers in the years that followed presided over killings, enforced disappearances, murders, and money laundering.

He said this happened because Islam was absent from the parliament of a country where 90 percent of the population is Muslim.



SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

Be neutral, act with restraint ahead of polls Gen Waker asks troops

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief of Army Staff General Waker Uz-Zaman yesterday directed troops deployed in aid of civil authorities to maintain strict neutrality, professionalism, and restraint as the country prepares for the 13th National Parliamentary Election and referendum.

The army chief visited Patuakhali and Khulna to review the overall law and order situation ahead of the polls and to inspect army personnel deployed under the "in aid to the civil power" arrangement.

The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) disclosed the update in a press release yesterday.

During the visit, he observed the activities of deployed troops on the ground,



SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

Indian diplomats' families were never in danger: Touhid

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The Indian diplomats or their families are not in danger in Bangladesh, said Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain yesterday.

"There has not been a single incident of that nature," he told reporters at the foreign ministry when asked about the withdrawal of the families of Indian diplomats in Bangladesh last week.

He said he is not sure if India wants to give any signal by designating Bangladesh as a 'non-family' diplomatic posting, lumping the country with a small group of high-risk postings such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and South Sudan.

"They may have apprehensions, or they may be thinking of something. Possibly they want to send a message -- but I cannot clearly identify any specific message here. I would say this much: if they want to take their families, there is nothing we can do about it. They are free to do so."

The Indian high commission had not expressed any security concerns before asking the diplomats to send their families back home and he was never told that they were in danger.

On the possibility of election-centric violence, Touhid said the overall security has not been disrupted so far.

"There were always some minor clashes, scuffles, pushing and



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No level playing field: Nahid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A level playing field is absent in the ongoing election campaign, said National Citizen Party Convener Nahid Islam, citing administrative inaction despite repeated attacks and obstruction targeting his party's candidates.

"When a candidate is attacked or harassed, or when their supporters and activists are obstructed, and the administration takes no action, we cannot call that a level playing field," he told reporters after campaigning in the capital's Badda and Gudharaghat Choytola mosque area.

After speaking to the media, the Dhaka-11 candidate carried out door-to-door canvassing among local residents. He sought votes for the "Shapla Koli" symbol and "Yes" in the referendum.



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Women demand action, not just promises

FROM PAGE 1

backgrounds, all of whom said the election has become a long-overdue test of accountability.

Taslima Akhter, labour rights activist and president of the Bangladesh Garment Sramik Samhati, said women's economic empowerment and safety must sit at the centre of any political agenda.

"First and foremost, we want all workers – women and men – to receive equal pay and dignified wages, as wage discrimination persists in many sectors.

"Women workers, particularly in the garment sector and other industries, are often unable to develop their skills or advance due to household responsibilities and childcare... We demand the establishment of factory- and community-based daycare centres, to ensure a safe and supportive working environment.

She said a labour ordinance was issued recently, but its effective implementation is crucial. "It will only become a complete law once a parliament is in place."

As the election nears, activists said women's participation must extend beyond casting ballots. Shima Akhter, a frontline July activist and a Dhaka University student, said free, fair and inclusive polls were essential if women were to participate meaningfully, not only as voters but as leaders.

Safety, another recurring demand, cuts across generations.

Thirteen-year-old Samanta Islam, an eighth grader at Monipur High School and College, said fear shapes her daily commute. "My aunt has to accompany me, worried about gangs, harassment or road accidents. I want a country where I can go to school confidently and free from fear."

Pointing to gaps in the education system, she said schools frequently shut down, syllabuses remain incomplete, and classes are often not taken seriously. "Education is called the backbone of the nation – but what will happen to our future if this situation continues?"

Media professional Prajukta Chowdhury said workplace safety remained a defining concern, stressing that women should be able to work late shifts and take part in public life without fear of harassment. "Crimes against women must be addressed regardless of political affiliation or social status."

Mahbuba Akter Suma, an assistant professor at Jagannath University, said women continue to be pushed

to the margins in male-dominated institutions. She recounted how a colleague was stalked during a short walk home, forcing her to stay away from work for days. "Such incidents take a toll on women's mental health and are worsened by the lack of common rooms, breastfeeding spaces or female halls in many universities."

Safety, many women said, also determines whether they can work at all.

For Shiuli Begum, a 40-year-old domestic worker in Dhaka's Kazipara, political slogans hold little meaning without material change. Working in five households, she said no government had ever prioritised the roughly 2.5 million domestic workers, 80 percent of whom are women like her.

"Everything is moving forward, but the lives of female domestic workers are always left behind. Still, we ask for one thing – to be treated as human beings and as workers.

"We are left unprotected. Rising living costs make it worse. Even subsidised food from TCB trucks does not reach us. Homeowners get the cards – most of us do not."

Umme S Sathi, a bank employee and mother of a toddler, said the absence of childcare facilities forces many women out of corporate careers, cutting short the professional lives of qualified workers.

For women with disabilities, exclusion is built into the system. Ashrafunnahar Mishiti, executive director of the Women with Disabilities Development Foundation, called for a dedicated employment quota, mandatory accessibility in transport and infrastructure, and political representation, alongside an end to discrimination in public and private employment.

Economic insecurity also shapes the demands of women entrepreneurs. Noorjahan Kabir, owner of Pure Promise by Adv Noor, said women need low-interest, hassle-free loans, free from humiliation and bureaucratic barriers. "Many women lack collateral and face resistance even within their own families."

But for many women, economic insecurity is compounded by the absence of justice.

Shahina Akter (not her real name), a rape survivor from Rangpur, called for an end to political protection for perpetrators and victim-blaming in society and courts, alongside faster trials, respectful treatment of survivors, and state-funded compensation to help victims rebuild their lives.

Meanwhile, Islamic education and moral development also feature among women's priorities. SM Sharmin, a senior Arabic teacher at Tanjimul Ummah Girls Hifz Madrasa in Uttara, called for most madrasas to be brought under government regulation, with syllabuses free from content that could cause moral decay, alongside proper libraries and supervision.

In sports, veteran karate athlete Shamima Akhtar Tulee pointed to harassment and corruption within sports federations, calling for equal pay for women athletes and greater investment in individual sports.

In rural areas, the concerns are no less stark. Ayesha Siddika, a government primary school teacher in Patuakhali, called for stricter enforcement against child marriage, affordable menstrual hygiene products, and practical, life-oriented education in schools.

Tania Ahmed, a homemaker from Noakhali, said safety must begin at home, warning that without proper enforcement of the domestic violence law, homes turn into places of fear.

Shipra Rani Sarker, from Cumilla's Laksam, whose husband abandoned her, said government support programmes for poor women often fail to reach those who need them most.

"These programmes must be properly monitored... Otherwise, no government will be of any use to us." Shireen Pervin Huq, head of the now-defunct Women's Affairs Reform Commission, said meaningful change would require confronting entrenched structural weaknesses.

"The primary proposal is the creation of an independent, constitutional National Women's Commission to hold all government ministries accountable, ensuring that women's rights are built into the rules of business across every ministry."

"The women and children affairs ministry should move away from direct implementation towards a catalytic oversight role," she said, suggesting that politically aligned bodies such as the Jatiya Mahila Sangstha be dissolved or merged with the Department of Women's Affairs to ensure professional stability.

Shireen also called for a nationwide government campaign, implemented through secondary schools, particularly boys' schools, to teach respect for women as human beings, citizens and equal members of society. "Addressing these priorities would allow further reforms to follow."

If anyone harms

FROM PAGE 1

He added, "There are two options. One, change yourselves for the better – respect others, respect mothers. Otherwise, be prepared to take full responsibility for the consequences."

Addressing the women at the rally, he said, "We will not bow our heads to any force but Allah. That is the country, that is the society we want to build."

On Tuesday, Jamaat Nayeb-e-Ameer Syed Abdullah Mohammad Taher alleged at a press conference that the party's women activists engaged in election campaigning were being attacked. He said Jamaat's women activists are highly active, prompting their main rivals to target them. He also announced a women's rally at Suhrawardy Udyan on January 31 at 10:00 am in protest against the alleged harassment.

Speaking at the Mirpur rally, Shafiqur Rahman said, "InshaAllah, a Bangladesh of justice will be established. Women, like men, will contribute equally in the workplace with dignity and security. We will ensure this at any cost. In major cities, there will be separate bus services for women. During peak hours, they will have separate vehicles."

He added, "We do not want patriarchy, nor patriarchy. We want a humane society balanced by both."

From the rally, he urged voters to support 'yes' in the referendum scheduled for the 12th, saying, "Our first vote will be 'yes'. Our second vote will be for justice and fairness."

Jamaat's women wing secretary, Nurunnisa Siddika, hinting at the BNP, said, "Return to the path of democracy. Join the effort to build a humane Bangladesh. We are rivals, but neither of us is the enemy of the other."

Shafiqur Rahman's wife, Amana Begum, said, "We want a society of peace, freedom, justice, and fairness. For that, we need capable and honest leadership."

Earlier in the morning, the Jamaat ameer began door-to-door campaigning in the North Kafur High School area, greeting voters and seeking support for the party's electoral symbol, the balance scale. "Mirpur is a symbol of struggle, courage, and protest. It was one of the strongholds of the July uprising. But today, it faces neglect, illegal occupation, traffic congestion, waterlogging, crime, and insecurity," he said, adding that the area also faces acute housing shortages and soaring rents.

He assured voters that these problems would be addressed if Jamaat is elected. Shafiqur also pledged to improve waste collection and management across Dhaka, including Mirpur.

He continued campaigning through street meetings and door-to-door visits after Maghrib prayers in the area behind Harman Mainer School in Mirpur-13, and after Esha prayers in the fruit market area of Mirpur-10.

Exporters here to face

FROM PAGE 1

under the bloc's LDC trade facility, Bangladesh has become the EU's second-largest garment exporter after China, even overtaking it in some categories such as denim, trousers and T-shirts. Industry leaders claim that in the EU, one in every three people wears Bangladeshi-made denim trousers.

In the 2024-25 fiscal year, EU countries accounted for more than 50 percent of Bangladesh's total garment exports, amounting to \$19.71 billion.

If Bangladesh fails to secure a successor arrangement, such as a bilateral free trade deal or GSP Plus status after LDC graduation, it will face nearly 12.5 percent duty on garment exports to the EU after 2029. In contrast, India and Vietnam will continue to enjoy zero-duty access through free trade agreements.

Following recent US tariff and trade policy shifts, the EU has emerged as the principal battleground for apparel exporters, intensifying competitive pressure.

"This sudden oversupply has shifted bargaining power towards EU buyers, enabling tougher negotiation terms with suppliers and shorter lead time expectations," BRAC EPL, a brokerage firm, said in a research note. "This dynamic has structural implications for Bangladesh's export margins."

Faisal Samad, director of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said although the EU-India deal would not impact Bangladesh's exports immediately, its effects will be felt gradually.

He said India's competitiveness rests on two major strengths – raw cotton and human resources – along with extensive financial and policy support from the Indian government.

Still, Bangladesh retains several advantages, Samad said, including domestic production capacity and strength in key products such as denim, trousers, T-shirts, sweaters, formal woven shirts, lingerie and undergarments, Samad said.

Exporters are working to diversify into higher-end, value-added products, while the government is negotiating with Brussels to sign a free trade deal, he added.

Analysts said Bangladesh must urgently strengthen its trade diplomacy to prevent a deterioration in EU market access.

"Bangladesh should take the preparation for obtaining the GSP Plus status to the EU and also take preparation for signing the bilateral free trade agreements to retain market access," said CPD's Mustafizur.

"The Indian apparel policy also indicates that the country is coming in a big way in the apparel sector and textile sector," he said, adding that India also has a natural advantage

due to its raw cotton base.

Fazlul Hoque, managing director of Plummy Fashions, a Narayanganj-based knitwear factory exporting mainly to Europe, said the shift could further weaken Bangladesh's price competitiveness. He warned that if Bangladesh is forced to pay duties while rivals continue enjoying duty-free access, buyers would have stronger incentives to demand lower prices and shift orders elsewhere.

WAKE-UP CALL
Industry leaders described the EU-India agreement as a "wake-up call" and urged the government to move quickly to preserve preferential access to Europe.

Showkat Aziz Russell, president of the Bangladesh Textile Mills Association, said Bangladesh's competitiveness must be reinforced through tax benefits and incentives for the local industry.

Mohammad Hatem, president of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, criticised what he described as long-running policy failure for not securing any durable EU trade advantage, such as an FTA or GSP Plus access, unlike key competitors.

He also said business leaders had urged the government to pursue a trade deal with Russia to secure zero-duty benefits, but it did not happen. He added that they had also demanded Bangladesh seek an LDC graduation deferment, but the government did not do so.

Mohammad Abdur Razzaque, a trade analyst and chairman of Research and Policy Integration for Development, said the RMG sector's vulnerability in Europe would intensify as the EU-India agreement is implemented.

Russia says two crew members from US-seized tanker released

AFP, Moscow

Moscow said yesterday two Russian crew members of a tanker seized earlier this month by the United States in the North Atlantic had been released and were on their way home.

US authorities took over the Russian-flagged tanker earlier this month, alleging it was part of a shadow fleet carrying oil from countries such as Venezuela, Russia and Iran in violation of US sanctions.

The United States said publicly that the Marinera's crew could be prosecuted. Russia said that would be "categorically unacceptable" and accused Washington of stoking tensions and threatening international shipping.

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Bangladesh, US agree to boost military cooperation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh and the United States have agreed to deepen army-to-army cooperation, with both sides emphasising training exchanges, joint drills, and the capacity to use advanced technology and military equipment.

The understanding came as the two countries concluded the 9th Bangladesh-US Land Forces Talks (LFT) 2026 in Dhaka, following a two-day meeting held on January 26-27 at the Army Sports Control Board conference room in Dhaka Cantonment, said a press release issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) yesterday.

Lt Col Mohammad Badrul Haque of the Military Training Directorate led a 22-member Bangladesh Army delegation, while the four-member US delegation was led by Maj Michael Jacob Oster of the US Army Pacific Command's (USARPAC)

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A yellow oriole and two bulbuls gather to drink date palm sap on a sunny afternoon, following the onslaught of winter chills. The photo was taken in Atrai upazila of Naogaon yesterday.

PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

FEBRUARY 12 POLLS US does not take sides: envoy

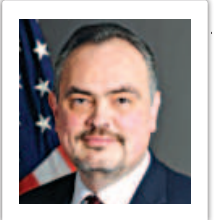
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The United States does not take sides in Bangladesh's elections, and the outcome is solely for the Bangladeshi people to decide, newly appointed US Ambassador Brent Christensen said yesterday.

"We are prepared to work with any government that the Bangladeshi people elect to represent them going forward," Christensen said while speaking to reporters following a discussion with Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin at the Election Commission.

A three-member US delegation met the CEC and EC Senior Secretary Akhtar Ahmed at its

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Take urgent action to curb unnecessary C-sections: speakers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a seminar on maternal healthcare yesterday called for urgent action to reduce unnecessary caesarean sections in Bangladesh, particularly in private hospitals.

They also urged greater community engagement and public awareness, saying reducing unnecessary C-sections requires the involvement of both healthcare providers and families.

The seminar, titled "National Dissemination Meeting on Reducing Unnecessary Caesarean Sections in Bangladesh," was held at the CIRDAP auditorium and organised by Ashulia Women and Children Hospital (AWCH).

Md Saidur Rahman, secretary to the Health Services Division of the Ministry of Health and

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More and more misinformation and disinformation are flooding social media ahead of the election. To create voter awareness, we are running selective fact-check reports published by fact-checking organisations.

FACT-CHECKED ✓

Fact-checkers debunk two viral claims

One falsely links Shahabuddin speech to Hasina return, another misidentifies man beside Patwary



STAR REPORT

A video circulating on Facebook has claimed that Sheikh Hasina, the ousted prime minister convicted of crimes against humanity, will return to Bangladesh before February. The video, shared by a page named Ajker Khobor on January 20, included a clip of President Mohammed Shahabuddin's remarks, presented in a way that suggested the development was recent.

However, fact-checking organisation Dismislab has verified the claim and found it to be false.

WHAT THE CLAIM SAID

The 15-minute video shows President Shahabuddin delivering a speech. In his address, he extends greetings to the people of Pabna and his contemporaries in politics. He also pays tribute to the four national leaders, Awami League activists, and freedom fighters.

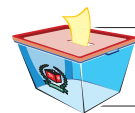
On the screen, the logo of Ajker Khobor appears on the right side, while the word "Live" and the date "20 January 2026" are displayed in the left corner. The caption of the Facebook video reads, "Ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina will return to the country before February."

WHAT THE FACT-CHECK FOUND

Upon verification through keyframe-based reverse image search, Dismislab traced the circulating clip back to a video report published on May 16, 2023, by the YouTube channel of news outlet Maasranga. A part of the video matches exactly with the visuals seen in the misleading Facebook video.

The video reports show that Shahabuddin assumed office as president of Bangladesh on April 24, 2023. On May 16, the same year,

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3



FEBRUARY 12 ELECTION | DHAKA-8

A race shaped by a murder and war of words

SHARIF M SHAFIQUE and SADI MUHAMMAD ALOK

As the national election approaches, the nation's attention has converged on Dhaka-8, a constituency at the heart of the capital's administrative and commercial life.

Here, political tension is high as a veteran heavyweight faces a challenger from a new generation.

Dhaka-8 -- comprising Shahbagh, Motijheel, Kakrail, Ramna, Shajahanpur, and parts of Moghbazar -- is the nerve centre of Bangladesh's governance, home to the Secretariat and Dhaka University.

The political climate, however, took a sombre turn after the tragic killing of Sharif Osman Hadi, spokesperson of Inqilab Moncho and a former Dhaka University student.

