

"Our brave Armed Forces are prepared -- with their fingers on the trigger -- to immediately and powerfully respond to ANY aggression..."
Iranian FM Abbas Araghchi warns US

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Fast deals, flimsy scrutiny

With the election less than 2 weeks away, the government is hurriedly pushing opaque, last-minute decision-making

STAR REPORT

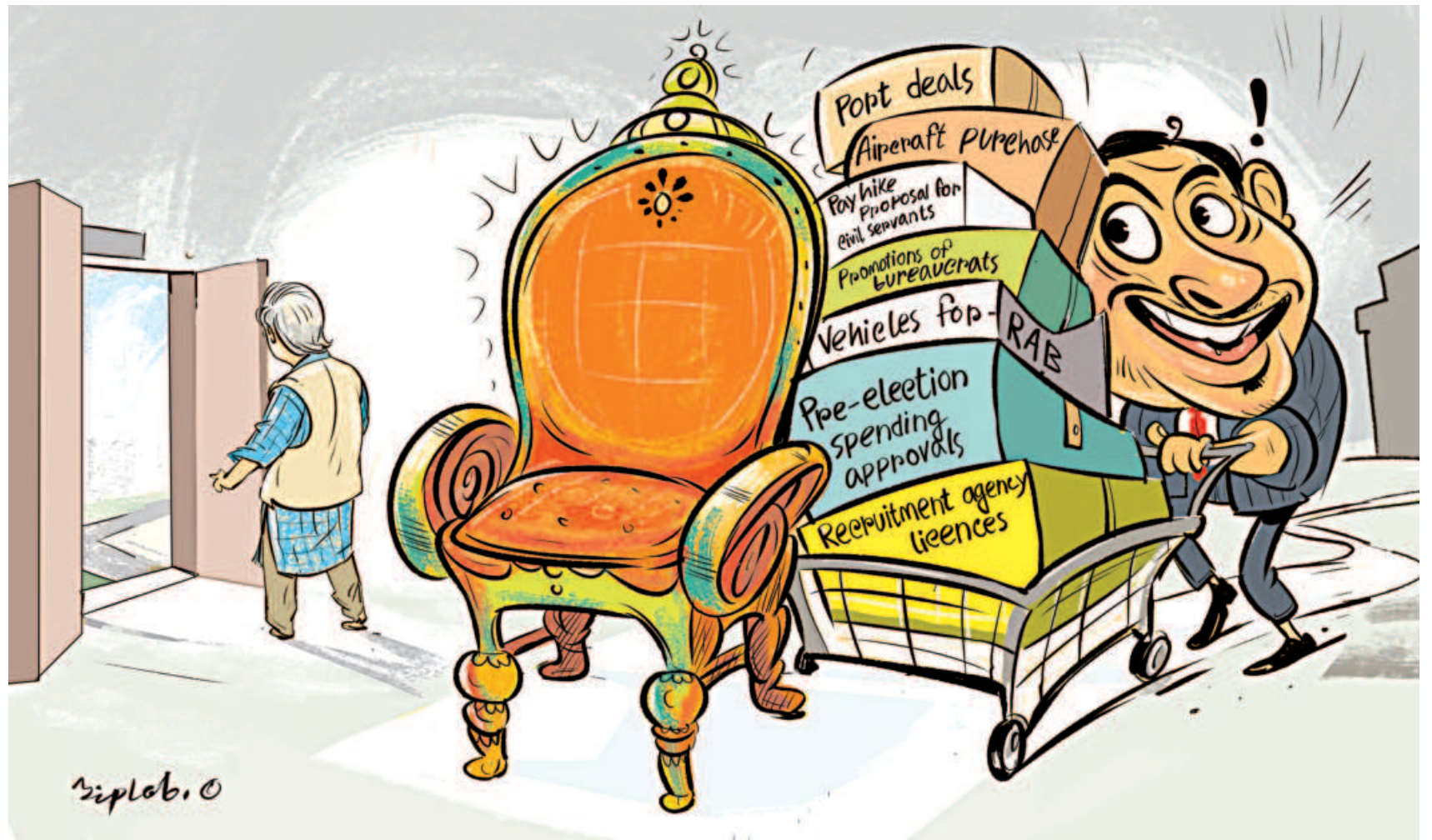
In its final days, Bangladesh's interim government has embarked on a rapid push for long term, high-value commitments, effectively tying the hands of the elected administration that will succeed it.

Foremost among them is a prospective deal with UAE-based DP World to manage cargo operations at the New Mooring Container Terminal in Chattogram Port, the country's most strategically important port asset. This follows the November decision to grant Denmark's APM Terminals a 33-year concession to build and operate the \$550 million Laldia Container Terminal. Simultaneously, Switzerland's Medlog SA is poised to run Pangaon River Port under a 22-year contract.

While Medlog's appointment followed an open tender, the Laldia and DP World negotiations did not. That lack of competitive bids is fuelling backlash as the interim government's mandate nears its end. Installed to oversee a smooth transition to elected rule, the interim authority now faces mounting criticism that it is exploiting its status to make opaque, long-term policy decisions with lasting consequences.

Alongside the port deals, the government is fast-tracking a major procurement of 14 Boeing aircraft for Biman Bangladesh Airlines and pushing through promotions of 118 senior bureaucrats. In parallel, a state-appointed commission proposed a public sector pay hike of as much as 142 percent. Economists warn that the wage increase alone could destabilise already fragile public finances.

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FEBRUARY 12 REFERENDUM Govt, EC at odds over civil servants' push for 'yes/no'

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR and AHMED DEEPTO

The Election Commission and the government are at loggerheads over whether employees of the republic can campaign for a "yes" vote in the referendum, scheduled to be held along with the February 12 general election.

"According to the Referendum Ordinance, government officials cannot campaign for either 'yes' or 'no'. If they do, it will be a punishable offence."

Election Commissioner Anwarul Islam Sarkar



For several days, government machinery and officials have been actively seeking support for a "yes" vote in the referendum on reforms related to constitutional matters outlined in the July charter.