Hadi, a potential independent candidate for this seat, was shot by miscreants on December 12 at Box Culvert Road in Purana Paltan while campaigning.

The constituency reflects a diverse social

mix. Government officials, businesspeople, and professionals dominate the Secretariat and Motijheel areas, while upper-middle and middle-class residents live in Ramna, Shantinagar, and Paltan.

Additionally, a massive cohort of young voters stems from Dhaka University, Dhaka Medical College, and the Buet area.

As campaigns intensify, voters point to persistent problems such as extortion, mugging, narrow roads, illegal occupation of footpaths, and waterlogging.

"A large portion of voters here are students. Since they are educated, candidates should make realistic and practical promises," a Dhaka University student told The Daily Star.

Sakeer Hasan, a Motijheel resident, was sceptical. "Extortion and illegal occupation are the core problems. I doubt these will really be solved after the election," he said.

Meanwhile, auto-rickshaw driver Md Nizamuddin placed his hopes on new leadership. "Old political

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



Mirza Abbas

Nasiruddin Patwary

Meghna Alam



Daffodil International University (DIU) celebrates its 13th convocation at Daffodil Smart City yesterday. The ceremony was presided over by UGC Chairman Prof SMA Fayeze. Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman, a renowned economist, delivered the convocation speech. DIU Chairman Dr Md Sabur Khan and Vice-Chancellor Prof MR Kabir also spoke on the occasion.

PHOTO: COURTESY

Five student unions to campaign for 'yes' vote

DU CORRESPONDENT

A joint platform of five public university student unions under the banner of "Oikyobodho Chhatra Sangsad" has announced campaign programmes for a "yes" vote in the upcoming referendum, beginning with divisional-level rallies from today.

The announcement was made yesterday afternoon in front of the Ducsu building, where Ducsu General Secretary SM Farhad read out a written statement, followed by concluding remarks from Vice President Abu Shadik Kayem.

According to the announcement, the first programme will be a divisional rally in favour of a "yes" vote at Court Point of Bandar Bazar in Sylhet at 2:00pm today.

Reading the statement, Farhad said through these

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A race shaped

FROM PAGE 3
parties have failed us in 55 years of independence. It's time for change," he said.

The race features BNP Standing Committee member Mirza Abbas, a seasoned politician with deep-rooted influence who has twice been elected MP from this area.

His primary challenger is Nasiruddin Patwary, a leader of the National Citizen Party (NCP) and a leader linked to the July Uprising.

Backed by the II party alliance led by Jamaat-e-Islami, Patwary is campaigning on dismantling what he calls the "old political culture".

Other candidates include Meghna Alam (Gono Odhikar Parishad), Kifayatullah (IAB), Md Golam Sarwar (Janata Dal), AFM Ismail Chowdhury (Bangladesh Jasad), SM Sarwar (Bangladesh Islami Front), Tridip Kumar Saha (CPB), Zuber Alam Khan (Jatiya Party), Russel Kabir (Muktijote), and AHM Rafiquzzaman Akanda (BSD).

The constituency recently became a flashpoint after Patwary alleged he was attacked during campaigning.

He blamed Abbas's supporters, a claim the veteran leader dismissed as a "sympathy stunt".

Focusing on economic disparity, he added, "I don't believe in empty promises of jobs. I want to uproot the cause -- extortion and corruption. If the system is fixed, the youth will create their own employment."

He also criticised the Election Commission, alleging that loan defaulters and criminals

were cleared to contest. "Even EC officials appear helpless and panicked," he said.

Mirza Abbas, meanwhile, alleged that a level playing field is absent.

"My opponents are resorting to personal attacks and derogatory campaigning, which is a clear violation of the code of conduct," he said.

"I am a son of this soil. For 50 years, I have stood by the people here. If they believe I can deliver, I hope they give me their mandate," Abbas added.

His manifesto includes recovering occupied playgrounds and parks, modernising Mugga Hospital, and establishing new schools and graveyards.

He also alleged behind-the-scenes interference. "I believe a section of the government is trying to ensure the victory of a particular group. But I believe the people will deliver the right verdict on February 12," said Mirza Abbas.

Meghna Alam, the only woman in the race for Dhaka-8, called for an end to defamation.

While noting obstacles in some areas, she said she had not faced any attacks.

"I propose a policy-based debate on media, similar to developed nations, where candidates will discuss their manifestos," she told The Daily Star.

"I urge voters to ignore fear and trigger a ballot revolution to change the filthy political culture," she said.

Dhaka-8 has 2,75,471 voters -- 1,52,795 men, 1,22,675 women, and one hijra.

US does not take sides: envoy

FROM PAGE 3
Agargaon headquarters. After the meeting, the US diplomat said he had a "very good" discussion with the CEC about the upcoming February 12 polls.

"He [CEC] explained to me a great deal about all the policies, preparations, and procedures that the interim government has been undertaking in preparation for the February 12 elections."

Christensen said he had expressed optimism about the polls during his confirmation hearing before the US Senate. "I am very excited about the upcoming elections. I am very much looking forward to them and to seeing the outcome of those elections."

Referring to an earlier meeting with the chief adviser, the US envoy said he shared the hope that election day would be

peaceful and participatory. "I hope it is a festive election day, that the Bangladeshi people are able to go and express themselves, and that you have a very successful election."

Christensen added that he felt reassured by the information shared by the CEC and said he was looking forward to the results on February 12.

After the meeting, EC Secretary Akhtar said the US delegation inquired about the code of conduct and how complaints are being handled.

"We informed them that we have a complaint management cell. At the constituency level, there are electoral inquiry committees, adjudication committees, and magistrates who coordinate these matters," he said.

Asked whether the delegation raised any

observations about violations of the code of conduct, Akhtar replied, "No, they did not. They mainly wanted to know how we manage such issues."

He added that the EC receives information from electoral inquiry and identification committees, returning officers, and other sources, and takes necessary measures. "We try to resolve these matters promptly."

Regarding the election-time security, Akhtar said the US also sought details of the EC's arrangements. "We informed them that about 9,50,000 security personnel will be deployed at different levels."

"...They were particularly curious about postal ballots -- how they will be managed and counted, where they will be sent, how many types of postal ballots are there, and the timeframe for counting

alongside referendum ballots. We explained these matters to them," he said.

The EC secretary added that samples of postal ballots were shown to the US delegation. "They said it is a complex and difficult process, and they wished us good luck."

Akhtar also confirmed that the US would not send formal election observers. However, observers from their mission offices in Dhaka, Sylhet, Chattogram, and Khulna will monitor the voting.

Asked whether government officials can campaign for or against the referendum, and in reference to a Bangladesh Bank circular reportedly urging votes in favour of "yes", the EC secretary said, "The issue has been brought before the court. As it is sub judice, I believe no government official has the jurisdiction to speak on it."

Fact-checkers debunk two viral claims

FROM PAGE 3
the newly appointed president was accorded a reception by citizens of his home district, Pabna, at the Government Edward College ground, where he delivered the speech. At that time, Hasina was the prime minister of Bangladesh.

Dismislab found that in his speech, Shahabuddin did not say anything about bringing Hasina back to the country. The claim circulating online falsely attributes such a statement to him.

Therefore, the video claiming "Sheikh Hasina would return to Bangladesh before February this year" is old and pertains to a different incident. The speech did not mention Hasina returning to the country, added the

Dismislab report. Meanwhile, eggs were thrown at National Citizen Party (NCP) Chief Coordinator and the II-party alliance's Dhaka-8 candidate Nasiruddin Patwary on January 27 during a programme at Habibullah Bahar College in Dhaka. Following the incident, several posts circulated on social media claiming that a person standing beside Patwary at the time was a leader of the banned student organisation Bangladesh Chhatra League.

Rumor Scanner Bangladesh has verified the claim and found it to be false.

WHAT THE CLAIM SAID
Social media posts alleged that an individual seen standing next to Nasiruddin Patwary during

the egg-throwing incident was a leader of Chhatra League.

WHAT THE FACT-CHECK FOUND
According to Rumor Scanner, the individual in question is Zakir Mahmud, not a Chhatra League leader.

During the verification process, Rumor Scanner traced multiple social media posts to identify Zakir Mahmud's personal Facebook profile. A review of the profile found no evidence linking him to Chhatra League.

On the contrary, Rumor Scanner found that Zakir Mahmud actively participated in the July uprising. On March 20 last year, he shared a banner on his Facebook profile reading, "Ban Awami League or death (Awami

League nishiddhokoron, othoba mrittu)." In the caption, he wrote, "If blood is needed, take blood; bury Awami League."

Rumor Scanner noted that similar claims identifying Zakir Mahmud as a Chhatra League leader had also circulated on social media in July last year. At that time, the fact-checking organisation contacted Zakir Mahmud directly.

He told Rumor Scanner that he is an honours third-year student of Habibullah Bahar College and is not affiliated with Chhatra League.

He further said that he was injured by police gunfire during the July uprising and shared several photographs showing his injuries as supporting evidence.

Anis Alamgir shown arrested in graft case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



A Dhaka court yesterday showed journalist Anis Alamgir arrested in a case filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) over allegations that he acquired assets beyond his known sources of income.

Judge Md Sabbir Faiz of the Dhaka Metropolitan Senior Special Judge's Court passed the order following an application submitted by the ACC, defence lawyer Taslima Zahan Popy said.

The case was filed on January 15 by ACC Assistant Director Akhtaruzzaman under Section 27(1) of the Anti-Corruption Commission Act with the commission's Integrated District Office-1 in Dhaka.

According to the ACC inquiry, Anis's total wealth stands at Tk 4.25 crore, while his net assets shown in his latest income tax return amount to Tk 57.99 lakh. The commission alleged that he accumulated nearly Tk 3.68 crore beyond known sources of income and concealed the information in his wealth statement.

Anis is currently in jail in connection with a separate case filed under the Anti-Terrorism Act.

Five student unions

FROM PAGE 3
rallies, they will call upon people from all walks of life to take a position in favour of "yes" in the referendum in a peaceful, democratic, and inclusive manner.

The five student unions are the Dhaka University Central Students' Union (Ducus), Jahangirnagar University Central Students' Union (Jucus), Rajshahi University Central Students' Union (Rucus), Chittagong University Central Students' Union (Cucus), and Jagannath University Central Students' Union (JnUcsu).

Organisers said the rallies aim to clarify the importance of the

referendum to the public, end politics of confusion and fear, and build consolidated awareness in favour of state reforms.

Similar rallies will be organised gradually in all divisional cities.

Alongside elected student representatives, participants are expected to include members of the families of the July martyrs and injured fighters, imams of mosques, priests of temples, presidents of business associations and press clubs, heads of Shilpakala Academy and sports organisations, representatives of the working class, and professionals, including teachers and doctors.

Govt approves

FROM PAGE 3
principle and that the price would be known after final approval from the purchase committee.

The move comes amid continued criticism of Rab at home and abroad over allegations of human rights violations.

The interim government's Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances has recommended abolishing Rab and submitted its report to Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus. International rights groups, including Human Rights Watch, have also called for the force to be disbanded.

Against this backdrop, questions have been raised about the procurement as the interim government nears the end of its tenure.

Home Ministry Senior Secretary Nasimul Gani defended the decision and to avoid open tendering, saying, "We are keeping government money within the government."

He said Pragati Industries, Bangladesh's first vehicle-manufacturing company, is state-owned, which is why the ministry opted to procure the vehicles from the company.

According to the home ministry proposal, the vehicles will be procured under the project "Enhancement of Rab Forces' Operational Capability (1st Revised)," implemented by Rab under Bangladesh Police with government funding.

The vehicles are needed in FY2025-26 to address shortages and strengthen Rab's capacity to maintain law and order ahead of the upcoming election, said the proposal.

It noted that the Open Tendering Method would take time and sought approval under Section 68 of the Public Procurement Act (PPA) 2006, citing urgent necessity to proceed through direct procurement.

The document added that the Finance Division has consented to the procurement plan and that the Economic Affairs Committee recommended in principle approval.

The project was initiated in 2018 during the previous Awami League government and approved by Ecnc on November 7 that year. It is scheduled to run from December 1, 2018, to December 31, 2026.

Bangladesh

FROM PAGE 3
security cooperation division.

Brig Gen Md Humayun Kabir, director of the Military Training Directorate, was present at the opening and closing ceremonies, according to the ISPR release.

During the discussions, the two sides reviewed areas of military cooperation, professional development, and strategic engagement. They discussed holding multiple joint trainings and exercises, and explored innovative training methods aimed at strengthening military capability.

The delegations also reaffirmed their interest in further strengthening ongoing strategic cooperation between the two armies, the release said. They agreed on taking effective steps to contribute to regional security and on coordinated preparedness to respond to natural and man-made disasters. The talks also placed emphasis on technological support and readiness to address global challenges, ISPR added.

Take urgent action

FROM PAGE 3
Family Welfare, highlighted the need for stricter regulation of private hospitals performing C-sections without proper licences.

Md Abu Jafor, director general of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), called for collective measures to address the issue, saying the government cannot do it alone.

Khurshid Talukder, director (Research) at AWCH, said, "Currently, quality antenatal care in our country is only 22 percent. We must improve basic services, with a goal to increase hospital deliveries to 90 percent by 2030."

Prof Ferdousi Begum, head of the Obstetrics and Gynaecology Department at AWCH, said alongside clinical measures, non-clinical interventions and midwives play a crucial role in promoting natural deliveries.

Prof Anjuman Ara, an obstetrician and gynaecologist, said,

"The C-section rate in Bangladesh is alarmingly high, with nearly half of all deliveries being caesareans, particularly in private hospitals."

"To tackle this, we implemented 11 interventions at our hospital to reduce the C-section rate from 65 percent to 42 percent in two years. The interventions include counselling mothers on the benefits of natural delivery, waiting for labour pain to progress naturally, and using the Robson Classification to identify high-risk groups," she added.

Dr Dabir Uddin Ahmed, CEO of AWCH, delivered the welcome address.

PRAYER TIMING				
JANUARY 29				
Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN 5:35	12:45	4:15	5:46	7:15
JAMAAT 6:10	1:15	4:30	5:50	7:45

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

জুলাই গণঅভ্যুত্থান স্মৃতি জাদুঘর
সংস্কৃতি বিষয়ক মন্ত্রণালয়
শেরে বাংলা নগর, ঢাকা

নিয়োগ বিজ্ঞপ্তি

আপনি কি জুলাই স্পিরিট হ্রদয়ে ধারণ করেন?
আপনি কি মনে করেন জুলাই অভ্যুত্থান নতুন বাংলাদেশের সম্ভাবনা তৈরি করেছে?
আপনি কি ইতিহাস নিয়ে আর্কিহিট কিংবা জাদুঘরের সাথে কাজ করতে আগ্রহী?
তবে আমরা আপনাকেই খুঁজছি

০৪ ফেব্রুয়ারি ২০২৬ তারিখের মধ্যে আবেদন করুন

জুলাই গণঅভ্যুত্থান স্মৃতি জাদুঘরের রাজস্বখাতে সৃজিত, ব্যবস্থাপক (গ্রহণকার, মুদ্রণ ও প্রকাশনা) ১টি, উপ-পরিচালক (প্রশাসন ও অর্থ) ১টি, উপ-পরিচালক (প্রশিক্ষণ) ১টি, ডেপুটি কিউরেটর (নিদর্শন সজ্জা, রেজিস্ট্রেশন ও সংরক্ষণ) ১টি, ডেপুটি কিউরেটর (নিদর্শন প্রদর্শন ও প্রদর্শনী) ১টি, উপরতন গবেষণা কর্মকর্তা ১টি, রক্ষণাবেক্ষণ প্রকৌশলী ১টি, ডেপুটি মাল্টিমিডিয়া ব্যবস্থাপক ১টি, হিসাবরক্ষণ কর্মকর্তা ১টি, সহকারী পরিচালক (প্রশাসন) ১টি, সহকারী পরিচালক (প্রশিক্ষণ) ১টি, নিরাপত্তা অফিসার ১টি, সহকারী কিউরেটর (নিদর্শন সজ্জা) ১টি, সহকারী কিউরেটর (রেজিস্ট্রেশন ও সংরক্ষণ) ১টি, সহকারী কিউরেটর (নিদর্শন প্রদর্শন) ১টি, ডিসপ্রে অফিসার ১টি, গ্রাফিক্স ডিজাইনার ১টি, রেজিস্ট্রেশন অফিসার ১টি, গবেষণা কর্মকর্তা ১টি, সহকারী রক্ষণাবেক্ষণ প্রকৌশলী ১টি, ডিজিটালকার ১টি, সহকারী মাল্টিমিডিয়া ব্যবস্থাপক (প্রোগ্রামার) ১টি, সহকারী মাল্টিমিডিয়া ব্যবস্থাপক (সংরক্ষণ) ১টি, অডিওভিজুয়াল প্রোগ্রাম অফিসার ১টি, শিক্স অফিসার ১টি, জনসংযোগ কর্মকর্তা ১টি, অডিওভিজুয়াল ম্যানেজার ১টি, সাইট্রেরিয়ান ১টি, প্রকাশনা কর্মকর্তা ১টি, প্রশাসনিক কর্মকর্তা (প্রশাসন ও সংস্থাপন) ১টি, সহকারী নিরাপত্তা অফিসার ১টি, সহকারী রেজিস্ট্রেশন অফিসার ১টি, এসিস্ট্যান্ট ডিসপ্রে অফিসার ১টি, রেপ্লিকা ম্যানুফেকচারার ১টি, সহকারী গবেষণা কর্মকর্তা ১টি, ফিল্ম এসিস্ট্যান্ট সাইট্রেরিয়ান ১টি, ফিল্ম এডিটর ১টি, স্টিক ক্যামেরাম্যান ১টি, উপ-সহকারী প্রকৌশলী (পুরকৌশল) ১টি, উপ-সহকারী প্রকৌশলী (বেসুতিক) ১টি, সহকারী জনসংযোগ কর্মকর্তা ১টি, সোশ্যাল মিডিয়া সম্পাদক ১টি, উৎসর্গ প্রদর্শক ১টি, সহকারী হিসাবরক্ষণ কর্মকর্তা ১টি, হিসাবরক্ষক ১টি, নিরাপত্তা পরিদর্শক ২টি, সিসিটিভি পরিদর্শক ২টি, সিসিটিভি ব্যবস্থাপক ১টি, রেজিস্ট্রেশন সহকারী ১টি, সহকারী সজ্জাহক ১টি, গবেষণা সহকারী ১টি, সাউন্ড রেকর্ডিং ১টি, জনসংযোগ সহকারী ১টি, সহকারী সাইট্রেরিয়ান কাম-ক্যাটালগার ১টি, মডেলার ১টি, অফিস সহকারী কাম-কম্পিউটার মুদ্রাক্ষরিক ৮টি, ক্যাশিয়ার ১টি, স্টোর সহকারী ২টি, রেকর্ড কীপার ১টি, বিক্রয় সহকারী ১টি, আইসিটি সহকারী ১টি, অফিস সহায়ক ২৫টিসহ মেট ৯৬টি শূন্য পদে জনবল নিয়োগের নিমিত্ত বাংলাদেশের স্থায়ী নাগরিকদের নিকট হতে দরখাস্ত আবেদন করা যাচ্ছে। বিশেষায়িত জাদুঘর বিদায় বিশেষ যোগ্যতা সম্পন্ন ব্যক্তিদের ক্ষেত্রে নিয়োগের যে কোন শর্ত শিথিলযোগ্য। আবেদনপত্র গ্রহণের শেষ তারিখ: ০৪ ফেব্রুয়ারি ২০২৬ (বিকাল ০৫.০০টা পর্যন্ত)। আগ্রহী উপযুক্ত প্রার্থীগণকে <https://july36.gov.bd/notice> এ সরাসরি প্রবেশ করে আবেদন করার জন্য অনুরোধ করা হলো।