Yesterday, the EC said government officials are not allowed to campaign for either a "yes" or "no" vote, warning that such campaigning would constitute a punishable offence.

The commission sent a letter to all returning officers, with copies forwarded to the cabinet secretary, principal secretary, secretaries of all ministries and divisions, and other senior government officials,

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13 DAYS TO VOTE

Farm loan relief, Padma barrage if BNP elected

Tarique promises at Rajshahi rally

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

The BNP, if voted to power, will waive agricultural loans of up to Tk 10,000 with interest and build the Padma Barrage to benefit the people of the Rajshahi region, party Chairman Tarique Rahman told a campaign rally in Rajshahi city yesterday.

"Over the last 16 years, did you see them [a certain party] anywhere on the streets or in movements?... They were nowhere. But secretly, they were with them [those who fled]... Now they have started new conspiracies."

BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman

"We have checked all the calculations and decided that those who have agricultural loans of up to Tk 10,000 at this moment -- if the paddy sheaf wins and forms the government -- we will waive those loans with interest.

"We also want to start work on building the Padma Barrage. If we can... people of this area, including farmers, will benefit from it."

Among other pledges were building cold storage facilities, reviving the Barind Multipurpose Development Authority and the IT park, establishing a specialised hospital, and re-excavating canals.

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IAB vows to protect minorities thru' Islam

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Islami Andolan Bangladesh (IAB) will ensure the security of minorities following Islamic principles for running the state if voted to power, its Ameer Mufti Syed Muhammad Rezaul Karim said yesterday.

Islam is a proven system of governance for all oppressed and vulnerable people, including minorities, he said while campaigning in various constituencies of Lalmonirhat and Rangpur, according to a statement from the party.

Instead of protecting the oppressed and the weak and building a true citizen-centered state, the current system and laws were used as tools of politics, said Rezaul Karim, the pir of Charmonai.

These turned the

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

Will take ruthless action against extortionists

Shafiqur promises

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman yesterday said if the II-party alliance comes to power in the February 12 national election, 90 percent of extortionists will no longer get the scope to extort people.

He added that the remaining 10 percent would first be urged to refrain from extortion, but if they refuse,

"We did not leave so that at least three ministries could be saved and protected from corruption."

Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman

"whatever needs to be done, will be done."

"It will not be considered whose father, brother, or child an extortionist is. In this regard, there will be ruthless, uncompromising, and strict action."

The Jamaat chief made the remarks as the chief guest at an election rally in Karwan Bazar, organised in support of Saiful Alam Khan, the alliance candidate for Dhaka-12.

He also opined that the country would move far ahead if extortion and corruption can be stopped.

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DYING UNDER SILT

Choked with silt and reduced to a fraction of its former width, the Bhadra River now forces locals, including schoolchildren, farmers, labourers, and the elderly, to risk their lives on a fragile bamboo bridge to cross to the middle of the narrow stream, where boats wait to carry them across. In the dry season, the shallow water level also devastates fish and aquatic biodiversity. The photo was taken recently at Sharafpur ferry ghat in Dumuria, Khulna.



PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

VIOLENCE IN SHERPUR BNP, Jamaat trade blame

EC withdraws Jhenaigati OC, UNO; 5 BGB platoons deployed a day after Jamaat leader's killing

STAR REPORT

Five platoons of BGB members were deployed in Sherpur's Jhenaigati and Sreebardi upazilas to maintain law and order after a Jamaat leader was killed in an election-related violence on Wednesday, said Shariful Islam, public relations officer of BGB headquarters.

The Election Commission yesterday withdrew Jhenaigati UNO Ashrafal Alam Rasel and Officer-in-Charge Nazmul Hasan of Jhenaigati Police Station following the incident.

Tarafdar Mahmudur Rahman, Sherpur deputy commissioner and also returning officer of the district, told The Daily Star that they have urged all candidates of Sherpur-3 (Jhenaigati Sreebardi) to postpone their campaigns for two days.

Kamrul Islam, the district's superintendent of police, said law enforcers, along with army personnel, have also been kept on high alert.

No case was filed in connection with the violence till filing of this report around 8:30pm, said Additional SP Mizanur Rahman Bhuiyan.

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PHOTO: BNP/STAR/TITU DAS/MASUK HRIDDOY

ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL... *Clockwise from top left:* BNP supporters at a rally in Bogura town's Altafunnesa Playground; Jamaat chief Shafiqur Rahman joins a rally in the capital's Mirpur 1 area in support of Mir Ahmad Bin Quasem, party candidate for Dhaka-14; Gono Samhati Andolon candidate Taslima Akhter during a voter outreach programme in Dhaka-12 area; Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal Barishal-5 candidate Manisha Chakraborty reaches out to young voters in the city's BM College area; independent candidate Rumeen Farhana engages with female voters in Bijoy Nagar under Brahmanbaria-2. The photos were taken between Wednesday and yesterday.



'Ensure policy support, cut red tape, bribery'

Business leaders ask Jamaat if it's voted to power

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Business leaders yesterday urged the Jamaat-e-Islami to ensure policy support, cut red tape, and curb bribery to improve the ease of doing business if it forms the next government after the February 12 election.

They also demanded punishment for money launderers, uninterrupted gas supply and new gas connections for industrial units, deferment of Bangladesh's graduation from the least developed country (LDC) group, and greater facilitation of exports, particularly in the garment, IT, and software sectors.

Their other demands included improving the business and investment climate, strengthening law and order, lowering bank interest rates, improving infrastructure, and attracting foreign direct investment (FDI).

The demands were made at a discussion titled

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

Remain strictly professional during polls

Gen Waker asks troops

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Army Chief General Waker-Uz Zaman yesterday directed members of the armed forces to perform their election-related duties with strict professionalism and neutrality.

He gave the directives during his visit to Cox's Bazar ahead of the 13th national parliamentary election and referendum, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said in a press release.

The army chief travelled to the coastal district as part of election preparations. He met with senior military officers, officials of various law enforcement agencies, and members of the civil administration at the BIAM Foundation regional centre.

The meeting discussed inter-agency coordination and overall security management to ensure that the upcoming national election and referendum are held in a peaceful, fair, and neutral manner.

At the meeting, Gen Waker emphasised the

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

'Apologise for your misdeeds in 1971'

Says Fakhru hinting at Jamaat

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir yesterday called on a political party to apologise for its misdeeds during the Liberation War before seeking votes from the public.

He made the remark while addressing an election campaign meeting in the GOREYA union of the Thakurgaon-1 constituency in the afternoon.

Fakhru recalled the widespread atrocities committed by the Pakistan army in 1971, saying many families were forced to flee to India and homes were torched.

Referring to his own experience, he said his family home in Thakurgaon town was completely looted and destroyed, including the underground fuel tank of their petrol pump and several trucks owned by his father's construction business.

"The Pakistan army did all that. And we know very well who collaborated with them at that time."



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IN SHADOW OF MEGA PROJECTS

People of Dhalghata want homes along with growth

MOKAMMEL SHUVO, Cox's Bazar

There is little doubt that one area of Bangladesh is poised to become a major commercial centre in the future.

In Cox's Bazar's Moheshkhali upazila, particularly in Dhalghata union, large-scale development projects are rapidly reshaping the region. On one side stands a 1,200 megawatt coal-fired power plant and the construction of a deep sea port is underway nearby.

Officials and stakeholders believe these mega projects could transform the area into a key hub for business and investment.

However, alongside this development, the area's long-standing social fabric is gradually disappearing. Many residents have already sold their ancestral land to the government and left the area. A large number of labour-dependent families, who had lived there for generations, say they were forced to relocate earlier after receiving minimal compensation. Several families are still living under the fear of eviction.

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Farm loan relief, Padma barrage if BNP elected

FROM PAGE 1

and is now trying to obstruct the polls.

Tarique's visit to Rajshahi for the rally came after around 22 years, drawing large crowds including leaders, activists and supporters.

He reached Rajshahi airport at 12:20pm. Travelling on a red and green bus, he first visited the shrine of Shah Makhdom (R) and then went to the rally venue. His motorcade faced heavy congestion as security personnel struggled to clear the crowd.

Accompanied by his wife Zubaida Rahman, he took to the stage on the madrasa grounds at 1:54pm. Supporters welcomed them by chanting slogans.

From morning, party leaders and activists arrived at the venue from Naogaon, Chapainawabganj, and surrounding districts by bus and truck, carrying party flags and wearing colourful caps and T-shirts. Small processions, some accompanied by musical bands, continued to arrive throughout the day.

A large number of supporters gathered at the field to catch a glimpse of Tarique; some even climbed nearby trees to listen to his speech.

Addressing the crowd, he promised to revive development projects in the Barind region to ensure sustainable agricultural growth.

"Among state-owned institutional projects, the Barind Project was the largest, with its own budget of about Tk 1,000 crore.... Over the past 16 years, no real work has been done. Today, it is almost shut down.

"If the BNP comes to power, it will be properly revived."

He further pledged to establish cold storages for mangoes in

Rajshahi and Chapainawabganj to help farmers preserve their produce and secure better prices.

Referring to employment, he said, "Although there is an IT park in Rajshahi, it is practically inactive. We will make the IT park functional and provide skills training to youths for employment."

He added that entrepreneurs would be given special support to establish agriculture-based industries to create jobs across the northern region.

Calling the February 12 election "very important", Tarique said it will be the day the people of Bangladesh must decide which direction the country will move.

"We have to decide whether we will take the country towards democracy or let it move in another direction.... If we run the country in a democratic way, then it will be possible to implement the plans I have placed before you. "But if we fail to protect democracy, there will be 'mega projects', but none for the people."

He added that accountable governance can only be achieved when the foundation of democracy is strong. "Those who are accountable to the people will work for the people. In the past, those who held power were not accountable. That is why we saw corruption, oppression, enforced disappearances, killings, and millions of people becoming victims of cases and repression."

Referring to recent incidents of political violence, Tarique said, "If any unwanted incident occurs anywhere, there is an interim government... I request it to conduct a fair and proper investigation. If the investigation finds any role of the BNP, we will cooperate in the probe.

"But the investigation must be proper, and justice must be served according to the country's law."

He ended his speech by introducing the 13 BNP candidates from Rajshahi, Natore and Chapainawabganj. He told the crowd, "Your job is to watch over them until the 12th. From the 13th, they will watch over you."

Speaking at a rally in Naogaon's Etim grounds later in the day, Tarique Rahman said a party had stayed away from public movements and protests over the past 16 years, but had all along been secretly aligned with those who have fled the country.

"Over the last 16 years, did you see them anywhere on the streets or in movements? Did you see them in protests? They were nowhere. But secretly, they were with them all the time. Now they have started new conspiracies. That is why you must keep your eyes and ears open, so that they cannot move your votes here and there.

"You must guard the ballot boxes. Do you remember what happened in 2008? In 2008, that 'magic' happened — one moment the box was empty, the next moment it was full. You remember, right? So, you must be careful."

Addressing voters in Naogaon and Joypurhat, he said there has been no development in the areas over the last 16 years.

"Yes, there were some big flyovers and tall buildings in Dhaka and a few other cities. There were mega projects. But mega projects also meant mega corruption.

"We want to change the fate of people living in the villages. We want to change the fate of district towns. We want to change the fate of upazila towns. We want to ensure education for our students. We want

to make our women and mothers self-reliant. We want to create jobs for unemployed youth. We want to create a safe situation where people can walk safely, do business safely, and sleep safely at night."

Tarique urged voters to ensure the BNP's victory so that the party can meet their demands, including railway connectivity in Naogaon.

Around 12:00am, Tarique reached his ancestral district Bogura after 19 years.

Bogura-6 is also the constituency from which Tarique is contesting the election.