জনজিম ওয়াহাব
মহাপরিচালক (অতিরিক্ত দায়িত্ব)
জুলাই গণঅভ্যুত্থান স্মৃতি জাদুঘর
শেরে বাংলা নগর, ঢাকা

জিডি-২১৭

নিয়োগ শাখা

নম্বর: ৩০.৩৪.০০০০.০৭৩.৩৫.০০০.২৬.৬১ তারিখ: ২৮/০১/২০২৬ খ্রি.

প্রাথমিক বাছাই ও লিখিত পরীক্ষার সংশোধিত বিজ্ঞপ্তি

অনিবার্য কারণবশতঃ বিমান বাংলাদেশ এয়ারলাইন্স লিমিটেড এর ম্যাটেরিয়াল ম্যানেজমেন্ট অ্যাসিস্ট্যান্ট পদের পূর্ব নির্ধারিত প্রাথমিক বাছাই ও লিখিত পরীক্ষা আগামী ৩১-০১-২০২৬ খ্রি. শনিবার সকাল ১০.০০ টার পরিবর্তে দুপুর ০২.৩০ টায় তেজগাঁও কলেজ, ১৬ ইন্দিরা রোড, ফার্মগেট, ঢাকা-১২১৫ কেন্দ্রে অনুষ্ঠিত হবে। উল্লেখ্য, ইতিপূর্বে ইস্যুকৃত প্রবেশপত্রই এক্ষেত্রে বলবৎ থাকবে।

পদের নাম	কেন্দ্রের নাম	পরীক্ষার তারিখ ও সংশোধিত সময়
ম্যাটেরিয়াল ম্যানেজমেন্ট অ্যাসিস্ট্যান্ট	তেজগাঁও কলেজ, ১৬ ইন্দিরা রোড, ফার্মগেট, ঢাকা।	তারিখ: ৩১-০১-২০২৬ খ্রি. সংশোধিত সময়: দুপুর ০২.৩০ টা

বিজ্ঞারিত তথ্যের জন্য বিমান ওয়েবসাইট www.biman.gov.bd এবং www.biman-airlines.com ভিজিট করার জন্য অনুরোধ করা হলো।

যথাযথ কর্তৃপক্ষের নির্দেশক্রমে-
মোঃ শফিকুল ইসলাম
ব্যবস্থাপক প্রশাসন

বিমান
বাংলাদেশ এয়ারলাইন্স
আকাশে শান্তির বীড়

GD-215

BANGLADESH HOUSE BUILDING FINANCE CORPORATION
Common Service Department
Head Office, 22 Purana Palta, Dhaka-1000
Website: www.bhbfc.gov.bd

Reference : HB/HO/CS/Store/Stationery-1009/6123

e-Tender Notice

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

e-Tender ID No.	Package No.	Name of the Work	Last Date and Time for Tender/Proposal Security Submission	Tender/Proposal Closing & Opening Date and Time
1219892	HB/HO/CS/Store/Stationery-1009	Supply of stationery & crockeries goods for Bangladesh House Building Finance Corporation (BHBFC).	08 February 2026 Time: 13:00	08 February 2026 Time: 14:00

This is 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 (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>), is required. The fees for downloading the e-Tender Documents from the National e-GP System portal have to be deposited online through any e-GP registered Bank's Branches. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

Sd/-
(C M Roome)
Deputy General Manager
Common Service Department
E-mail: dgm.cs@bhbfc.gov.bd
Tel : +88-02-223381754

GD-212

INTERNATIONAL



Demonstrators take part in a vigil and protest in New York City on Tuesday over the fatal shooting of a man identified as Alex Pretti by federal immigration agents in Minneapolis, Minnesota, US. Inset, federal agents detain a man during an immigration enforcement action in Saint Paul, Minnesota. PHOTO: REUTERS, AFP

Minneapolis mayor 'playing with fire'

Trump blasts Jacob Frey's vow not to enforce federal immigration laws

AGENCIES

US President Donald Trump yesterday slammed comments by Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey who said the northern city "does not and will not" enforce federal immigration laws.

In a post on his Truth Social platform, Trump said he was surprised by Frey's statement since the two had "a very good conversation" following the fatal shooting of two Minneapolis residents by federal agents amid massive immigration raids there.

"Could somebody in his inner sanctum please explain that this statement is a very serious violation of the Law, and that he is PLAYING WITH FIRE!" Trump wrote.

On Tuesday, Trump suggested he would "de-escalate a little bit" in the city, as a senior White House aide said US immigration agents may have breached "protocol" in Minneapolis before shooting dead a nurse during protests.

The comments came the same day a man sprayed Minnesota Congresswoman Ilhan Omar with a syringe of unknown liquid at a Minneapolis town hall meeting, where she called for curbing the Trump administration's immigration crackdown.

White House Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller told AFP the administration is evaluating



A man is tackled after spraying an unknown substance at US Representative Ilhan Omar during a town hall in Minneapolis on Tuesday. PHOTO: AFP

whether the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents who gunned down 37-year-old Alex Pretti on Saturday failed to follow "clear guidance" to "create a physical barrier between the arrest teams and the disruptors."

Two federal officers fired their weapons during the shooting of Pretti in Minneapolis, according to a Department of Homeland Security report to Congress published Tuesday by US media.

Trump told Fox News on Tuesday that Gregory Bovino, a hardline Border Patrol commander who

is now expected to leave the city, was "a pretty out-there kind of a guy" whose presence may not have helped the situation. He sent top US border security official Tom Homan to meet with officials there.

The turmoil could result in a fresh US government shutdown, with Democrats calling for broad reforms to federal immigration operations at DHS and threatening to block approval of its funding, as part of the spending bills that go up for votes in the Senate later this week.

Europe told to boost defence amid Trump rift

AFP, Brussels

Europe must step up efforts on defence and play a bigger role in Nato as US President Donald Trump has "shaken the transatlantic relationship to its foundation", EU top diplomat Kaja Kallas said yesterday.

Trump rocked European allies this month by threatening to seize Greenland from Nato and EU member Denmark -- before eventually backing off.

The crisis -- the latest to buffet ties since his return to power a year ago -- has reinforced calls for the continent to cut its decades-long reliance on Nato's dominant military superpower for protection.

"Let me be clear: we want strong transatlantic ties. The US will remain Europe's partner and ally. But Europe needs to adapt to the new realities. Europe is no longer Washington's primary centre of gravity," Kallas told a defence conference in Brussels.

"This shift has been ongoing for a while. It is structural, not temporary... Europe must step up -- no great power in history has outsourced its survival and survived." Kallas remained clear-eyed that Nato remains the bedrock of European security.

Guarantee

FROM PAGE 12

international law. The coming weeks will be a decisive test of whether it will honour those responsibilities," she said.

The authorities must uphold the rights of individuals and groups to speak freely -- including during an election. Chief Advisor Yunus's government must show genuine leadership by ensuring that all Bangladeshis can participate fully and safely in deciding their country's future.

"They must ensure that the right to life is protected. No one should fear for their life for peacefully speaking their minds and sharing their views," she said in the letter.

Despite Bangladesh being a signatory to many of the core international human rights instruments, the interim administration has failed to give effect to these obligations. This includes the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which enshrines the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and freedom of association that must be upheld, including during an election period.

"Unlawful restrictions on these fundamental freedoms undermine public debate and participation in the electoral process, and weaken public trust in institutions." The letter said since assuming power in 2024, the interim authorities have misused the draconian Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) against journalists and other perceived critics. The letter cites the examples of Monjurul Alam Panna, who was arrested under the ATA in August 2025 for allegedly "attempting to overthrow the interim government," and Anis Alamgir, who was detained under the ATA in December 2025, for allegedly "spreading propaganda for the Awami League."

Both journalists' arbitrary arrests violate their rights to freedom of expression and association, it added. The letter also cites the interim authorities' inadequate response to the violence that followed the killing of Sharif Osman Hadi on 18 December 2025, when the offices of media outlets The Daily Star and Prothom Alo were set alight, and the editor of the New Age newspaper, Nurul Kabir, was harassed. On the same day, Dipu Chandra Das, a Hindu man, was lynched following allegations of blasphemy, it added.

The letter also cites the interim authorities' inadequate response to the violence that followed the killing of Sharif Osman Hadi on 18 December 2025, when the offices of media outlets The Daily Star and Prothom Alo were set alight, and the editor of the New Age newspaper, Nurul Kabir, was harassed. On the same day, Dipu Chandra Das, a Hindu man, was lynched following allegations of blasphemy, it added.

Tarique to hold 3 rallies in the north today

FROM PAGE 1

divisional activists at the city stadium in 2004.

After campaigning in Rajshahi today, he will address another rally at ATM ground in the Kazir Mor area of Naogaon around 5:30pm. He is scheduled to attend another gathering around 7:30pm at the Alfresco playground in Bogura, where he will stay at Hotel Naz Garden overnight.

On Friday, the BNP chief will visit the grave of Abu Sayed in Pirganj around 3:45pm. He will then address a campaign rally at the Rangpur Eidgah ground around 4:30pm, after which he will return to Bogura.

Tarique is contesting from Bogura-6 and Dhaka-17. BNP candidates won all polls in Bogura 6, Tarique's ancestral home, up to 2008. Between 1996 and 2008, Khaleda Zia was elected from the seat four times.

On the last day of the three-day tour on Saturday, Tarique will join a rally for electioneering around 2:00pm at the BSCIC Industrial Park in Sirajganj, followed by another rally at 4:00pm in the Darun Charjona bypass area on the Dhaka-Tangail highway. He is expected to return to his Gulshan residence at night.

Party leaders said organisational preparations for the tour have been completed. Grassroots leaders and activists have been

mobilised across the districts to ensure large turnouts and smooth programmes, reflecting growing local-level enthusiasm ahead of the polls.

They said the tour is aimed at taking BNP's election message directly to grassroots voters in the key northern districts.

The leaders added that the party will highlight its policy proposals, such as the Family Card, Farmer Card, and plans for education, healthcare, and other sectors, during the rallies to contrast its agenda with that of its rivals.

According to BNP sources, local units have been working for weeks to prepare venues, coordinate logistics, and mobilise supporters from surrounding upazilas and unions.

Meetings with ward- and union-level leaders have been held regularly to assign responsibilities, manage crowd control, and ensure discipline during the rallies.

Grassroots leaders said the party chairman's visit has energised activists, who had been largely inactive for years due to political pressure.

In several districts, BNP leaders said supporters from neighbouring constituencies are also expected to join the rallies, turning the programmes into regional rather than constituency-based events.

No level playing field

FROM PAGE 2

The election environment has been disrupted since Tuesday, Nahid said, adding that female activists of the I party alliance are being harassed and attacked across the country.

Two NCP candidates contesting in Dhaka-18 and Dhaka-8 were attacked and harassed, he said.

Attempts are underway to establish dominance through muscle power and to create an atmosphere of terror around the election.

"They have little confidence in the people. A massive wave of public support has risen in favour of the I-party alliance. That is why they are trying to obstruct the election through terror

and force." Despite filing complaints with the Election Commission and law enforcement agencies, they have received no remedy.

"We have repeatedly warned that if this situation continues, the election will become one-sided, and the people's true verdict will not be reflected."

If such incidents are not stopped now, there would no longer be a suitable environment for the election.

Promising to address local problems, Nahid told voters: "We want real change in Bangladesh. There will be reforms. We will be able to establish a state free from corruption and discrimination."

July uprising

FROM PAGE 2

"We had made compromises to run the country according to Islamic principles. But when those we compromised with announced they would continue to govern under the existing laws, we were forced to withdraw from that compromise. However, the united policy we adopted in favour of Islam remains intact," he said.

Expressing regret, the ameer questioned why Abu Sayed and Mugdho had to lose their lives in the uprising,

and why so many young people were sacrificed, if the country was to continue under the old laws.

"Therefore, those who love the country and want to make the blood of July meaningful should vote for the Hand Fan symbol in the upcoming election," he said, urging voters to support Islami Andolon Bangladesh's Kurigram-2 candidate, Principal Nur Bakhtur.

Among others, presidium member Professor Mahbubur Rahman also spoke at the rally.

Be neutral

FROM PAGE 2

issued necessary operational directives, and exchanged views with the civil administration, ISPR said.

As part of the tour, General Waker held a meeting at the Patuakhali deputy commissioner's conference room with senior military officials, divisional and district administrators, and representatives of various law enforcement agencies.

A similar coordination meeting was later held at the Khulna divisional

commissioner's office.

Discussions at the meetings focused on inter-agency coordination and overall security management to ensure that the upcoming national election is held in a peaceful, fair, and credible manner, the release said.

Senior army commanders, divisional commissioners, senior officials of the civil administration and law enforcement agencies, and members of the media were present during the visit.

Govt issues draft ordinances for broadcast, media commissions

FROM PAGE 12

ministry secretary, two persons with at least 15 years' experience in broadcasting activities, and an additional secretary as its member secretary.

The draft says the chairman and members would be ineligible if they hold profit-making posts, are involved in media-related businesses, hold dual passports, or have been convicted in criminal offences.

According to the draft, the commission would oversee the formulation and compliance of broadcasting policies.

It would recommend issuance of licences upon applications and coordinate with the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission on technical issues.

The commission would be empowered to inspect broadcasting offices and collect documents or digital evidence. In case of violations, it could impose fines, order corrective broadcasts, cancel licences and take other necessary measures. However, the draft ordinance also proposes a provision for appeals against

these decisions with the information ministry. In such cases, the ministry's decision will be considered final.

Owners of existing broadcasting media, defaulters declared by Bangladesh Bank or a court, dual citizens, those who have not completed five years after serving a two-year prison sentence, and those who have not completed three years since a licence was revoked will not be eligible to apply for a new broadcasting licence.

The draft proposes that those involved in broadcasting activities in violation of the law may face imprisonment of up to three years, or a fine ranging from at least Tk 10 lakh to a maximum of Tk 50 lakh, or both.

If any broadcaster airs confidential military or civilian information that may threaten state security or disrupt public order, each person involved may be punished with imprisonment of up to two years, or a fine ranging from Tk 1 lakh to Tk 10 lakh, or both.

The draft proposes that any involved in

advertisements for unauthorised financial institutions, betting or gambling, tobacco or tobacco products, alcohol or narcotics, or any advertisement that is deceptive to the general public may be punished with imprisonment of up to two years, or a fine ranging from Tk 5 lakh to Tk 30 lakh, or both.

If parliament, the offices of the president and the prime minister, court proceedings, cantonment areas, or key point installations (KPIs) or institutions are shown in advertisements, those responsible

may be punished with imprisonment of up to six months or a fine of up to Tk 2 lakh.

The draft proposes that offences be tried by a Broadcast Tribunal, with complaints filed only by commission-authorised persons, and that all offences be bailable.

Contacted, Rezwanaul Huq, chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Broadcast Journalists Centre (BJC), told The Daily Star that the broadcast sector involves multiple

stakeholders, including the ICT ministry, BTRC, cable operators, internet service providers, and issues such as the salary structure of broadcast journalists, but the draft ordinance does not address all these concerns.

"We don't want an incomplete broadcast ordinance passed in a hurry during the government's final days. We want a comprehensive law that includes all parties after the next government takes office," he added.

Media Commission The draft National Media Commission Ordinance, revised yesterday, proposes a commission of a chairman and eight members, including at least one woman and one member from a small ethnic or indigenous community. One member would serve as member secretary. The chairman and members would be appointed for up to four years.