At 12:23am, he addressed the rally saying, "I want to thank Allah because after 19 years I have come to my own home, Bogura. I do not know what to say to you. I have become emotional. I cannot understand what speech to give."

He said that during the 2001-2006 BNP government, Bogura saw better development than many other districts of Bangladesh, something to be proud of.

"The work in the area was carried out by my mother, Khaleda Zia. Today she is no longer here. I am standing here in her place. Should I speak as a son or as a candidate?"

The crowd answered, "Son!" Tarique then said, "You are my own people. I want to share this with you — in 2001-2006, my situation was one, but now it is another. Now the whole of Bangladesh is deprived.

"The people of Bogura must be serious about this election." "Jobs and business will be based on merit. No one should say that someone is getting advantages just because they are from Bogura district!" (Our Rajshahi and Bogura correspondents also contributed to the report.)

IAB vows to protect minorities thru' Islam

FROM PAGE 1

itself into an instrument of oppression and a source of profit for a specific small group, failing to ensure the security of minorities even after 55 years of independence, he said.

"Through rising commodity prices, inflation, and financial mismanagement, the weak have been made even weaker. Taxes are collected from the hard-earned income of people, and that tax money is siphoned off abroad," he said.

Students and members of the general public shed blood, lost their lives, and suffered disability and blindness in the 2024 uprising in an effort to overthrow this old system, the IAB ameer said at street meetings and election rallies in the northern districts.

"We have come to seek your votes by presenting Islam as an alternative, to turn the demands of the students and the people into reality. To erase 54 years of failure and to build the Bangladesh of our dreams, vote for the Hand Fan symbol. We promise that you will no longer be disappointed," he said.

He also claimed only IAB clearly presented Islam as the guiding principle for running the state in Bangladesh. "Therefore, those who love Islam, those who love the country, and those who want to overcome half a century of failure should vote for the Hand Fan symbol."

Among the other central and

local leaders who spoke at the programmes included Professor Mahbubur Rahman, a member of the party's presidium and convener of its Central Election Management Committee; and Sultan Ahmed, secretary general of IAB's student wing Islami Chhatra Andolan.

Claim of Sherpur

FROM PAGE 5

more than 15,000 views and over 100 shares. Similar claims were also posted from multiple other Facebook profiles and pages.

Besides, a local correspondent of a TV channel published a post on the channel's official page reporting Saiful Islam's death.

What the fact-check found Dismislab's investigation team contacted Jubaidul Islam, the Sherpur correspondent of News24, who confirmed that, "Saiful Islam, who was injured in the Jamaat-BNP clash in Sherpur, has not died."

The organisation further verified the matter after Saiful Islam himself appeared in a live video from his Facebook account.

In the live video, Saiful said, "Some people have spread the rumour that I had died. Alhamdulillah, I am alive. I am not dead... Please, do not believe such rumours."

Dismislab directly contacted Saiful, who confirmed that he had already gone live from his personal Facebook profile to clarify the false news.



Rohingya repatriation only solution to the crisis

CA tells UNHCR representative

BSS, Dhaka

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus yesterday said the repatriation of more than one million Rohingyas to their homeland in Myanmar's Rakhine State remains the only viable and sustainable solution to the crisis.

He urged the UN refugee agency to continue its active engagement to facilitate their safe return.

The chief adviser made

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6



US Ambassador to Bangladesh Brent T Christensen pays a courtesy call on Chief of Army Staff General Waker-Uz-Zaman at the Army Headquarters yesterday. They exchange greetings and discussed ways to further strengthen the existing cordial relations between the two countries.

PHOTO: BANGLADESH ARMY

PDB overpaid BPC Tk 644cr for furnace oil

Price set above procurement cost, says PDB at BERC hearing

ASIFUR RAHMAN

The Bangladesh Power Development Board (PDB) has said it paid Tk 644 crore more than necessary to the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) for furnace oil supplied to power plants over the last one and a half years.

At a public hearing yesterday, PDB officials said BPC charged a fixed price of Tk 86 per litre during the period, despite its actual procurement cost varying between Tk 57 and Tk 83 per litre in different months.

PDB noted that 35 percent of BPC's furnace oil supply comes from the state-owned Eastern Refinery, while the remaining 65 percent is imported.

It argued that prices should be set based on a weighted average of domestic and imported costs, rather than through a fixed or arbitrary calculation.

"Furnace oil is a byproduct of crude oil and has a global benchmark price, known as Free on Board (FoB). The cost at Eastern Refinery should not exceed this, but BPC does," said Md Jahangir Alam Mollah, a PDB director, during a hearing before the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC).

He said BPC has sold furnace oil at Tk 86 per litre for a long time, while private companies imported the fuel at Tk 57 per litre in December last year.

BERC held the public hearing on furnace oil pricing for

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

'981 hurt in polls-related violence since Oct last year'

HRSS says clashes, threats, rumours fuel election-time unrest

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN and TOUSIF KAIUM

Violence has flared since campaigning began for the 13th national election on January 22, and police say arrests and cases alone will not be enough unless rival groups show restraint.

In the eight days from the start of official campaigning until yesterday, at least 19 incidents of clashes were reported across the country, according to media reports and data received from police.

A Jamaat upazila unit secretary was killed in clashes in Sherpur on Wednesday.

The incidents were triggered by local disputes, "offensive" comments on social media, and even quarrels over sitting on a chair, according to the information.

19 clashes recorded since campaigning began on Jan 22

BNP- and Jamaat-led alliances involved in most reported clashes

Police say arrests alone cannot curb poll-time violence

Experts blame weak enforcement of electoral code

Human Rights Support Society (HRSS) said in a statement yesterday that, based on information it collected from October until yesterday, at least 981 people were injured and five were killed in 113 incidents of violence across the country linked to the upcoming national elections.

HRSS said that during the campaign period, candidates' aggressive attitudes, the spread of hatred against opposition parties and other candidates, threats and intimidation, smear campaigns, falsehoods and hostile remarks are fuelling hostility and violence among party leaders, activists and supporters, which is not desirable in any way.