Disqualifications include non-citizenship or dual citizenship; convictions for financial corruption or moral turpitude unless two years have passed since the

sentence ended; bankruptcy or unsoundness of mind; other profit-making posts (for members); and conflicts of interest, including recent paid work in media or advertising.

A five-member selection committee would recommend candidates for appointment by the president. It would be led by an Appellate Division judge nominated by the chief justice and include the cabinet secretary, a public university professor of mass communication and journalism or law, and two top journalists with at least 20 years' experience.

The two journalists must not be active members of any political party, hold ownership stakes in any media organisation, or have served as a media chief executive immediately before joining the committee.

The draft says the commission would uphold freedom of expression and press freedom by protecting media and journalism, setting standards for self-regulation and ensuring compliance.

It would frame codes of conduct and best practices

in line with international norms, resolve consumer complaints against approved electronic and online media, and issue mandatory directives.

It would also frame regulations on journalists' minimum qualifications and protection, including the right to access information under existing laws; investigate matters of public interest and publish reports; work without unwarranted or undue control, subject to objectivity; protect sources and data; refuse work outside professional standards; and safeguards against unlawful intrusion into communications and privacy.

The draft says all media outlets would be required to follow the commission's regulations. It also says the commission would recommend measures to the government and law enforcers to prevent threats, harassment, sexual harassment, and violence against journalists, and coordinate compensation for journalists who suffer violence, unlawful detention, enforced disappearance or abduction while on duty.

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR: LATE S. M. ALI

Campaign clashes are a worrying sign

Political parties, EC, and police all must act to stop further violence

The number of clashes and injuries reported across at least five districts in just a few days is indicative of a dangerous normalisation of political violence during elections. We have seen this trend in the past, and we are seeing it again even after a mass uprising dismantled the old, authoritarian order. According to our report, at least 24 people have been injured, while another newspaper has put the figure at 40. So far, it seems that the clashes are largely between BNP and Jamaat, the two major parties of the present moment, which makes the situation all the more disconcerting. Why must election campaigning become so acrimonious that it descends into physical scuffles and violence?

The parties in question were part of a coalition in the past, and then were united in their participation in the 2024 uprising to pave the way for a democratic future. They also sat together to amicably discuss the July National Charter during long sessions held by the National Consensus Commission. Yet today, as they compete with one another, their activists and supporters are resorting to violence over the most trifling matters. Social media, meanwhile, has become more of a weapon to defame opponents rather than a platform to win votes through inspiring messages.

The details of the clashes reported are particularly revealing. In Shariatpur, five people were injured after a Jamaat activist published a Facebook post accusing a BNP female leader of campaigning for a "No" vote in the referendum. This prompted some BNP men to go to the local Jamaat office where an altercation broke out between the two groups, eventually leading to a physical fight. In Netrokona, seven people were injured in clashes between supporters of a BNP candidate and a rebel candidate formerly of BNP. Elsewhere, clashes have occurred over allegations of obstructing rival campaigns, erecting banners, harassing women supporters, activists going door to door, and collecting NID cards and bkash numbers. Scuffles involving alliance partners have also been reported.

We are worried that such clashes may escalate as election day nears, so there is an urgent need to de-escalate tensions. The onus for that lies primarily with political parties and their leaders. They must send a clear, unequivocal message to their candidates and supporters that violence against rivals will not be tolerated, and that serious consequences will follow any breach of this directive. The police and the Election Commission must also be far more proactive in preventing violence and in identifying and punishing those involved in clashes.

As it is amply clear by now, online misinformation and disinformation, including AI-generated content, are now capable of igniting real-world violence, so the EC must remain vigilant against the circulation of AI-generated and other incendiary content, while political parties must rein in not only street-level activists but also digital instigators. Finally, we want to remind political parties, especially BNP and Jamaat, that the broader objective for the nation is a fair and credible election in which citizens can once again exercise their fundamental democratic right freely. So, their commitment to restraint and fairness is a must.

Why is Rab getting new vehicles?

Govt must reconsider its decision, focus on reform proposals instead

We are concerned by the interim government's decision to approve the purchase of 163 vehicles for the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab)—that, too, at the end of its tenure. According to a *Prothom Alo* report, the vehicles are to be procured through direct purchase without any tender under a revised project aimed at enhancing Rab's "operational capacity." While the government has said the vehicles cannot be purchased before the national election due to procedural requirements, the approval itself raises questions. At a time when Rab's very existence is under national and international scrutiny, this decision sends a wrong signal.

For years, Rab has been accused of extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture, and other grave human rights violations. These allegations are not confined to domestic rights groups; they have been echoed by international organisations and UN bodies. Consequently, in 2021, the US imposed sanctions on Rab and several of its former and then-serving officials. The role of this force was questionable during the July uprising, too. The Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances, formed by the interim government itself, recommended disbanding Rab after identifying it as the worst offender in cases of enforced disappearances. The Police Reform Commission also proposed reviewing Rab's past activities and allegations of abuse to assess whether the force is needed at all. Citing this widespread criticism, the TIB chief has pointed out that Rab's dissolution has become a national demand.

Against this backdrop, the decision to strengthen Rab's logistical capacity is not only misguided, it also ignores prevailing reform proposals as well as well-documented facts and findings. We must ask why the government has made such a decision, and what purpose it serves. Proceeding with direct procurement worth hundreds of crores of taka at a time of economic stress and political uncertainty is equally questionable.

If the interim government is serious about reform, justice, and restoring public confidence in law enforcement, it must reconsider this purchase and act upon the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances and the Police Reform Commission. Instead of enhancing Rab's capacity, the government should focus on disbanding the force or fundamentally rebuilding it through a transparent process that addresses its structural flaws, lack of accountability, and history of political misuse.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

King George III dies

On this day in 1820, ten years after mental illness forced him to retire from public life, King George III, the British king who lost the American colonies, died at the age of 81.

BANGLADESH'S T20 SNUB

ICC failed a key test of sporting governance



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International sport depends on a simple bargain: athletes accept risks, including physical and monetary, but governing bodies accept responsibility. When that bargain fractures, the question of credibility follows. The International Cricket Council's (ICC) handling of Bangladesh's request to relocate the country's matches for the Men's T20 World Cup from India to tournament co-host Sri Lanka due to security concerns—and its subsequent decision to replace Bangladesh with Scotland—represents one of the most consequential governance tests that cricket has faced in recent years. The controversy is not about diplomacy or rivalry, but about whether global sports regulators still operate within the constraints of fairness, consistency, and reasoned discretion that modern sports law demands.

Bangladesh's request was framed as a security precaution, supported by government advice and recent precedents within cricket itself. Changing venues is not exceptional in the sport's history; it is a recognised move for managing geopolitical and security risks. Pakistan's frequent venue adjustments, Sri Lanka's war-era relocations, and multiple ICC events staged outside the territory of host nations all testify to that reality. What makes this episode an issue is not that the ICC disagreed with Bangladesh's assessment—regulators are entitled to disagree—but that it escalated disagreement to exclusion without publicly demonstrating why less disruptive alternatives were unworkable.

The ICC has argued that it conducted internal security assessments and found no credible threat warranting relocation. That may be so, but in regulatory governance, assertion is not explanation. Modern sports governance, shaped increasingly by the jurisprudence of the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), requires decision-makers to show not merely that they considered an issue, but how they weighed competing interests. Transparency in this regard is not a courtesy; it is a legal safeguard.

CAS panels have consistently held that international federations exercise a form of quasi-public power. With that power comes obligation. In *FC Sion v FIEA*, CAS stressed that governing bodies must provide reasoned and transparent decisions,

particularly where the consequences for participants are severe. Exclusion from a global tournament is among the most severe sanctions available in sport. The ICC rejected relocation of matches without making the independent security assessment public, without demonstrating proportionality, and without showing that graduated remedies had been exhausted. The message, intentional or not, was that compliance mattered more than safety concerns raised in good faith.

Replacing a qualified team is much more than administrative housekeeping; it is the regulatory equivalent of a

Then there is the matter of consistency. When rules are applied unevenly, trust erodes, especially among smaller or less powerful member states.

In *Guillermo Cañas v ATP Tour*, CAS recognised that inconsistent application of regulations undermines regulatory legitimacy and may give rise to legitimate expectations. Bangladesh could reasonably argue that the ICC's long reliance on neutral venues created an expectation that similar accommodation would be available when comparable concerns arose. This is not an argument for automatic approval, but for consideration with equal seriousness. When India refused to play in Pakistan, citing security concerns and political tensions, it was treated as a systemic challenge to be managed. Bangladesh's concern about playing in India was treated as an obstacle to be removed.

This distinction matters. Replacing a qualified team with a non-qualified one—without disciplinary proceedings,

The ICC's decision has also alarmed player representatives. The World Cricketers' Association (WCA) has warned that punishing teams for raising safety concerns creates a chilling effect: players and boards learn that silence is safer than candour. Neutral venues, security bubbles, and independent assessments were not gifts from governance; they were concessions wrested by past experiences. When a governing body signals that safety concerns will be met with replacement rather than mitigation, it disincentivises transparency.

This controversy should not be misread as a geopolitical quarrel between boards or states. It is a policy failure rooted in centralisation of power without corresponding accountability. The ICC has spent the past decade consolidating authority over scheduling, revenue distribution, and tournament design. Centralisation can bring efficiency, but only if matched by transparency and restraint. Otherwise, it becomes coercive.



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

nuclear option. CAS jurisprudence is unambiguous on this point. In *Matuzalem Francelino da Silva v FIEA*, the panel rejected excessive regulatory discretion and held that sanctions must be proportionate and must not violate fundamental rights, including the right to pursue one's profession. Although the case concerned football, its principles apply across sports. The proportionality test requires regulators to ask three questions: i) whether the measure is suitable to achieve a legitimate aim; ii) if it is necessary, or if less restrictive alternatives are available; and iii) whether it imposes an excessive burden relative to its objective. Applied here, the ICC's decision struggles at the second hurdle.

without formal sanctions, and without an appealable decision grounded in published reasoning—stretches the ICC's regulatory discretion to its limits. It also exposes the organisation to legal risk, even though Bangladesh has signalled that it will take no further action beyond what's already done. Under ICC regulations, disputes ultimately fall within CAS jurisdiction. CAS rarely intervenes in sporting merits, but it intervenes readily where procedure, proportionality, or consistency fail. Remedies could include annulment of decisions, declaratory relief, or compensation—outcomes that would damage the ICC far more than a negotiated venue compromise ever could.

The ICC, therefore, needs a course correction. First, the ICC should publish a clear framework for handling security-based relocation requests, including independent assessments and graduated remedies. Second, it should reaffirm that neutral venues remain a legitimate governance tool, not a concession of last resort. Third, it should ensure that exclusion is treated as a sanction requiring heightened procedural safeguards, not an administrative shortcut. Cricket is a global game only so long as its governance treats all participants as equally entitled to safety, voice, and reasoned judgement. The Bangladesh episode suggests that assumption can no longer be taken for granted.

Trump's Board of Peace is no UN, but an aberration



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The proposal for a "Board of Peace" (BoP), spearheaded by US President Donald Trump with an initial focus on Gaza but with declared global ambitions, raises profound questions about the future of international diplomacy and multilateralism. At its core, the initiative appears less as a spontaneous peace endeavour and more as the latest, and perhaps most explicit, gambit in a long-running US struggle with the existing United Nations (UN) system. To understand its prospects, one must first examine the US discontent that fuels this proposal.

For decades, the US has been the UN's principal funder as well as a dominant force within its secretariat and many of its specialised agencies. Western influence, with Washington at the helm, is palpable in the staffing of senior posts and the general orientation of UN programmes. However, this dominance runs up against a formidable wall in the UN Security Council (UNSC). The veto-wielding power of China and Russia has repeatedly thwarted US and generally

Western initiatives, turning the council from an instrument of US policy into a chamber of constraints. This is the central headache for Washington: a system it heavily bankrolls but cannot fully control on matters of supreme geopolitical importance.

Consequently, the US has often bypassed the UN when anticipating a Russian or Chinese veto. The unilateral economic sanctions against Russia and military strikes, such as those in Iran, stand as recent, stark examples. The logical, if radical, extension of this frustration is not mere bypassing but the creation of a parallel structure. The BoP, complete with plans for an International Stabilization Force (ISF), is not a novel concept in spirit. It echoes past failed initiatives like the proposed League of Democracies, championed by Joe Biden in his Senate years.

Trump, however, introduces a distinct, transactional approach to this idea. Learning from prior failures, he has chosen a title that is emotionally potent and vaguely bureaucratic, potentially

obscuring its confrontational underpinnings. The design of the logo is reminiscent of that of the UN's, which suggests an attempt to borrow the legitimacy of the established order while seeking to supplant it. Trump's obsession with a Nobel Peace Prize adds a personal dimension; a laureate Trump would undoubtedly have leveraged that prestige to lend credence to this new venture.

The tactics for enrolment appear to follow Trump's well-documented playbook: a mix of persuasion and pressure. Invitations are dispatched, with an implicit or perhaps explicit threat of punitive trade tariffs for those who decline. This coercive potential may sway some nations dependent on the US market, but it simultaneously undermines the project's credibility. An organisation born from strong-arm tactics will struggle to be perceived as a genuine forum for equitable peacebuilding.

This is where the BoP faces its most significant hurdles. Major global powers are likely to abstain. China and Russia would naturally view it as a hostile, US-centric alliance designed to marginalise them further. Crucially, many European nations, despite being traditional US allies, remain deeply invested in the UN framework and are wary of initiatives that explicitly undermine multilateralism for a unilateral, transaction-based world order. Their participation is doubtful without guarantees of shared,

substantive leadership—a concession unlikely from a Trump-led project.

Therefore, the most probable outcome is not the birth of a robust new UN, but the accelerated weakening of the current one. The Board of Peace may not stand firm as a functional alternative, but the very act of its promotion by a figure like Trump inflicts damage. It encourages further disengagement from the UN, legitimises non-cooperation, and deepens the rift between Western and non-Western visions of global governance. The world would not gain an effective new peace body but instead lose faith in the existing one, without a viable replacement.

In conclusion, Trump's Board of Peace is unlikely to find deep or widespread diplomatic traction. Its divisive genesis, coercive recruitment strategy, and exclusionary premise alienate the very actors necessary for global stability. It is less a vessel meant to hold water and more a wrecking ball aimed at the foundations of the post-war multilateral system. Its legacy may not be a new era of peace, but a deepened global crisis: a world where the rules-based order is further fragmented, leaving behind a dangerous vacuum where ad hoc alliances and raw power politics hold greater sway than ever before. The greatest risk is not the board's success, but the collateral damage its pursuit will cause to international cooperation.

UAP incident shows systemic erosion of academic integrity



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SAMINA LUTHEFA

Academic freedom—the right to teach, study, pursue knowledge or research without unreasonable interference—is often perceived through a narrow lens in our country. The dismissal or silencing of a teacher practising this right, often has much deeper and potentially dangerous implications. When academic freedom is attacked in one place, it sends a message far beyond the individual concerned. If one teacher can be punished, cornered, or publicly humiliated, it becomes a warning to thousands of others. The damage, then, is not individual; it is systemic. In Bangladesh, political, economic, social, and cultural forces frequently converge to create an increasingly hostile environment for teachers, researchers, and students alike.

Traditionally, the gravest threat to academic freedom comes from the state. When governments restrict dissent, criminalise speech, or politicise education, academic life becomes fragile. Bangladesh experienced this acutely during Sheikh Hasina's rule, when teachers were jailed, harassed under the Digital Security Act, 2018, subjected to surveillance and intimidation simply for expressing opinions or criticising injustice. Speaking out—whether inside or outside the classroom—became a high-risk act.

However, state repression is only one part of the picture. Neoliberal capitalism has also played a decisive role. Since education has been commodified and reduced to a form of skill training, disciplines that are not immediately “marketable”—promising immediate lucrative job opportunities—have come under pressure. Subjects that encourage critical thinking, social analysis, or dissent are increasingly seen as unproductive or even dangerous. Over time, this creates a social perception that certain disciplines—and by extension, their teachers—are dispensable.

The freedom to teach, research, and even attract students gradually erodes.

This is compounded by the rise of social and cultural authoritarianism. When decisions about what should be taught, who should teach, and who should study are influenced not by academic standards but by religious sentiment, political allegiance, or pressure from organised groups, academic integrity collapses. Universities cease to be spaces that promote inquisitiveness and become battlegrounds for moral policing and ideological control.

The consequences of this erosion are not confined to higher education. When academic freedom is damaged at the tertiary level, its effects trickle downwards—to secondary, primary, and even pre-primary education. Fear, conformity, and self-censorship become normalised across the entire education system.

However, academic freedom is not destroyed only by dismissals of teachers. There are many quieter, bureaucratic ways to strangle it. In South Asia, we inherited colonial legal and administrative structures, including the University Grants Commission (UGC) model, which continues to enable excessive control over universities. These structures, combined with neoliberal “quality assurance” frameworks shaped by international financial and development institutions, often force knowledge into narrow, standardised moulds. Under the guise of maintaining quality, they limit intellectual diversity and autonomy.

At the institutional level, pressures are both overt and subtle. Teachers may be told what they can or cannot teach. More commonly, they are punished for being vocal against injustice in society or governance failures—activities that may not be part of their formal academic duties but are inseparable from the role of an academic. Over the past 15–16 years,

we have seen teachers being imprisoned, sued, and harassed for expressing opinions. Some have been repeatedly remanded, their dignity and security systematically stripped away.

In extreme cases, academic freedom has been met with outright violence. The enforced disappearance of researcher Mubashar Hasan because of his research topic represents one of the most brutal assaults on academic inquiry imaginable. Others have lost their jobs, faced politically motivated cases, or endured physical attacks. There have been instances where progressive teachers and writers were hacked to death in the past. Students, too, have been targeted—arrested, detained, and prosecuted simply for expressing views.

There are also less visible forms of coercion.

students, alumni, and sections of the general public are engaging in intimidation, harassment, and physical aggression against teachers.

Elected student representatives have stormed offices, threatened administrators, and publicly humiliated faculty members. Sometimes, teachers have been obstructed from teaching certain subjects. Online spaces have become arenas of relentless cyberbullying, misinformation, and character assassination. Academics are routinely delegitimised through coordinated hate campaigns that twist words and fabricate allegations.

This climate has led to a disturbing conclusion: academic freedom in Bangladesh is virtually non-existent. However, at this

accountability. When due process collapses, no one—teacher, student, or administrator—has real rights. Besides, trust between teachers and students, which is central to any functioning classroom, disintegrates.

This breakdown has been actively encouraged. Violence, intimidation, and humiliation have gone unchecked, sometimes even tacitly endorsed by the highest authorities. As a result, fear has become the organising principle of academic life.

The termination of Layeqa Bashir and ASM Mohsin at the University of Asia Pacific (UAP) must be seen in this context. This was not an isolated incident but the culmination of 17 months of unchecked violations of academic freedom and due process. The spectacle of mobs forcing administrative decisions without investigation sets a terrifying precedent.

By allowing this to happen, the UAP has inflicted lasting damage on its own credibility. Many teachers may now choose to leave this profession, recognising that their rights are unprotected and that university administrations are either unwilling or incapable of acting as administrators at all.

This problem extends far beyond one university. From Chattogram to Rajshahi, from Jahangirnagar to Dhaka University, and across numerous private universities, the pattern is the same. Student groups linked to political organisations have simply replaced earlier political actors, who once gagged academic freedom on campuses.

University administrations, the UGC, and the Ministry of Education all bear responsibility. In the case of UAP, the UGC was informed early and urged to intervene, but they failed to act. This inaction has contributed directly to the deterioration of academic freedom at a moment when, after the July uprising, many hoped for meaningful change.

Instead of qualitative improvement, we are witnessing qualitative decline. For institutions of higher learning, this is an ominous warning. If administrations cannot govern, they should step aside. Otherwise, universities will soon be run not by academic principles but by intimidation and mob influence.

Academic freedom cannot survive in such conditions. And without academic freedom, universities lose their very reason for existence.



VISUAL: ALIZA RAHMAN

Administrative systems are often designed to wear teachers down by delaying promotions, denying leave, manipulating housing, and creating an atmosphere in which survival depends on obedience. This breeds self-censorship, where conformity becomes a strategy for safety.

While these patterns were stark during the Awami League era, the situation has not improved since. What has changed is the nature of the perpetrators. Academic freedom is no longer violated only by the state or university administrations. Increasingly,

point, it is also crucial to clarify what academic freedom does not mean. It does not protect hate speech, incitement to violence, or actions that endanger the lives and freedoms of others. Such acts fall outside the bounds of academic freedom and must be addressed through due process.

The absence of due process is, in fact, one of the most damaging aspects of the current crisis. Over the past 17 months, we have repeatedly seen instant punishment being meted out based on mere accusations and mob pressure, without investigation or

ADP downsize: Why health and education are taking the hardest hits



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NAWSHAD AHMED

In the tradition of reviewing the performance of the Annual Development Programme (ADP) at the mid-point of each fiscal year, the National Economic Council (NEC) recently revised the total ADP allocation. The NEC has downsized the ADP by about 12.5 percent, to Tk 208,935 crore (3.3 percent of GDP) from its original budget allocation of Tk 230,000 crore (3.7 percent of GDP). This amount includes Tk 8,935 crore from autonomous bodies and corporations' own funds. Excluding this amount, out of Tk 2 lakh crore, Tk 128,000 crore is expected to come from domestic sources, and Tk 72,000 crore is to be financed from foreign sources. Out of the total cut of Tk 30,000 crore in the revised ADP, Tk 16,000 crore cut is from

and higher education, reduced by 55 percent from the original allocation of Tk 28,557 crore. The slow implementation rates of the two biggest social sectors, over the first six months of the current financial year, prompted the NEC to cut down their allocation in fear of underutilisation, which may improve from its original budget allocation rate at the end of the year. While this makes immediate sense, the underlying causes of historically low ADP implementation of these two sectors should be assessed properly and measures should be taken to ramp up the performance of the two prime social sectors in the country in future.

The Revised Annual Development Programme (RADP) consists a total

amenities received Tk 22,730 crore (10.87 percent), while education received Tk 18,550 crore (8.87 percent), and local government and rural development were allocated Tk 15,142 crore (7.24 percent).

Notably, the local government division received the highest allocation of Tk 37,534 crore in the RADP, which includes social safety net programmes and other community-based interventions focusing on poverty alleviation, infrastructure development, and operation and maintenance in city corporations, municipalities, and unions.

The substantially reduced allocations for health and education in the RADP could significantly affect the population. Several ongoing projects—such as the establishment of cancer, kidney, and heart treatment centres in eight divisional cities and 500-bed hospitals in Jashore, Cox's Bazar, and Pabna—will likely experience major delays in construction work and equipment procurement, resulting in locals not receiving essential medical services in the near future. These critical health initiatives should aim to resume work early in the next fiscal year, given that low-income families cannot access treatment for cancer, kidney and heart conditions at private hospitals due to high costs of service.

Budget cuts in the education sector could push more children out of school. The trend already did much damage during the Covid pandemic, when parents either shifted children from private schools to public schools or madrasas, or took them out of school altogether. Lower expenditure in the education sector may give rise to this tendency once more. Meanwhile, major infrastructural deficiencies exist within government-run educational institutions and training facilities. Additional classrooms are necessary to accommodate students and a lower student-teacher ratio is needed to enable a conducive learning environment. More teachers should also be recruited to this end. A reduced budget for education in the RADP will likely delay the achievement of targeted improvement in the sector.

While reduced allocation is likely to impact the performance of the health and education sectors, the substantial increase in allocation

for the local government division may facilitate the creation and improvement of essential infrastructure and services in the city corporations, municipalities, upazilas, and union parishads.

Although no basic reform in local

governance is expected over the next six months, ongoing local-level projects (some dependent on donor assistance) will benefit from timely funding and technical and managerial support. Many of these projects/programmes

will also contribute to poverty alleviation through employment generation. Ultimately, securing timely development benefits and delivery of expected public services depend on a successful execution of the ADP.

Several sectors have been hit hard by the ADP downsizing, among which health is losing much at a 74 percent reduction from its original allocation of Tk 18,148 crore. This is followed by secondary and higher education, reduced by 55 percent from the original allocation of Tk 28,557 crore.

domestic financing while Tk 14,000 crore is cut from foreign sources.

Now, what triggered the ADP budget cut in the first place? Three traditional factors are at play here: 1) slow spending; 2) lower than expected revenue mobilisation; and 3) slower external fund flow. But another factor has emerged, which is the “shortage of projects” mentioned by Planning Adviser Professor Wahiduddin Mahmud at a media briefing. The ADP spending in the first six months of the current fiscal year reached Tk 41,876 crore, which was only 17.54 percent of the total ADP budget.

Several sectors have been hit hard by the ADP downsizing, among which health is losing much at a 74 percent reduction from its original allocation of Tk 18,148 crore. This is followed by secondary

of 1,330 projects, including 1,108 investment projects, 35 feasibility studies, and 121 technical assistance projects. Another 66 projects are being implemented by autonomous bodies and corporations, using their own funds.

In the RADP, 60.54 percent of the total allocation has been earmarked for five sectors: transport and communication, power and energy, housing and community amenities, education, and local government and rural development. The transport and communication sector received the highest allocation of Tk 38,500 crore, or 18.42 percent of the total RADP. The power and energy sector received the second-highest allocation of Tk 26,186 crore, or 12.53 percent of the total RADP.

The housing and community

BANGLADESH COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS & SURGEONS (BCPS)
67, Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Sarani, Mohakhali, Dhaka.

INVITATION FOR TENDER

Date: - 29/01/2026

1. Ministry/Division	Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
2. Agency	Bangladesh College of Physicians and Surgeons (BCPS)
3. Procuring Entity Name	Secretary, BCPS, Mohakhali, Dhaka-1212.
4. Invitation for / Tender Package Name	Supply of SUV (Sport Utility Vehicle)
5. Tender Ref. No & Date	BCPS /CAR/916/2026/ Date- 29/01/2026
6. Procurement Method	Open Tendering Method (As per PPR-8)
7. Budget and Source of Funds	BCPS Own Fund Package Name BCPS/CAR/917/ 2026
8. Tender Publication Date	29/01/2026
9. Tender Last Selling Date	15/02/2026 at 02:00 P.M.
10. Tender Last Submission /Dropping/ Closing Date and Time	16/02/2026 at 12:00 P.M.
11. Place of Selling and Receiving/Dropping Tender Documents	Office of the Secretary, BCPS, Mohakhali, Dhaka.
12. Tender Opening Date , Time and Place	16/02/2026 at 02:00 P.M., Office of the Secretary, BCPS, Mohakhali, Dhaka. In presence of Tenderer if any.
13. Place, Date and Time of Pre-Tender / Pre- bid Meeting	Place: Office of the Secretary, BCPS, Mohakhali, Dhaka. Date: 05/02/2026, Time at 12:30 P.M.
14. Eligibility of Tenderers	1. The Tenderer shall have minimum of years of general experience in supply of similar goods and related service as Manufacturer/ Supplier shall be 03(three) years. 2. The minimum amount of credit line/credit facility/ liquid assets shall be Tk- 65 lacs.
15. Brief Description of Goods and Related Services	Stated in Tender document/ As per TDS. The items will be accepted after considering suppliers sample.
16. Guarantee / Warranty & after sales service	The SUV will be brand new (0 mileage) and should be in good condition during use. Payment will be made as per quoted rate after supply of the items and submission of bill.
17. Price of Tender Documents Taka	Taka 2000/- (Two Thousand Taka) only in cash (Non-refundable).
18. The Tender Security & Completion time	Tender Security Amounts in Bangladeshi Taka will be 3% of the total quoted price. Completion time in weeks: 06 weeks.
19. Name & Designation of Inviting Tender	Prof. Abul Bashar Md. Jamal, Secretary, Bangladesh College of Physicians and Surgeons (BCPS).
20. Address and Contact details of Official Inviting Tender	Bangladesh College of Physicians and Surgeons (BCPS) 67 Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Sarani, Mohakhali, Dhaka-1212. Phone No.222295006, 222284189 Web. www.bcps.edu.bd, Email: bcps@bcps.edu.bd

The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject all tenders without assigning any reason.


(Professor Abul Bashar Md. Jamal)
Secretary, BCPS
Mohakhali, Dhaka-1212.

GD-213

MEANINGFUL WORK BRINGS MENTAL SATISFACTION: Oishee talks 'Soldier', first film with Shakib Khan



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

“I'm very happy. There's a certain mental satisfaction that comes from doing meaningful work. When the team is good, the work eventually becomes better.”

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

After the release of her recent film *Noor*, actress Jannatul Ferdous Oishee is already stepping into a new phase of her acting career. She has recently completed a significant portion of shooting for her upcoming film *Soldier*, directed by Shakeeb Fahad — a project that marks her first on-screen collaboration with Dhallywood superstar Shakib Khan.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Oishee reflects on her experiences, her growth as an actor, and the quiet dreams she continues to carry within Bangladesh's film industry.

“I genuinely enjoyed working with the *Soldier* team,” Oishee says. “I'm very happy. There's a certain mental satisfaction that comes from doing meaningful work. When the team is good, the work eventually becomes better.”

She believes that a professional environment is essential for creative comfort. “If there's a proper shooting atmosphere, work becomes comfortable,” she explains. “Without professionalism, things become difficult. In that sense, the *Soldier* team was truly good.”

Working opposite Shakib Khan for the first time was a defining moment in her career. Oishee reveals that she spent around ten days shooting with him, with most of her scenes shared with the superstar.

Reflecting on their professional dynamic, she says, “As a senior, he fulfilled his responsibility. He was cooperative, and I appreciated that deeply. Before *Soldier*, we hadn't really spoken. We had only met briefly once at an event. Our real introduction happened on the set of this film.”

She admits there was nervousness at the beginning. “Shakib Khan is a very big superstar. It was my first film with him, and I didn't know how he would take things. I was nervous. We met for the first time on set. But I quickly realised that he makes everyone feel comfortable, and that made the shooting process much easier.”

Observing him closely gave her a deeper understanding of his stature. “I worked for ten days so far and mostly my shots were with Shakib Khan, and while working with him, I truly felt why he is such a big star,” she says.

“What struck me most is that, unlike many people, he doesn't highlight himself or talk about his achievements. He doesn't treat hard work or struggle as something heavy — it feels natural to him. I really liked that.”

She adds, “Shakib Khan is extremely hardworking. He can work relentlessly. He works with honesty. Even if someone says something to him, he responds with a smile.”

When asked about Shakib Khan's feedback on her work, Oishee smiles. “He actually asked me why I don't work more often. I told him that not every project offers a good experience — sometimes there's a lack of professionalism. But I do want to work. I love acting. I want to work with good teams like *Soldier*.”

Looking ahead, her dreams remain simple but sincere. “I'm searching for opportunities to play diverse characters,” she says. “I want to act in films. I just need the right opportunities.”

For Oishee, *Soldier* represents more than just another project — it marks a step forward built on discipline, good teamwork, and a growing belief in her own place within Dhallywood's evolving cinematic space.

BotTala stages 99th show of 'Khona' at BSA



Theatre collective BotTala is set to stage the 99th performance of its acclaimed play 'Khona' today, at the Experimental Theatre Hall of Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy. Written by Samina Luthfa Nitra and directed by Mohammad Ali Haider, the production revisits the folklore figure Lilaboti, widely known as Khona, an astrologer whose agricultural wisdom survives through Khonar Bochon.

Set nearly fifteen centuries ago, the play examines gender, class and power, focusing on how women's knowledge is systematically silenced within family and institutional structures. Since its debut at the Central Shaheed Minar during the centenary of International Women's Day, *Khona* has continued to attract audiences both in Bangladesh and internationally.

Before the masterclass: Ibrahim Ahmed Kamal on the endurance of rock

FAIZA RAMIM

Getting down from the bike before the YAMAHA Flagship Centre at 5:45pm this Friday, January 23, I spotted a short, lean man walking out of the parking lot—hardly looking older than 40–45. As he moved closer, it became clear who I was looking at: Ibrahim Ahmed Kamal, the legendary guitarist of Warfaze, in town to lead *Guitar Master Class 4* as the guest mentor.

Before I could properly introduce myself, my simple, timid wave was enough. He walked right up, shook my hand, and I introduced myself as his interviewer. “Oh. Am I looking good?” he asked. When I said it was for a newspaper, he laughed. I said yes anyway. At almost 60, wearing his old merch, a full beard and bandana, and looking noticeably leaner than before, his appearance felt almost unrecognisable. Still, the rockstar persona came off him at full volume.



PHOTO: COURTESY

Fame, however, does not get to his head. He gave us more than an hour of his time, speaking like an old acquaintance. Even now, he goes live on Facebook and says the easiest way to get him to reply is simply greeting him with a salam.

Kamal started Warfaze at just 14, inspired by Western metal bands. The first song he learned on guitar was Black Sabbath's *War Pigs*. That early start helps explain why Warfaze sits where it does now: a pioneering force that helped carve out multiple subgenres within Bangladeshi rock and metal.

In 1984, with no video tutorials and no mentors to guide him, Kamal learned guitar entirely by ear—with only time, passion and obsession. In Warfaze's early days, he played bass. But late 1987 changed the band's shape: guitarist Meer left, and Kamal took over the guitar duties. Asked what remains consistent in Warfaze's sound, he answered simply: distortion.

That single word pulled me into a bigger question. Punk began as rebellion against systems and set ways—was that an inspiration

behind starting out too? Kamal did not romanticise it. “I think the system is already disrupted,” he said. “If we can bring discipline into the chaos, that's success.”

Warfaze's rebellion is not theoretical. The band rose during the decline of the Ershad regime, and songs like *Ekti Chele* and *Shadhikar* spoke to that moment. Asked whether listeners always grasped the messages, Kamal said they mostly did. For him, music begins with a concept—a message worth sharing, something you hope might change a life.

That mindset carried into the Yamaha Flagship Centre in Tejgaon at 7:00pm, where the fourth session of the *Guitar Masterclass* drew young musicians eager to hear from a childhood favourite. Kamal prefaced the session with a warning: they might learn one or two concepts, but what mattered was what they did

with them afterwards. Organised by Team Alpha, the masterclass blended hands on playing with overlooked essentials: tonality, songwriting nuance, and what “professional” really means on a guitar. To demonstrate, Kamal asked the room for a random topic—“election”—and, with humour and precision, showed how tonality can exist inside anything. He followed that up with a breakdown of Warfaze's *Rupkotha* and *Purnota*. He moved between humour and precision, making the room listen harder than it usually does.

As the interview drew to a close, I asked the inevitable question: amid AI-generated music and TikTok virality, is rock dead? Kamal disagreed. Anyone who thinks rock is dead, he said, is simply looking in the wrong places.

In the end, it comes down to circles—and what you choose to expose yourself to. Rock is alive and well. It only asks for attention, understanding, and the respect needed to let it keep breathing.

ARIJIT SINGH explains decision to step away from playback singing

On January 27, Arijit Singh announced that he is stepping away from playback singing, sharing the decision through a post on his official Facebook page. Thanking listeners for their unwavering support over the years, the singer said he will not accept any new playback assignments once he completes his existing commitments.