SEE PAGE 13 COL 1

150 agri students receive Prayash Syngenta scholarship

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 150 final-year university students from agriculture-related disciplines across Bangladesh received the Prayash Syngenta Scholarship 2025 at a certificate handover ceremony held at The Daily Star Centre yesterday.

Jointly initiated by Syngenta Bangladesh and The Daily Star, the scholarship supports academically strong and motivated students who aspire to contribute to the country's agricultural development.

Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star; Hedayet Ullah, managing director of Syngenta Bangladesh; Aasha Mehreen Amin, joint editor of The Daily Star; and Mohammed Shahidul Islam, corporate affairs and sustainability director of Syngenta Bangladesh, attended the ceremony and handed over certificates to the recipients.

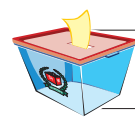
Addressing the students, Mahfuz Anam urged them to remain committed to agriculture as a field of study and profession, highlighting the growing role of technology and innovation in advancing agricultural development in Bangladesh.

Hedayet Ullah stressed the rising global demand for food production amid a rapidly growing population and the critical role future agricultural professionals will play in meeting this challenge.

This year, the programme received 760 applications from 27 universities across the country.

The selection process included multiple stages, such as academic screening and an independent review of applicants' written submissions focusing on motivation, contribution plans and potential impact.

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FEBRUARY 12 ELECTION | DHAKA-12

A battle of 'Saifuls'

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

Dhaka-12, as a constituency, can be defined by a high-density corridor where industry, commerce, and community intersect.

It is home to the high-octane Tejgaon Industrial Area, Karwan Bazar -- the country's largest wholesale hub and Dhaka's primary food lifeline, the country's largest truck stand at Tejgaon, a concentration of business headquarters rivalling that of Motijheel and Gulshan, and sprawling residential neighbourhoods.

Diverse in both character and function, Dhaka-12 is as complex as it is crowded.

A total of 15 candidates are contesting the February 12 polls, representing parties including Jamaat-e-Islami, Jatiya Party, Biplobi Workers Party, Ganosamhati Andolan, Communist Party of Bangladesh, and Gono Odhikar Parishad, among others.

The BNP has extended its support to Biplobi Workers Party General Secretary Saiful Huq in the constituency, withdrawing its own candidate, Saiful Alam Nirrob, former convener of BNP's Dhaka North City unit.

Nirrob, who faced the brunt of repression under the Awami League government, chose to stay in the race, prompting the BNP to expel him. He is now contesting the election as an independent candidate with the Football symbol.

Voters believe the real contest is among BNP rebel Saiful Alam Nirrob, Jamaat-backed Saiful Alam Khan Milon, and BNP-supported Saiful Huq, turning the race into what many are calling the "Battle of the Saifuls".

Besides the three, Taslima Akhter of Ganosamhati Andolan, Kallol Banik of the Communist Party of Bangladesh, Mohammad Shahjalal of Bangladesh Islami Front, Mominul Amin of National Democratic Movement, Tarek Rahman of Amjanatar Dal, Sarker Mohammad Salauddin of Jatiya Party, Mahmudul

Hasan of Islami Andolon Bangladesh, Farid Ahmed of Jonotar Dal, Mosammat Salma Akter of Inshaniyat Biplob Bangladesh, Muntasir Mahmud of Bangladesh Cultural Liberation Alliance (Muktijot), and Abul Bashar Chowdhury of Gono Odhikar Parishad are also contesting for the seat.

All candidates are engaged in intensive campaigning, making different promises to win over the support of the constituency's 3,33,320 voters -- 1,74,349 men and 1,58,968 women.

Talking to The Daily Star, voters identified load-shedding, mosquito menace, teen gangs, and extortion as the constituency's most pressing issues.

Major candidates have also prioritised these concerns in their election pledges.

Saiful Alam Nirrob has pledged to eliminate extortion, curb drug abuse, dismantle teen gangs, clear footpaths occupied by hawkers, vendors, floating populations and construction materials, and modernise the truck stand.

He also vowed to allocate designated days for street vendors to operate on unused roads.

"If voters elect me with the 'Football' symbol on February 12, my primary goal will be to build a modern and safe Dhaka-12," Nirrob told The Daily Star.

Nirrob expressed optimism about being elected, but voiced concern over the use of muscle power and election-centric violence.

Jamaat candidate Saiful Alam Milon also voiced hope, saying people want change and will vote for Jamaat to bring it.

Talking about his party's pledges, he said Jamaat, if voted to power, would create employment for 50 lakh youths in its first year at the country's helm.

He also spoke of skill development programmes for educated youth, upgrading colleges into universities,

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



Saiful Alam Nirrob

Saiful Huq

Saiful Alam Milon

BNP rebel

BNP-backed

Jamaat

'January saw 42 communal attacks'

Says Oikya Parishad, places seven demands

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 42 incidents of communal violence, including 11 killings and one rape, were reported across the country in January, raising concerns about the safety of religious and ethnic minorities ahead of the upcoming national election, said Hindu-Buddha-Christian Oikya Parishad yesterday.

The incidents, recorded up to January 27, also included nine attacks on temples and churches, and 21 cases of attacks, looting, land grabbing, and vandalism of minority homes and businesses, the organisation said at a press conference at the Jatiya Press Club.

DEMANDS

- ❶ Level playing field for minority candidates, voters
- ❷ Ban on use of religion, communal sentiment in campaigns
- ❸ Adequate law enforcement, including army, if needed
- ❹ Declare minority-dominated areas risk-prone

In a written statement, the organisation's acting general secretary Monindra Kumar Nath said the organisation documented a total of 522 incidents nationwide over the last year.

These included 61 killings; 28 incidents of violence against women, including rape and gang rape; 95 attacks on places of worship involving vandalism, looting, and arson; 102 attacks on homes and business establishments; 38 cases of abduction, extortion, and torture; 47 incidents of threats and physical assaults; 36 arrests and torture on allegations of religious blasphemy; and 66 cases of forcible occupation of land, homes, and businesses.

He said members of minority communities

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A total of 150 agriculture students received the Prayash Syngenta Scholarship 2025 at a certificate handover ceremony held at The Daily Star Centre yesterday. Jointly initiated by Syngenta Bangladesh and The Daily Star, the scholarship supports those who aspire to contribute to the country's agricultural development.

PHOTO: STAR

Submit probe report on Hadi murder by February 3

Court asks CID

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday asked the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) to submit a probe report by February 3 in a case filed over the killing of Inqilab Moncho spokesperson Sharif Osman Hadi.

Dhaka Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Awlad Hossain Muhammad Zonaid passed the order after the CID failed to submit the report yesterday, said a police officer working at the court.

On January 25, the court directed the CID to submit the report by yesterday, he added.

On December 12 last year, Hadi, an independent aspirant for the Dhaka-8

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A battle of 'Saifuls'

FROM PAGE 3
establishing medical colleges in every district, and promoting moral education.

On women, the Jamaat candidate said his party will ensure their education, employment, and security, with a zero-tolerance policy against violence and harassment.

At the local level, Milton said his priorities include stopping extortion and drug abuse, resolving gas shortages, addressing waterlogging and ensuring public safety.

Meanwhile, talking to this newspaper, BNP-backed candidate Saiful Huq accused Nirob and his supporters of obstructing his campaign.

Expressing confidence, Huq said he is receiving a strong response from voters.

Like his rivals, Huq pledged to tackle extortion, drug abuse and illegal occupation, and promised to make the constituency business-friendly and livable by resolving water, gas, electricity and sewerage issues.

Bangladesh Garment Sramik Samhati President Taslima Akhter, vying for the constituency under the banner of Ganosamhati Andolan, called for a peaceful democratic transition.

She emphasised women's empowerment and a labour-friendly environment, pledging to continue her struggle on both fronts.

Nargis, a middle-aged woman who has been selling rice cakes (pithas)

in Tejgaon for nearly a decade, said she is eager to vote after many years.

"My vote is my right, and I will vote for the most suitable candidate," she said while talking to The Daily Star.

She hoped for a positive change through the February 12 election, and demanded an end to extortion from whoever wins this seat.

Mojibur Rahman, a 43-year-old private-sector employee, said he is satisfied with the election environment and hopes for a fair polls.

Citing load shedding, drugs and teen gangs as key problems, he said the next government must ensure security, improve law and order and control the prices of essentials.

Businessman Rezaul of Poschim Rajabazar and Giasuddin Torofdar, secretary of the Manipuri Para Welfare Association, identified mosquito, rickety footpaths, and sewerage problems as the main issues of the constituency.

Both hope these problems will be resolved by the next elected government.

This newspaper also spoke with some Hindu voters in Shahinbag Hindupara, who said the election lacks the festive atmosphere seen around previous times.

"The country's current situation is complicated, and the coming days may get worse. But we want peace and to build the nation together," said one voter, requesting anonymity.

Submit probe

FROM PAGE 3
constituency, was shot in Dhaka's Paltan area while campaigning. He died on December 18 while undergoing treatment in Singapore.

On December 14, Inqilab Moncho Member Secretary Abdullah Al Jaber filed an attempted murder case with Paltan Model Police Station against Faisal and several unnamed individuals, which later turned into a murder case.

On January 6 this year, investigation officer Faisal Ahmed, an inspector at the Detective Branch of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police, submitted a charge sheet in the case before the court, naming prime accused Faisal Karim Masud, four of his family members, and 12 others.

On January 15, the complainant, Abdullah Al Jaber, filed a no-confidence (naraji) petition with the court, rejecting the probe report.

After granting the petition, the court directed the CID to conduct further investigation into the case.

150 agri

FROM PAGE 3
Following the evaluation, 150 students from 13 universities were selected.

The review process was conducted by a panel of academics from different institutions to ensure transparency and fairness.

The complete list of scholarship recipients is available at: <https://prayahscholarship.thedailystar.net/winners>.

The initiative reflects a shared commitment to investing in young talent and supporting the future of agriculture in Bangladesh.

PDB overpaid BPC

FROM PAGE 3
the first time.

PDB is the main consumer of BPC's furnace oil, which is used in government-run oil-fired power plants.

The country currently has 5,634 megawatts of furnace oil-based power generation capacity, about 20 percent of total capacity. BPC sells around 8-9 lakh tonnes of furnace oil annually.

Of this, about 1,200MW of capacity is government-owned and fully dependent on BPC. In the 2024-25 fiscal year, the unit cost of electricity from these plants was Tk 27.39 per kilowatt-hour, compared to an average generation cost of Tk 12.98 per kWh.

Despite receiving Tk 38,637 crore in government subsidies that year, PDB incurred a loss of Tk 17,021 crore. In contrast, BPC posted a profit of Tk 4,316 crore from oil sales to PDB.

"PDB remains in loss as electricity is sold below production cost. The loss increases when furnace oil is bought at a higher rate from a government agency," PDB said.

PDB proposed fixing the furnace oil price at Tk 50.83 per litre, based on a weighted average of BPC's local production and import costs.

BPC proposed reducing the price by Tk 5 to Tk 81 per litre, based on Platts rates from October to December last year.

Meanwhile, BERC's technical evaluation committee recommended

a price of Tk 74.04 per litre.

PDB Chairman Md Rezaul Karim said power generation costs are rising due to high fuel prices, adding that adjustments are needed to protect consumers.

"We do not want any company to become unprofitable, but it is not right for one company to make a profit at the expense of another," he said.

BPC General Manager (Accounts) ATM Selim said the global price cited by PDB does not include additional costs such as duties and charges.

BPC and three distributor companies -- Padma, Meghna, Jamuna, as well as Standard Asiatic Oil Company also proposed higher distribution margins, claiming furnace oil sales are loss-making despite overall profitability.