In subsequent posts, Arijit clarified that he is not retiring from music altogether. He said he plans to continue creating music independently and expressed a desire to return to Indian classical music. Explaining his decision, the singer cited long-standing creative restlessness and a need to explore new musical paths. He also said he hopes his decision will open space for new voices to emerge. Fans can still expect a few new releases from his remaining projects in 2026.



BAFTA nominations 2026: 'One Battle After Another', 'Sinners' lead with most nods

Paul Thomas Anderson's *One Battle After Another* and Ryan Coogler's *Sinners* dominated the 2026 BAFTA nominations, reaffirming their strong momentum this awards season. Anderson's politically charged comedy-drama led with 14 nominations, including Best Film, Best Director and multiple acting categories. Close behind, Coogler's *Sinners* earned 13 nods—the highest ever for a film directed by a Black filmmaker

at the BAFTAs—following its record 16 Oscar nominations.

Among British productions, *I Swear*, *Pillion* and *The Ballad of Wallis Island* were nominated for Best British Film. Chloé Zhao's *Hamnet* collected 11 nominations, tying with Josh Sasse's *Marty Supreme*.

The BAFTA Film Awards ceremony will be held on Sunday, February 22, at London's Royal Festival Hall.

শুভকামনা ও দোয়া প্রার্থী



ডিআইজি (অব:) মো রফিকুল ইসলাম এবং নিশাত আফজা আরজু (ফিস সাইনটিস্ট ও বাংলাদেশ বেতার ও টেলিভিশনের একজন স্পেশাল গ্রেডের কণ্ঠ শিল্পী)-এর বড় মেয়ে বেনজির বিনতে রফিক (অনার্স ও এমএস, ফিসারিজ, ঢাকা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়) এর সাথে ঢাকা নিবাসী কর্ণেল (অব:) খন্দকার ফারুক আহমেদ এবং ফারজানা রহমান তাহেরার জ্যেষ্ঠ পুত্র প্রত্যয় আনাফ (বোয়িং পাইলট) এর শুভ বিবাহ গত ২৬ ডিসেম্বর-২০২৫ আর্মি অফিসার্স ক্লাব ঢাকায় অনুষ্ঠিত হয়।

আমরা নতুন এ যুগলের জন্য সকলের কাছে শুভকামনা ও দোয়া প্রার্থী।

শুভেচ্ছান্তে

বেনজির ও আনাফ-এর বাবা, মা, নানী, মামা, মামী, চাচা, চাচী, আত্মীয়স্বজন ও শুভানুধ্যায়ীগণ

Indian diplomats' families

FROM PAGE 2

shoving during the earlier elections and nothing more than that has happened this time."

Asked about the foreign ministry's statement after deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina's speech at a public event in New Delhi inciting her party loyalists and the general public to carry out acts of terror aimed at derailing the upcoming general elections, he said that there is apprehension that attempts may be made to create conflict.

"The others may be able to explain the day-to-day details better. But we believe that if any danger or conflict occurs, it would not be normal, because those participating in the election are showing sufficient restraint in their activities. Therefore, any disorder is more likely to be caused by those who are not participating or are unable to

participate in the election."

Asked if visa processing at the Bangladesh missions in India have been suspended, he responded in the positive. "We will reopen it when the time comes. For the next eight to ten days, it is better not to reopen it."

All election observers coming from abroad will face some level of scrutiny but the government wants as many observers and journalists as possible.

"If anyone tries to come under the guise of election observation for some other purpose, the home ministry, along with the missions, will examine that. We want transparency. We have no reason to prevent journalists from coming."

Asked about Bangladesh's decision to issue passports to 69,000 Rohingyas, he said: "Due to our failures, many Rohingyas obtained Bangladeshi passports years ago

-- handwritten passports, with many allegations of corruption. The situation now is that Saudi Arabia is insisting that those who already hold Bangladeshi passports be formally documented. We tried not to do this, but due to other national interests, we finally decided to issue passports."

A passport does not mean citizenship, he said.

Any country can issue a passport to a non-citizen for specific purposes and there are many examples worldwide.

On the agreement between Bangladesh and China on setting up drone manufacturing plant, he said if Bangladesh decides in its own interest to set up a factory or industry with another country's cooperation, it will do so independently.

"What others think does not matter."

Rebels giving BNP run for its money

FROM PAGE 1

"When we receive information, we verify it and then act. Those who refuse to follow party decisions will face consequences," he added.

KEY RACES

After dissolving the Bangladesh Jatiya Dal and joining BNP, Syed Ehsanul Huda is contesting in Kishoreganj-5, where expelled central BNP member and Bajitpur upazila BNP president Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Iqbal is his main competitor.

In Dhaka 7, BNP candidate Hamidur Rahman is running alongside Ishtaq Sarkar, a former organising secretary of the Jubo Dal central committee.

In Dhaka 14, BNP-nominated candidate Sanjida Islam Tulce is facing Syed Abu Bakar Siddique Shaju, who has been expelled as convener of the party's Darus Salam thana unit.

In Noakhali 2, BNP candidate and adviser to the party chairperson Zainul Abidin Faroque is in the race with Kazi Mofizur Rahman, a member of BNP's central executive committee.

In Munshiganj-1, BNP nominee Sheikh Abdullah is facing former upazila chairman Momin Ali, while in Munshiganj 3, Kamruzzaman Ratan, social welfare affairs secretary of the party's central committee, is contesting alongside expelled leader and former district BNP convener Mohiuddin Ahmed.

In Sunamganj 3, BNP candidate Kaiser Ahmed is running against Anwar Hossain, a former district BNP vice-president contesting independently. In Sunamganj 4, BNP nominee Nurul Islam is competing with Dewan Zainul Zakerin, another former district BNP vice-president.

Party sources said there are six BNP rebel candidates across four constituencies in Brahmanbaria, while Mymensingh district has seven rebel candidates in its 11 seats.

In Mymensingh 2, the party's candidate and North District unit Joint Convener Motahar Hossain Talukder is facing former BNP lawmaker Shah Shahid Sarwar, while

in Mymensingh 11, Bhaluka upazila BNP candidate Fakhruddin Ahmed is being challenged by upazila BNP Joint Convener Muhammad Morshed Alam.

Rebel candidates have also emerged as major contenders in seats the BNP has left for alliance partners.

In Dhaka 12, Revolutionary Workers Party President Saiful Haque is contesting alongside expelled BNP leader Saiful Alam Nirob, former convener of Dhaka North city BNP.

In Patuakhali 3, the BNP has left the seat for Gono Odhikar Parishad President Nurul Haque, while Hasan Mamun, a former president of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal's Dhaka University unit and member of BNP's National Executive Committee, is also contesting.

The BNP has also left Brahmanbaria 2 for Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Vice-President Maulana Junayed Al Habib, though expelled BNP leader Rumeen Farhana remains in the race.

Speaking to this newspaper yesterday, a BNP Standing Committee member admitted the failure to rein in rebel candidates, many of whom have emerged as main rivals of party nominees.

"But these rebels are also from the BNP. If they win, the party may take a softer stance toward them," he added, seeking anonymity.

ANGER AMONG GRASSROOTS

In the last seven days alone, the BNP has expelled more than six dozen grassroots leaders accused of campaigning for rebel candidates, sparking anger and dissatisfaction at the local level.

Several expelled leaders said they continue to work for rebel candidates despite disciplinary action, acknowledging that this is hurting BNP's nominated contenders.

They alleged that the party high command ignored grassroots opinions during the nomination process, failed to consult local leaders, and sidelined long-time activists.

Moniruzzaman Monir, general secretary of Bajitpur upazila BNP in Kishoreganj was among 17 leaders who were expelled on Monday. He

Unfamiliar ballots for voters

FROM PAGE 1

vote for now?

That uncertainty has been sharpened by an unexpected development. Jamaat-e-Islami, contesting this seat with serious intent, has nominated a Hindu candidate, Krishna Nandi.

The irony is hard to miss: an Islamist party fielding a Hindu in a Hindu-majority constituency. The move has startled voters and forced conversations that would have been unthinkable in previous elections.

At Botunia Bazar, beside the erosion-prone Sugandha River, I stopped at a small clothing shop where a group of locals had gathered. The scene was unremarkable: folded shirts, a couple of worn-out wooden benches for customers, and an ageing ceiling fan. The conversation, however, was anything but.

Present were Debashish Chakravarty, the local priest; Dibendu Roy, the shop owner; Nihar Ranjan Roy, a trader; Seema Sarkar, a tailor; and Harunur Rashid Gazi, a Muslim trader whose brother chairs the local Hindu-majority union parishad.

They did not hide their confusion. "We always voted Awami League -- this is hundred percent true," Dibendu Roy told me without hesitation. "Now there is no boat symbol. It's confusing, at least for me." Others nodded.

So who would they vote for? Dibendu paused before answering, "We are trying to choose someone who at least believes in the spirit of 1971," he said carefully. "We have to vote. So we are looking for an alternative."

That brought Krishna Nandi into the conversation. Could a Hindu candidate carrying Jamaat's symbol be that alternative?

Seema Sarkar struggled to respond and eventually looked away.

Nihar Ranjan Roy spoke instead. Many here, he said, were unsettled not only by Jamaat's politics but by the candidate himself. "We don't know him. He is not from this constituency. Suddenly he appears asking for our

votes."

Notably, Krishna Nandi is from Dumuria (Khulna 5).

Debashish Chakravarty, the priest, took a more analytical view. "This is Jamaat's political strategy," he said. "They think a Hindu candidate will bring more votes here." Whether that calculation will work remains an open question.

What struck me repeatedly was how often religion itself was downplayed. "People outside may think this area votes by religion," Nihar Ranjan Roy said, "but here we don't." Hindus and Muslims live in peace, he insisted, attend each other's festivals and social functions. "Disputes exist, but they are personal, not communal."

Harunur Rashid Gazi pointed to living proof. His brother, a Muslim, has twice been elected chairman of Botunia union, where Hindus make up about 60 percent of the population. No one around the shop disputed that.

Taken this into account, BNP candidate Amir Ejaz Khan has intensified his grassroots campaign in Khulna-1 (Dakop-Batiaghata). He has entered the race for the fourth time and is also from Batiaghata.

I asked about an issue often discussed elsewhere: the fear among Hindus since Sheikh Hasina's fall. None of them said they had experienced insecurity. "Nothing happened here," Dibendu Roy said. The land his shop stands on, he added, belongs to a Muslim.

Debashish Chakravarty, however, spoke of a different anxiety. "The fear is coming from outside," he said. "From Indian social media." He described constant online campaigns portraying Hindus in Bangladesh as unsafe and in need of "rescue".

"That propaganda scares people more than reality," he said.

As I moved around Dakop and Batiaghata, it became clear that communal tension is not part of the local political memory. The deeper fracture lies between voters and

politics itself. When the conversation turned to election promises, cynicism surfaced quickly. "They sing many songs now because they are on stage," Dibendu said, "but after the polls, they disappear."

What people wanted instead was concrete: stopping erosion along the Sugandha River, stronger embankments, and protection from floods. These mattered far more than promises of cards, loans or allowances.

A few kilometres away, in Khuna village by the Bhadra River, those priorities felt even starker. I sat with three women, Shabana Begum, Rokhsana Parveen and Mafia Begum, outside a modest riverbank home belonging to Ibrahim Sheikh. All said they would vote. Why? "A new raja will come," Shabana said simply. "We have to vote."

What would they want from the new king? They laughed. "Whether it helps me or not, a new raja must be made," Mafia Begum said. None could name a single election pledge. What they spoke about instead was water. "In two months, there will be no water," Rokhsana said. "Even the river dries up. Sometimes we can't cook, can't use the toilet." They have raised the issue for years, without result.

Back in Botunia, another contrast emerged. Some men spoke with surprising clarity about a proposed referendum on political reform.

Harunur Rashid Gazi listed issues he believed should appear on a yes-no ballot: balancing power between the prime minister and president, and ensuring opposition representation in parliament.

In Khuna, however, the very idea of a referendum remained a mystery. No one had explained it to them.

As I left Dakop-Batiaghata, the picture felt clear yet uneasy. Here, the February 12 election is not driven by excitement or allegiance. This is a constituency without communal fear, but full of political uncertainty.

(Shakeel Anwar is a former BBC journalist)

Body of 3-yr-old

FROM PAGE 12

Assistant Superintendent of Police (Rangunia Circle) Balayat Hossain said, "Upon receiving the news, five units of fire service, along with police, rushed to the scene. A team of army also joined rescue efforts around 7:30pm."

Abdul Mannan, deputy director of Chattogram fire service, told The Daily Star at 8:00pm, "It appears that a very narrow pit, about 25-30 feet deep, was dug several years ago for a government project. I do not know why it was not filled up afterwards. We dug another pit adjacent to it to rescue the boy within a short time."

A video circulating on Facebook shows locals trying to rescue the child using bamboo poles. In the video, a young man can be seen asking the child to hold on to the bamboo.

The child's uncle, Shah Alam, said in a Facebook live video that Misbah fell into the pit while playing with other children and had managed to hold on to a bamboo stick for more than an hour.

A similar incident took place on December 10 last year in Rajshahi.

Two-year-old Sajid fell into an abandoned 30-foot-deep tube-well pit in Tanore. His body was recovered nearly 32 hours later, highlighting the dangers posed by unattended deep pits.

Indian parliament

FROM PAGE 12

Reading out the reference for Khaleda Zia, he said, "I refer with profound sorrow to the passing away of Begum Khaleda Zia, former prime minister of Bangladesh and chairperson of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party."

Khaleda passed away on December 30, 2025.

"She was the first woman prime minister of Bangladesh and served in the office three times between 1991 and 2006. She also served as the leader of the opposition from 1996 to 2001. Khaleda Zia made important contributions to the development of Bangladesh and to Indo-Bangladesh bilateral relations," the chairman said.

"The house joins the beloved family, the government and the people of Bangladesh in mourning the passing away of her excellency Begum Khaleda Zia," Radhakrishnan said.

ICT sector key

FROM PAGE 12

intervention there will be," he said.

Criticising research that does not study positive examples of such institutions, he said, "Why don't you study The Daily Star and Prothom Alo? You should also find some good examples so people understand that even in this environment, it is possible to build good institutions."

Referring to his experience, he said, "In 35 years, we may have made mistakes, but we have never intentionally done bad journalism. We never intentionally wrote against anyone and never published anything without evidence."

Emphasising the role of editors and owners, he said independent editors are not always on the best of terms with the owners.

"If you have an independent editor, the character of a media organisation changes immediately. An editor must be able to stand against the government and against the owner and say, 'I will not let the government harm my staff.' We got full cooperation from our owners."

"If an editor tells the owner, 'Fire me first, but I will not let my staff be harmed,' a lot will change," he said, adding that The Daily Star and Prothom Alo established the institution of the independent editor.

Giving an example, he said, "For 27 or 28 years, we have given business awards, but we have never given a business award to the owners of The Daily Star because of a conflict of interest."

He said over 500 licensed newspapers exist in Dhaka, many without financial strength, offices, or the capacity to employ journalists, showing their purpose is different.

"If journalist unions are publicly politically divided, how do you expect readers to have faith in you?"

On self-regulation, he said, "Journalists can have personal political beliefs, but they cannot use them in their profession... Owners must also commit that they will not use media politically and must give editors freedom of operation."

Anam also said that for self-regulation, the Editors' Council and the Newspaper Owners Association of Bangladesh (Noab) were taking joint initiatives on separate codes of conduct for editors and owners.

Noab President AK Azad criticised the caretaker government for arrests under the anti-terrorism law.

"Police are picking up some innocent people from home and demanding huge sums of money. Those who can pay are released from the police station, and those who cannot are sent to jail under the anti-terrorism law," he said.

"They [government] know that their term lasts only until February 12. So why are they afraid? Why have they crippled the judiciary?"

"The current caretaker government has no political agenda. Yet why are they not delivering justice, and why are innocent people being sent to jail?"

Speaking about state-sponsored oppression of journalists, Azad said, "Those who were in power before and

Shooting team cleared

FROM PAGE 12

the cricket team's tour was turned down on security grounds, he said the government was treating the two matters as separate cases.

"Only a shooter and a coach are travelling there. The competition venue is fully secured, and the involvement of general spectators is very limited. We have also been assured by the hosts that there is no security threat," Mahbub told The Daily Star yesterday.

He also informed that Sports Adviser Asif Nazrul had spoken with Bangladesh Shooting Sport Federation general secretary Ferdows Ara Khanom before giving the green signal for issuing the government order.

Earlier in the day, National Sports Council (NSC) Director (Sports)

Mohammad Aminul Ahsan said they were optimistic about receiving the GO, as all required documents had already been forwarded to the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

"We are considering two things. First, shooting is an indoor sport with limited spectators, unlike cricket, which is played in large venues before large crowds, so there is minimal security concern. Second, we want to promote friendship through sports," he said.

While Robiul, being an employee of the defence forces, only requires a GO to travel to India, Sharmin will need to apply for a visa.

The championships will mark Robiul's first international appearance since the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris. He has been training since January 4 under Sharmin's guidance.

Brawl over front-row seats

FROM PAGE 1

However, supporters of the BNP and Jamaat candidates got into an altercation over front-row seats, triggering the clash.

Of the injured, 45 were taken to the Jhenaigati Upazila Health Complex, where 25 were admitted and 20 received primary treatment, said doctor Arup Saha.

Another 20 injured were admitted to Sherpur General Hospital, confirmed medical assistant Md Yasin Hossain.

Several motorcycles and more than 100 chairs were vandalised during the clash, witnesses said.

In a Facebook post, Nuruzzaman alleged that BNP supporters, after arriving late, attacked Jamaat supporters with "local weapons" following an argument and scuffle over front-row seats. He claimed more than 50 Jamaat supporters were injured.

BNP candidate Mahmudul Haque Rubel made counter-allegations, blaming Jamaat activists for the violence.

In a Facebook post, he claimed Jamaat carried out the attack to create chaos, leaving around 50 BNP leaders and activists injured.

Sherpur Superintendent of Police Md Kamrul Islam said security personnel brought the situation under control and that additional law enforcers have been deployed to prevent further violence.

No case had been filed in connection with the incident as of filing of this report at 1:40am today.

Meanwhile, BNP suspended its 41-member Sherpur district convening committee following the clash.

In a press release issued in the evening, BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi said the

committee, led by Convener Sirajul Islam and Member Secretary ABM Mamunur Rashid Palash, had been suspended until further notice.

Protesting the death of Rezaul, students of Dhaka University and Jagannath University brought out separate processions on their campuses in the wee hours of today.

At Dhaka University, a group of students marched campus streets. Several Ducus leaders, including Vice President Md Abu Shadik Kayem, took part.

At Jagannath University, around 100 students brought out a procession from the main gate around 12:45am today and marched campus streets chanting slogans against the BNP.

Meanwhile, in Bhola, Islami Andolan Bangladesh (IAB) alleged that three of its activists were injured in an attack by Jamaat supporters in Charlesson Municipality yesterday.

IAB's Bhola-4 candidate Kamal Uddin's daughter, Maria Kamal, made the allegation at a press conference at the Charlesson Upazila Press Club, saying she and her followers were attacked while campaigning in Ward-6 of the municipality around 9:30am.

In a statement, Jamaat's upazila unit denied the allegation, calling it "false and motivated".

Contacted, Jamaat upazila unit Ameer Mir Sharif Hossain said there was a scuffle between the two groups and claimed a Jamaat activist was injured.

No complaint has yet been filed in this connection, said Charlesson UNO Md Lokman Hossain.

[Our Mymensingh and Barishal correspondents contributed to this report]

Media freedom hinges

FROM PAGE 12

intervention there will be," he said.

Criticising research that does not study positive examples of such institutions, he said, "Why don't you study The Daily Star and Prothom Alo? You should also find some good examples so people understand that even in this environment, it is possible to build good institutions."

Referring to his experience, he said, "In 35 years, we may have made mistakes, but we have never intentionally done bad journalism. We never intentionally wrote against anyone and never published anything without evidence."

Emphasising the role of editors and owners, he said independent editors are not always on the best of terms with the owners.

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"They [government] know that their term lasts only until February 12. So why are they afraid? Why have they crippled the judiciary?"

"The current caretaker government has no political agenda. Yet why are they not delivering justice, and why are innocent people being sent to jail?"

Speaking about state-sponsored oppression of journalists, Azad said, "Those who were in power before and

those currently in power have the same character. There is no guarantee that future governments will be better."

The Noab president said ethical journalism will not be possible if the state system is not corrected and we do not speak out against it.

Kamal Ahmed, chief of the Media Reform Commission, said that without accountability and transparency, the media can never regain the trust of readers and viewers.

He criticised the government's plan to create separate commissions for broadcast and other media, which he said could create confusion.

"The government is rushing into its final stage. A broadcast commission is being formed while the existing licensing powers remain with BTRC. You can be certain that there will be overlaps and conflicts."

"And a media commission is planned while keeping the Press Council. Then, who will handle conflicts related to journalism, the Press Council or the media commission? This overlapping will unnecessarily increase complexity."

On social media, he said, "... Bots and misinformation create the impression of popularity or public opinion. That is dangerous."

Sara Hossain, honorary executive director of Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST), called for documenting past harassment of the media to understand "where we need to work more".

"A mechanism is necessary to guide who the good and bad actors are. Those who do not comply should be held accountable," she said.

Sajjad Sharif, executive editor of Prothom Alo, said although journalism is essential for democracy, it is challenging in our country.

"The media must follow internal rules. There is no alternative. We must adopt editorial policies, transparency, and accountability to gain the trust of readers and viewers," he said.

SM Rezwan Ul Alam, associate professor of political science and sociology at North South University, said that if internal governance, internal communication, and internal strategic communication systems are not in place, the recommendations made by the Media Reform Commission will not be implemented.

Fahim Ahmed, CEO of Jamuna Television, said that a regulatory system will be effective only when journalists receive the minimum benefits they deserve.

MRDI Executive Director Hasibur Rahman moderated the event. Syed Samiul Basher Anik, manager of programme at MRDI, presented a policy paper on self-regulation of the media.

Among others, Rezwanul Haque, chief editor of Maasranga Television and president of the Broadcast Journalist Centre; Susan Vize, head of the office and UNESCO Representative to Bangladesh; Reaz Ahmad, editor of Dhaka Tribune; and Shahed Mohammad Ali, editor of the daily Samakal, also spoke at the event.

BOOK REVIEW: FICTION

THROUGH AGNES' EYES: Reimagining Shakespeare's lost years in 'Hamnet'

Review of 'Hamnet' (Tinder Press, 2020) by Maggie O'Farrell



ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

The plot of the novel centres around Shakespeare's wife Agnes (pronounced Ann-yeis). Better known as Anne Hathaway, O'Farrell chose to call the character Agnes as it was the name that her father, Richard Hathaway, used for her in his will.

JONAH KENT RICHARDS

One of the great pleasures of reading enough of the plays of William Shakespeare is that, after a while, you feel like you know him. British actor Patrick Stewart famously stated, "... he feels like an old friend—someone who just went out [...] to get another bottle of wine." While Shakespeare scholars have succeeded in creating a rough Shakespeare biography based on historical documents, many of them will admit that there are large gaps in our knowledge. We know the names of Shakespeare's family members as well as the dates of their baptisms, marriages, and deaths. But we remain ignorant of their personalities and family dynamics. Northern Irish novelist Maggie O'Farrell's historical fiction novel, *Hamnet*, attempts to give flesh and personality to our bare bones understanding of these historical figures. Her work illustrates the story of

Shakespeare's meeting with his wife and how the death of their only son, Hamnet, led Shakespeare to write his magnum opus *Hamlet* (1623).

The plot of the novel centres around Shakespeare's wife Agnes (pronounced Ann-yeis). Better known as Anne Hathaway, O'Farrell chose to call the character Agnes as it was the name that her father, Richard Hathaway, used for her in his will. The author portrays Agnes as almost otherworldly. The daughter of an unnamed wood-dwelling woman, Agnes was most at peace in the forest. She had a vast knowledge of the local plants, which she used to create treatments for her family and neighbours. She was a skilled beekeeper, and she even had a trained kestrel. Most importantly, she could see into the future. When Agnes' birth mother died in childbirth, her father married another woman named Joan, whom Agnes constantly clashed with. When her father dies, Agnes is

left isolated under her stepmother's watchful eye with her brother Bartholomew as her primary ally. The depiction of Agnes' family life certainly offers a compelling reason for why she would be drawn to an 18-year-old William Shakespeare.

Shakespeare is the secondary character in the novel. O'Farrell deliberately leaves Shakespeare unnamed. Referring to him only as "the Latin tutor" and later as "the husband" and "the father." This depiction of Shakespeare is based on his likely education at the Stratford grammar school where he would have been intensely educated in the Latin language. O'Farrell places Shakespeare in an emotionally and physically abusive relationship with his father, the glover and former town bailiff John Shakespeare. This portrayal of the abusive John Shakespeare is based on the historical figure's social and economic decline. Shakespeare sees

the mysterious and beautiful 26-year-old Agnes, with a proper dowry, as a means of escaping his father's house and starting a household of his own.

Shakespeare scholars know from the date of Shakespeare's marriage to Anne Hathaway in November 1582, and the baptism of their first daughter Susanna Shakespeare on May 26, 1583, that Anne must have been pregnant during the wedding. While these circumstances have led some to speculate that Shakespeare and Anne's marriage was the forced result of an unplanned pregnancy, the novel posits that Shakespeare and Agnes intentionally became pregnant to force their parents to accept their handfast engagement to one another. O'Farrell clearly imagines Shakespeare and Agnes as marrying out of love.

O'Farrell also explains how Shakespeare ended up working in the London theatre companies. In the scholarship, Shakespeare disappears from the historical record between the baptism of his twins, Judith and Hamnet, in 1585 to the first reference of Shakespeare as a London player and playwright in 1592. Often called "The Lost Years," scholars don't know why Shakespeare left Stratford or how he ended up in the London theatre companies. The story suggests it was Agnes who encouraged Shakespeare to move to London to set up a branch for his father's glover business. Agnes is motivated by a desire to help her husband escape the emotional and psychological burden of living under his father's roof. Shakespeare ends up selling gloves to the theatre company before eventually joining them.

The novel also explores the circumstances of Hamnet's death in 1596, and whether it had any connection to Shakespeare writing his play *Hamlet*. The cause of Hamnet's death isn't listed in the Stratford Parish records, but O'Farrell conceives of Hamnet dying from pestilence. She crafts a heartbreaking story of Judith originally getting sick with Agnes extending all her efforts to save her daughter only to discover that Hamnet has become sick and to have him die despite her efforts to save him. O'Farrell beautifully captures the pain that the Shakespeare must have felt over Hamnet's death. She has Shakespeare briefly return to

Stratford for the death only to return to London to escape his grief despite Agnes' request that he stay in Stratford with his family.

The climax of the book occurs when Agnes travels to Shakespeare's theatre in London to witness a performance of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In her novel, O'Farrell contends that Shakespeare was not only inspired by the death of his son to write the play, but that he modelled Hamlet after Hamnet. The text describes how Agnes is overwhelmed by the sight of the actor who has transformed into what her son would have looked like had he grown to manhood. O'Farrell has Shakespeare himself play the role of the ghost and Agnes bears witness as father and son symbolically reconnect with one another on stage. O'Farrell writes, "[Agnes] sees her husband, in writing this, in taking the role of the ghost, has changed places with his son". O'Farrell's decision to cast Shakespeare as the ghost is clearly inspired by Shakespeare biographer Nicholas Rowe's theory on the casting of the ghost role. There is something metatheatrical about the idea of the mother watching her husband embrace their symbolic son in a play about a broken family.

If I had to critique anything about the novel, it is that I wanted O'Farrell to spend more time exploring Shakespeare's process of writing *Hamlet*. We know Shakespeare was a great adaptationist who drew upon source material like Saxo Grammaticus' *Historia Danica* and François Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques*. I would have loved her to depict Shakespeare using these texts to weave together his version of the story.

Regardless, O'Farrell's *Hamnet* is one of the most compelling depictions of Shakespeare's family life that I have ever encountered. O'Farrell's Agnes is a Shakespearean heroine in her own right, and she brings a breath of much-needed humanity to the historical figure of Anne Hathaway. By showing us the story through Agnes' eyes, we gain insights into the young man whom we have all previously believed we knew so well.

Jonah Kent Richards is a Shakespeare screen adaptation scholar, an English teacher, and contributor for *Star Books and Literature*.

BOOK REVIEW: NONFICTION

A firebrand's journey to Washington from Barisal

Review of 'Daughter of the Agunmukha: A Bangla Life' (Speaking Tiger, 2024) by Noorjahan Bose, translated by Rebecca Whittington

NUSRATHUQ

"Agunmukha" translates to "fire-mouth" in English. The word mirrors the tumultuous life of Noorjahan Bose, shaped by her early years in cyclone- and flood-prone small towns of Barisal; her experience of sexual violence at the age of 10; the loss of Imamuddin, her first love and husband, to smallpox; single motherhood; and her later marriage to Swadesh Bose, a Hindu man—an interfaith union opposed by society. Noorjahan Bose accepted all of these as challenges, because for her, a firebrand, being defeated by life or giving in to society's unreasonable demands was never an option.

In Barisal, despite the natural disasters, her childhood was a happy one. Several families lived in single units within an area where visiting and consulting one another on matters both significant and insignificant, sharing meals, playing and enjoying all the perks that a rural setting offers (fishing, bathing in the rivers and ponds, enjoying the fresh vegetables, fruits, and climbing the trees that bore them) were the norm. But they also lost family members and relatives to floods and cyclones.

The descriptions of the floods in Barisal are very vivid in the book. The force of the water, its power to destroy entire villages and to mercilessly take lives, shows us how the inhabitants of flood-prone areas have learned survival skills and be resilient. People place their dry food like rice and spices in containers and place them in sacks to retrieve them when the flood waters recede. Other useful information in the work include what relief goods are most required: water purification tablets, cholera vaccine, essential medicine, bandages, clothes, etc.

Life was wonderful in Bose's teen years in

Barisal till the Hindu-Muslim riots led her to question religion itself. If faith led to taking human lives, she wanted no part of it. Her husband Swadesh Bose believed in leftist politics and religion had no place in his life. It was ironic indeed that society had this much antagonism towards their interfaith marriage when faith was not important to either of them. A Muslim fanatic in Washington even threatened to kill her because she had insulted Islam by marrying outside her faith.

Her political consciousness started in school when, during the Language Movement, she staged a walkout from the classroom holding banners in support of the movement. The school had to take disciplinary action against her, as Barisal was part of West Pakistan then, but the headmaster later told her, "I wish I had a daughter like you". She also observed the elders in her family participating in elections, canvassing, delivering fiery speeches, etc.

Unfortunately at age 10 she was sexually abused by an uncle. No one would believe her if she told on him. He was, after all, a respected person in society. He was the only elder considered safe to entrust her in his care, escort her to other relatives' houses, and even to stay in his home. Wasn't she safe in his home as he had a wife and children of his own? She was not. Eventually, the daughter of Agunmukha finally flashed a knife at him and the nightmarish violations came to an end.

In her book, Bose has expressed how important it is to talk to children as early as possible about how to protect themselves from sexual predators. She herself had no idea of what to make of the rogue uncle's actions. She wondered if his actions were normal. Did he love her more than he

loved his other nieces? Like us all, she also expresses disappointment at how the law hardly protects victims of sexual abuse.

After this, she states that her happiest years were with Imadullah, a Jubo League worker whom she married and had a son with. He was from among the small minority who did not believe in the efficacy of the smallpox vaccine. His mother's amulet would protect him, he believed. Unfortunately he died of the disease and

She calls her life in Cambridge "Another Life". Because of her curious nature and a reader of books, she observed, learned and even adapted to the western culture. She made efforts to know English. She was, however, surprised to learn that women's rights were not ideal even in this "developed" country and sexual abuse of women was remained as an unaddressed problem.

Her descriptions about watching the ballet "Swan Lake" at the Royal Albert

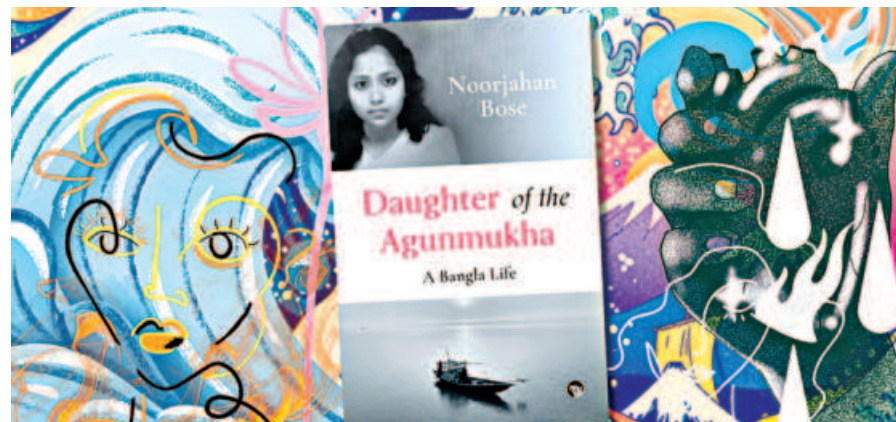


ILLUSTRATION: MAHMUDA EMDAD

Bose was devastated. The devastation worsened when she saw the rituals that widows must follow. She had no say in when her husband would be buried and what burial rites should be followed. Worst of all, she could not see or touch him because the death of a spouse meant that the marriage was null and void; she was deprived of a last farewell sentence to her dear Imad. But as Imad's widow, she was intelligent enough to choose a white sari with a zari border for her marriage ceremony to Swadesh Bose.

Hall, being invited to the Queen's garden tea party at Buckingham palace and visiting Stratford-on-Avon to reminisce her favorite Shakespearean characters, seeing the magnificence of the camellias and rhododendrons in Kew Gardens were a delight to read.

At Oxford she enjoyed her life in the same way as she did in Cambridge, but she was disappointed in her encounter and assessment of Nirad Chaudhuri, author of *The Autobiography of an Unknown*

Indian. Written in 1951, it was well received as it had in-depth analysis of the recently independent India. He had come to Calcutta after spending his early life in Kishoreganj, East Pakistan, but now at Oxford, he criticised Bengalis, their culture and cuisine. He also had a deep disdain for the working class. Noorjahan Bose's disappointment in him was complete when she saw his wife malnourished and wearing a patched and torn sari. The wife told Bose matter-of-factly that all their earnings went to supporting Nirad Chaudhuri's lavish western lifestyle.

Like every Bengali, she was delighted to witness an independent Bangladesh, but was disappointed when her husband was not considered for a post in the Planning Commission of the new independent country. She concluded that his being a Hindu had much to do with it. She cites other instances when landlords (in Karachi) would not rent their homes to a Hindu tenant. There are several instances of ill-disguised disapproval of Swadesh Bose being Hindu. Religious intolerance is a distinct theme in the book.

Her life in the USA was very fulfilling. On her return to Bangladesh, she worked tirelessly for women's rights, preventing early marriage and ensuring justice for sexually abused women.

In conclusion, this book is inspiring and is an easy read. Her message is that women especially need to be brave, be eager to learn, and adapt to change. The key to succeeding in life is education and having an open mind. Despite narrations of the difficulties she faced in life, *Daughter of the Agunmukha* is a feel-good book.