During cross-examination, the companies acknowledged distributing profit bonuses and dividends of up to 180 percent to shareholders.

"Most earnings came from non-operating segments, not from core business," a BPC representative said.

BERC Chairman Abdul Jailil said a decision would be made after reviewing all data and evidence to ensure no party gains unfairly.

Written submissions will be accepted until February 3, after which BERC will announce its decision.

January saw

FROM PAGE 3
wants to exercise their civic rights through voting, but their fears regarding life, livelihood, property, and dignity remain unaddressed.

"The responsibility for any discouragement of minority voters must be borne by the government, the administration, the Election Commission, and political parties," Nath said.

He also criticised the introduction of 'Yes' and 'No' votes under the referendum system, claiming it excluded secularism as a fundamental principle of state governance.

"The government and the Election Commission are directly campaigning in favour of this, which is sorrowful, unfortunate, and clearly biased," he said.

The Oikya Parishad placed seven demands, including ensuring a level playing field for minority candidates and voters; banning the use of religion and communal sentiments in campaigns; deploying adequate law enforcement, and if necessary the army; and declaring minority-dominated areas as risk-prone zones with enhanced monitoring.

It also called for a strict ban on election campaigning at places of worship and demanded that hate speech, incitement, and the spread of communal rumours be treated as criminal offences under special laws.

The organisation urged the Election Commission and relevant authorities to act decisively to restore confidence among minority voters ahead of the polls.

Jamaat, NCP tug

FROM PAGE 5
supporters have been chanting boycott slogans against the NCP.

"Jamaat activists and supporters have been continuing this opposition both on social media and in public. Jamaat still has not officially campaigned for the NCP candidate," said Rokibul Hasan, chief election agent of the NCP candidate and coordinator of the party's Boalkhali unit.

"Instead of cooperation from our alliance partner Jamaat, we are facing opposition. We have already informed the central leaders of the alliance about these issues," he added.

Chattogram - 8 constituency has 5,49,136 registered voters and 179 polling stations. A total of seven candidates are contesting the seat.

The BNP candidate is Ershad Ullah, president of Chattogram City BNP.

During visits to the constituency over the past two days, voters said they remained unclear about the candidate representing

the II party alliance. Tarek Bin Sagir, a voter from Chandgaon, told The Daily Star, "We want to support the anti-fascist forces in the upcoming polls but remain uncertain whom to vote for, as two candidates associated with the July movement appear to be contesting from the same alliance."

Saimun Sultana Priya, a homemaker from Gomdandi in Boalkhali, said, "I heard that the Jamaat candidate has withdrawn. But people on Facebook and elsewhere are saying he might return to the race. So we are confused about who the alliance's candidate actually is."

Contacted, alliance candidate Arif said he has yet to receive any support from Jamaat.

"Local Jamaat leaders approached our leaders in Boalkhali seeking permission for their candidate to contest this seat, but the NCP central leadership did not approve it," he said.

He said he hopes Jamaat will join his campaign soon.

Women can't be

FROM PAGE 5
The interviewer pointed out that women had served as prime ministers of Bangladesh, saying, "So clearly women are capable of leadership positions."

Shafiqur reiterated his stance, "Even most of the countries in the world did not consider this feasible. This is the reality of the world."

Jamaat was a key partner in the coalition government led by the BNP, which was headed by Khaleda Zia, who served as prime minister for three terms.

When asked if he thought Khaleda did a good job as prime minister, Shafiqur refrained from a direct assessment. "It's not our decision; it's their party decision."

"We should respect the party opinion. We cannot impose anything upon anyone."

Asked about the five-hour work time proposal for women, he said, "I said a mother who is looking after children and also spending the same amount of time working with gentlemen, it is no justice... at least during the lactating period. In this period, they have to be shown honour. Some sisters, they feel it is not possible to continue the job, so they gave up the job. But if you reduce the hours for a certain period... it is not mandatory for all. It is optional."

When Srinivasan

asked, "So this is for lactating women only?", he responded, "Basically that. But if some lady says 'no, I want to do the eight-hour duty', then no problem. It's an option... Maternity leave is only for six months. It's not sufficient, we feel."

The interviewer raised the question of cultural rights and media freedom, highlighting the "provocative" calls of Jamaat's student leaders at universities against media houses and cultural institutions, including Prothom Alo, The Daily Star, Chhayanaut and Udichi Shilpogoshi -- all of whom were attacked last month.

At that, Shafiqur said, "But you have not observed the statements of the party... We have already condemned it, we never supported it."

Claiming that his party and the student wing Islami Chhatra Shibir have distanced themselves from those who made the calls, he said, "Chhatra Shibir will decide what move to make [against them]. It is not our matter... Please ask them... We can give only our opinion or suggestion."

Asma's quiet

FROM PAGE 5
candidate campaigning this way made people take notice. "We don't usually see women candidates walking around with a small group. It made us stop and listen," he said.

At around 12:30pm, Asma held a small roadside rally at the Bahaddarhat junction to reach floating voters. Her campaign materials were modest: a hand mic, a poster bearing her name and symbol, and leaflets outlining her message.

Addressing the gathering, she spoke about issues affecting ordinary people, including access to health services, quality education and fair wages for workers.

"I don't have the money or manpower to organise large rallies or processions," Asma said. "But I believe real politics is about speaking to people directly."

In Chattogram-10, there are 4,86,316 registered voters and 139 polling centres. Nine candidates are contesting the seat, including BNP's Saeed Al Noman and Jamaat-e-Islami's Shamsuzzaman

Helaly.

Later in the afternoon, Asma and her team held a small street-corner meeting in Sholoshohor. Speaking to residents, she said she was seeking votes to fight fascism and work towards a fair and equal society.

Chattogram-10 comprises eight wards of the Chattogram City Corporation, covering parts of Double Mooring, Halishahar and Khulshi.

Asma said women candidates often face additional barriers in politics. "Women rarely get space in this system. The field is not equal. That is why I prefer to stay on the ground and talk to voters myself," she said.