Nusrat Huq is a senior teacher in Sunbeams school.

SPORT



Missing World Cup 'extremely disappointing'

SPORTS REPORTER

After weeks of uncertainty over Bangladesh's participation in next month's ICC T20 World Cup, Bangladesh head coach Phil Simmons left the country yesterday with sheer disappointment.

"Missing the World Cup is extremely disappointing," he told The Daily Star before leaving on Wednesday.

Simmons joined the Bangladesh team in October 2024, and under his guidance the Tigers played two major events -- Champions Trophy and Asia Cup.

This tournament could have been his first World Cup with the Tigers. Had everything gone according to plan, this would have been one of his busiest periods, travelling with the team to the venue and making final preparations.

Instead, Bangladesh's absence has been confirmed. Simmons arrived in Dhaka during the

Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) intending to prepare the side, but found uncertainty instead. During the playoffs, he was often seen pacing near the Mirpur press box, voicing concern with a faint, uneasy smile.

There is no uncertainty now. With no matches scheduled, he is returning home. "I am leaving today," he said. "Our next series is in March, so we will have to prepare again then. Hopefully, I will return at that time."

Other coaching staff have also been granted unexpected leave, as the board has no plans in place following the World Cup exclusion.

Since the end of the BPL, Mirpur has remained eerily quiet. The team will stay inactive until mid-March, when they face Pakistan in a three-match ODI series on March 12, 14, and 16, with Tests in May. Domestic cricket is also under threat, as disputes endanger the Dhaka Premier League.

What to WATCH

SONY SPORTS 1,2,5
Australian Open
Semifinals
Live from 2:30 pm
Europa League
Live from 10:00 pm (Friday)
STAR SPORTS SELECT HD2

South Africa vs West Indies
2nd T20I
Live from 10:00 am
PTV and A Sports
Pakistan vs Australia
1st T20I
Live from 5:00 pm

'Mission isn't complete yet'

SPORTS REPORTER

After confirming their place in the upcoming ICC Women's T20 World Cup, Bangladesh batter Sobhana Mostary has made it clear that the team's "mission isn't complete yet," as they now aim to lift the trophy in the ongoing qualifying tournament in Nepal.

Bangladesh have been in commanding form throughout the tournament, winning all five of their matches so far.

Their most recent triumph -- a convincing 39-run victory over Thailand in the opening Super Six clash in Kathmandu yesterday -- ensured their qualification for the main event with two games still to play.

"Our mission isn't complete yet. We want to become champions of this tournament," Mostary said after the game.

The Tigresses were also guaranteed a top-four finish after the Netherlands defeated the USA by 21 runs via the DLS method. That result confirmed the Dutch side's maiden Women's T20 World Cup appearance as well.

Four teams from the qualifier will progress to the main tournament, joining Australia, England, India, New Zealand, South Africa, West Indies, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The Women's T20 World Cup

is scheduled to take place in England and Wales from June 12 to July 5.

On Wednesday, Bangladesh posted a competitive 165 for 8. The innings was rebuilt brilliantly after early setbacks, as Juairiya Ferdous and Mostary stitched together a crucial 110-run partnership. Juairiya scored 56 off 45 balls, hitting three fours and four sixes to register her maiden WT20I fifty, while Mostary struck 59 off 42 deliveries, including nine fours and a six.

Thailand began their chase poorly, losing Suwanan Khaio to off the first ball to Marufa Akter. Though Natthakan Chantham (46), Naruemol Chaiwai (30), and Nannapat Koncharoenkai (29) kept them in the contest, the required rate proved too much.

Bangladesh currently top the Super Six table with six points and a healthy net run rate of 1.15. Mostary, tournament's second-highest run-scorer with 182 runs, also has bigger ambitions.

"When we go to England for the World Cup, we want to win more matches than we did last time," she said, referring to Bangladesh's single win in the 2024 edition.

The Tigresses will face Scotland in Kirtipur on Friday before concluding their campaign against the Netherlands on Sunday.



SHORT CORNER

14th South Asian Games deferred to 2027

The 14th edition of the South Asian (SA) Games has once again been postponed. According to the revised schedule, the nine-day multi-sport event will now be held in Pakistan in March next year. The Games were originally scheduled to take place in March 2023.

Pakistan face Australia with T20 WC participation uncertain



Pakistan take on Australia in a three-match T20I series starting in Lahore from Thursday, despite doubts over their participation in next month's World Cup in cricket's shortest format. Pakistan are protesting over last week's decision by the International Cricket Council (ICC), which rejected Bangladesh's demand to relocate their matches out of India.

British-Bangladeshi owner of Lankan team sentenced over match-fixing

A Sri Lankan court handed the British owner of a Premier League team a four-year suspended sentence on Wednesday over match-fixing in the domestic T20 cricket tournament, a judicial official told AFP.

** Read full stories on The Daily Star's website



Match officials walk off after overseeing Ansar & VDP Football Club's 12-0 win over Kachari Para Akadas Unnayan Shangstha in the ninth and third-to-last round of the Women's Football League 2025-26 in Kamalapur on Tuesday evening. While an all-woman referee panel is not new to the league, this edition has seen 38 of the 45 matches so far officiated solely by women. The remaining fixtures, including a few high-stakes contests, were handled by mixed-gender panels.

PHOTO: BFF

'There is no chain of command in BCB'

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is currently beset by multiple issues, which former national captain Khaled Mahmud Sujon -- who has held many positions within the board in the past -- addressed in an exclusive interview with The Daily Star's Abdullah Al Mehdi. The excerpts are as follows:

The Daily Star (DS): How do you view the way the BCB is operating currently?

Khaled Mahmud Sujon (KMS): Simply put, it is not in a good state; there are too many complaints regarding the board directors. The biggest issue is that people without a cricketing background or organisational skills are there. Hence, this existent situation is natural. You can't run a cricket board in corporate style.

DS: Did you think there was a diplomatic failure in the BCB-ICC impasse?

to the World Cup.

DS: The board discussed Shakib Al Hasan's return on the day ICC replaced Bangladesh in the World Cup. Should it have been done?

KMS: Discussing Shakib's inclusion was not warranted at the time. Without talking about these things, they should be setting example through their work. If Shakib does not get cleared from the government level, the BCB cannot change that decision. This was the moment for a discussion on the World Cup instead. Maybe it was a diversion.

DS: Insiders have confirmed M Najmul Islam's reappointment as Finance Committee chairman, even as the BCB has yet to officially announce it. How do you view this ambiguity and players' expressing a lack of trust in the BCB?

KMS: No one can save cricket except the board. If they don't admit this, they are making a mistake. Players are being disrespected by the board at every step. The board is the highest authority and has the jurisdiction to give a post to anyone. When they speak, they must be united and speak in unison. The biggest issue is that the board is not united. There is no chain of command in the board.

DS: Is BCB failing to solve the club cricket crisis?

KMS: Yes, there is failure. But if the clubs and organisers of the Dhaka [First Division Cricket] League do not want to play, the board can do little. So, I will not just blame the board. The clubs are also wrong. Even if a club is relegated, the councillor remains a councillor, but no one is thinking about the damage to the players caused by the quarrels.

DS: Given the gap in the Bangladesh team's schedule till March, what should be done now?

KMS: They should perhaps organise a 50-over tournament, so that every player can play.



KMS: We all felt disrespected regarding the Mustafizur [Rahman] issue. Since the government said we can't go, we all have to accept it, and rightly so, because it really hurt our honour. I can't say how much the BCB was able to achieve through diplomacy with the ICC, though they did try to play in Sri Lanka. Perhaps the situation was such that the ICC could not manage it either; truthfully, you cannot blame just one person, if you do that, you would have to blame everyone. For cricketers and those who hold the game in their hearts, this feels like bleeding. It hurts that we are not going



Novak Djokovic's march towards history took a fortunate turn on Wednesday as he escaped his Australian Open quarterfinal after Lorenzo Musetti retired injured while holding a commanding lead. The Italian fifth seed had outplayed the 38-year-old, racing ahead 6-4, 6-3 but trailing 3-1 in the third set on Rod Laver Arena before a leg injury forced him to quit. Djokovic openly admitted he was lucky to survive, conceding he was "on his way home" before the twist of fate intervened. But the Serb now faces an even sterner test in the semifinals against another Italian, reigning champion Jannik Sinner, who swept aside Ben Shelton and looms as the favourite in a daunting showdown. Despite holding a 6-4 win-loss record over Djokovic, including victories in their last five encounters, Sinner downplayed the favourite tag, saying Djokovic is an "inspiration" and that he hopes to "learn something" from him.

PHOTO: AFP

CORPORATE BOOKING

Fantasy Kingdom and Water Kingdom will be reserved on 29th January (Thursday), 2026 for Corporate Booking.

From 30th January (Friday), 2026 Fantasy Kingdom and Water Kingdom will remain open for all.

Contact: 01969-910100





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Govt issues draft ordinances for broadcast, media commissions

BAHARAM KHAN and ARAFAT RAHAMAN

The information and broadcasting ministry yesterday published drafts of ordinances of the national media and broadcast commissions and sought opinions by Saturday.

Appeals against the decisions of the Broadcast Commission can be made to the ministry, whose decisions will be considered final, according to the draft of "Broadcast Ordinance, 2026".

The ministry also called a stakeholders' meeting at 5:00pm today at the Film and Publications Department's conference room. The information adviser will chair the meeting to gather views on the two drafts.

The draft "Broadcast Ordinance" has a provision for a five-member selection committee to recommend a five-member Broadcast Commission, with at least three members from the bureaucracy.

The committee will comprise the cabinet secretary, the information

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Locals of Kishoreganj's Mithamain wade into the waters of the Funfuni Beel to catch fish during the traditional Polo Bawa festival yesterday. Like every year, the century-old festival brings together people of all ages for communal fishing. From early morning, villagers -- young and old -- descended into the water with polos and nets in hand, turning the area into a scene of collective effort and festivity.

PHOTO: TAFSILUL AZIZ

Media freedom hinges on self-regulation

Speakers at policy dialogue also emphasise roles of editors, owners

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a policy dialogue yesterday emphasised the need for self-regulation, including internal codes of conduct for both journalists and media owners, to ensure freedom and accountability of the media.

They also highlighted that strong institutions, independent editors, fair ownership, and proper internal governance are essential to protect journalists, uphold editorial independence, and rebuild public trust in Bangladesh's media.

These remarks were made at a multi-stakeholder policy dialogue on "Media Self-Regulation in Bangladesh: The Cornerstone of an Accountable Free Press," organised by the Media Resources Development Initiative (MRDI) in association with The Asia Foundation at Brac Centre Inn in the capital.

Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, said he was fully in favour of self-regulation of the media, which he said depends on "strong institutions and truly independent editors".

"The more we are self-regulated, the less government

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ICT sector key to nation's future

Says Yunus, laments that Bangladesh has 'become famous for forgery'

BSS, Dhaka

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus yesterday emphasised the need for technological advancement to keep pace with a rapidly changing world, saying the ICT sector will shape the future.

"The coming world will be fundamentally different. Things we cannot imagine now will become reality. The world is changing rapidly... if we cannot gear up and align with this global momentum, we must consider how far we will fall behind," he said.

He made the remarks while addressing the inaugural session of the Digital Device and Innovation Expo 2026 at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre (BCFCC) in Dhaka.

The four-day expo, organised jointly by the ICT Division, the Bangladesh Hi-Tech Park Authority, and the Bangladesh Computer Samity, carries the theme 'Bangladesh to the World' and will continue until January 31.

The chief adviser noted that although Bangladesh may appear to be moving alongside other countries, in reality, the nation lags in thinking, action, and preparedness. He attributed this gap to insufficient attention to the ICT sector, which he called the "core sector that will shape the world's future."

Stressing that preparation must begin now, he urged authorities to move beyond traditional thinking when formulating policies for the sector.

"The country's future will depend on the conversations we have, the visions we imagine at such gatherings, and



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Guarantee human rights ahead of polls

Amnesty chief urges Yunus

STAR REPORT

Amnesty International (AI) Secretary General Agnès Callamard has urged Bangladesh's interim government to restore public trust by guaranteeing full respect for human rights and the rule of law.

In an open letter to Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus ahead of the February 12 polls, Callamard

raises concerns about the authorities' "continued misuse of anti-terror legislation against journalists, and their failure to adequately safeguard the rights to life, security of persons, and freedom of expression, and association."

It calls on the interim government to "ensure that laws, policies, and practices fully protect" these rights.

"Bangladesh's interim government had a mandate to restore human rights, in line with the nation's obligations under

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'Time is running out'

Trump warns Iran as Tehran rejects nuclear talks amid US military 'threats'

AGENCIES

US President Donald Trump yesterday appeared to threaten another attack on Iran if it does not "make a deal" on nuclear weapons, after Tehran rejected talks.

"Hopefully Iran will quickly 'Come to the Table' and negotiate a fair and equitable deal - NO NUCLEAR WEAPONS," the US leader said in a social media post, noting that "a massive armada is heading to Iran."

"As I told Iran once before, MAKE A DEAL! They didn't, and there was 'Operation Midnight Hammer,' a major destruction of Iran. The next attack will be far worse!"

There can be no negotiations between Washington and Tehran if the United States makes threats against the Islamic republic, the Iranian foreign minister said earlier in the day.

"Conducting diplomacy through military threat cannot be effective or useful. If they want negotiations to take shape, they must certainly set aside threats, excessive demands and raising illogical issues," said Abbas Araghchi after the US deployed an aircraft carrier in the region.

Trump said another "armada" is floating toward Iran and that he hopes Tehran would make a deal with Washington, reports Reuters.

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman told Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian that Riyadh will not allow its airspace or territory to be used for military actions against Tehran, state news agency SPA reported on Tuesday.

In a phone call with Pezeshkian, the Crown Prince affirmed his country's support for any "efforts that would resolve differences through dialogue" to bolster security and stability in the region.

Pezeshkian told the Crown Prince that Tehran welcomes any process, within the framework of

international law, that prevents war.

Turkey's foreign minister yesterday urged the US to resolve its disputes with Iran "one by one" instead of through a sweeping deal, saying this would avoid humiliating Iranian officials, and added that Tehran was ready for talks on its nuclear programme.

Speaking to Al Jazeera, Hakan Fidan reiterated that Turkey opposed any foreign intervention or attack on Iran, saying it would be "wrong to start the war again."

➤ KSA bars use of airspace, territory for strikes on Iran

➤ Iran supports international law to prevent war: FM

➤ Turkey urges US to resolve Iran disputes one by one

➤ Iran executes man on charges of spying for Israel

Iran yesterday executed a man arrested in April 2025 on charges of spying for Israel's espionage agency Mossad, the judiciary said. Hamidreza Sabet Esmailpour, who had been convicted of passing information to a Mossad agent, was hanged at dawn, the judiciary's Mizan news agency said.

Rights groups have previously said 12 people have been hanged on similar charges in the wake of Israel's 12 day war with Iran in June, reports AFP.

Indian parliament pays tributes to Khaleda Zia

UNB, Dhaka

The Rajya Sabha (upper house) yesterday paid tribute to Bangladesh's former prime minister Khaleda Zia, alongside erstwhile members of the upper house of the Indian parliament, L. Ganesan and Suresh Kalmadi, who also passed away recently.

Soon after the house met for the day and before the laying of papers, Rajya Sabha Chairman CP Radhakrishnan read out the obituary references for Khaleda Zia and the two former members, according to the Press Trust of India.

The house stood in silence as a mark of respect for the departed. Later, the chairman said the secretary general will convey to members of the beloved families their "sense of deep sorrow and deep sympathy".

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Correction

In our yesterday's issue, we ran a story on this page with an error in the headline. The headline should have read "Dhaka, Beijing sign drone production deal".

Body of 3-yr-old recovered 4hrs after falling into pit

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The body of a three-year-old boy was recovered last night, four hours after he fell into a deep tube-well pit in Raozan upazila of Chattogram.

Firefighters recovered the body of Misbah Uddin around 8:30pm, Raozan Police Station Officer-in-Charge Sazedul Islam told The Daily Star.

Misbah was the son of Saiful Islam, a day labourer.

The incident occurred in Joynagar village of Ward-7 under Kadulpur union of Raozan in the evening, police said.

According to family members, Misbah went missing around 4:30pm after falling into the pit near his house while he was playing.

The OC said, "Firefighters rescued the boy and rushed him to the upazila health complex, where doctors declared him dead."

"Doctors told us that the child was brought dead to the hospital," he added.

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Bangladesh players celebrate a dismissal against Thailand during their first match of the Super 6 stage of Women's T20 World Cup Qualification campaign in Kathmandu yesterday. Bangladesh won the match by 39 runs to seal a place in the 12-team tournament, which will be held in England and Wales from June 12 to July 5.

PHOTO: CRICKET ASSOCIATION OF NEPAL

Shooting team cleared for Delhi meet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A two-member Bangladesh shooting team on Wednesday received government approval (GO) to travel to India for the Asian Shooting Championships, scheduled to be held in New Delhi from February 2 to 14.

The clearance came at the eleventh hour following prolonged deliberations over Bangladesh's participation, after the Interim Government had earlier declined to send the national cricket team to India for the upcoming T20 World Cup due to security concerns. That decision eventually resulted in Bangladesh being replaced by Scotland in the 20-team tournament.

The country's top rifle shooter Robiul Islam, who is set to compete in the 10m air rifle event on February 6, is expected to depart for India on January 31. Shooter-turned-coach Sharmin Akter is the other member of the contingent.

Youth and Sports Secretary Mahub-Ul-Alam confirmed the development to The Daily Star. Asked about the decision to issue a GO for the shooting team while

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