The constituency has previously been represented by the late BNP vice chairman Abdullah Al Noman, who later served as a minister. It is home to industrial factories, key railway facilities and several elite residential neighbourhoods.

In this constituency, another woman candidate, Sabina Khatun of Insaniyat Biplob Bangladesh, is also contesting.

A daughter

FROM PAGE 5
Speaking about the election atmosphere, Habiba said the contest lacks a level playing field. "In football there are 11 players. I am playing without a goalkeeper -- you can understand what that means," she said.

She said she finds encouragement when voters respond positively as she asks for their support. "I left my own daughter in Dhaka. Daughters are closest to their fathers -- that's why I came out to seek votes for mine," she added.

Habiba also spoke about the deployment of army personnel in Babuganj and Muladi. "I welcomed it for the safety and security of the people and the protection of polling centres," she said.

"People are our strength -- people are my strength," she said. "I have appealed to them, saying: I am your daughter. Please give your vote to my father and help bring him back to you."

Later in the day, she was seen travelling by trawler along the banks of the Sugandha river, continuing her door-to-door outreach in riverside villages as part of the campaign.

Putul's doorstep

FROM PAGE 5
had previously listened to her problems. "I have no one to turn to, and I do not even have a social allowance card. For the first time, I am able to share my struggles," she said.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Putul said many elderly residents had raised similar concerns about the absence of social safety net cards. She said she had assured them of working to address the issue if elected.

Natore-1, which has around 3.68 lakh voters, continues to grapple with long-standing problems, including poor communication infrastructure in rural and char areas. The lack of industrial development has also limited employment opportunities for local residents.


Putul said that if elected, she would prioritise infrastructure development in remote areas, including canal excavation for irrigation and improved drainage to address waterlogging.

She also pledged to work towards industrial development to create jobs for the local workforce.

As a woman campaigning in a male-dominated political environment, Putul said she has faced verbal harassment. Recently, a local leader backing a rival candidate was expelled from the BNP for making derogatory remarks about her.

Putul acknowledged that she has been subjected to bullying during the campaign but said she remains undeterred. She said criticism is inevitable in public life and that she is focused on moving forward.

The Natore-1 race has drawn nine candidates. Putul's main challenger is Taiful Islam Tipu, a former central BNP leader contesting the seat as an independent candidate. With several pro-BNP leaders reportedly supporting his campaign, the contest remains a difficult one for the first-time candidate.



INDEPENDENT UNIVERSITY, BANGLADESH

Planning & Development Department

INVITATION FOR TENDER

1. Sealed Bids are hereby invited from the Bonafide Contractors / Vendors for "Construction of Rest House, Open Shed & related facilities" at Kaliakoir Land of IUB, Gazipur. The bidders shall be required to submit a complete offer in two separate envelopes, one for the Technical Offer while the second envelope shall contain the sealed Financial Offer.
2. Interested bidders shall apply in their official letter heads to the undersigned along with the following documents:
 - i. Updated Trade License, latest Income Tax Clearance Certificate, VAT Registration Certificates & Ownership evidence of the Company / Firm.
 - ii. Experience certificate of similar type of work (with minimum Tk. 1.5 crore in single Work Order over a period of 5 years).
 - iii. Certificate of General Experience at 5 years in Civil & Steel Structure Construction.
3. Interested bidders are requested to collect the Bid Documents from the Office of the Dy. Director and Head, P&D, IUB, between 10:30 AM to 3:00 PM up to Tuesday, 17th February 2026 on payment of a non-refundable amount of Tk. 1,000/- (Taka one thousand) only in cash.
4. A Pre-bid Meeting with the intended bidders will be held on Tuesday, 10th February 2026, at 11:30 AM at the Office of the Dy. Director and Head, P&D.
5. The Bids will be received at the Office of the Dy. Director and Head, P&D up to 1:00 PM of Thursday, 19th February 2026 and the Technical Offers shall be opened at 01:30 PM on the same day and at the same place, in presence of the bidders who may wish to attend the Tender Opening.
6. The Financial Offers of the technically responsive bidders shall be opened separately with due notification to the respective bidders
7. All bidders should mention their contact number, email address & website address (if any) clearly in the forwarding letter of the Tender.
8. The bidders shall furnish an earnest money, equivalent to 2.5% of the bid amount in favour of Independent University, Bangladesh, in the form of Bank Draft/Pay Order from a scheduled Bank of Bangladesh.
9. IUB Authority reserves the right to accept or reject any or all tenders without assigning any reasons whatsoever.

Engr. Kazi Din Muhammed
Dy. Director and Head, Planning & Development
Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB), Plot-16, Block-B, Bashundhara, Dhaka

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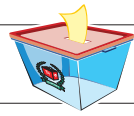
সরকারি অনুদানে পূর্ণদৈর্ঘ্য ও স্বল্পদৈর্ঘ্য চলচ্চিত্র নির্মাণের জন্য প্রস্তাব জমাদানের সময় বৃদ্ধি

চলচ্চিত্র শিল্পে মেধা ও সৃজনশীলতাকে উৎসাহিত করা এবং বাংলাদেশের সকল জনগোষ্ঠীর আবহমান সংস্কৃতির প্রতিনিধিত্ব করার লক্ষ্যে মানবিক মূল্যবোধ সম্পন্ন, জীবনমুখী, শিল্পমান সমৃদ্ধ ও বহুসর বিবৃত করে এমন পূর্ণদৈর্ঘ্য ও স্বল্পদৈর্ঘ্য চলচ্চিত্র নির্মাণের জন্য ২০২৫-২৬ অর্থবছরে সরকারি অনুদান প্রদানের উদ্দেশ্যে কাহিনী ও চিত্রনাট্য বাছাইয়ের জন্য প্রযোজক/পরিচালক/চলচ্চিত্র নির্মাতা/চলচ্চিত্র ব্যক্তিত্ব/সংশ্লিষ্ট বিষয়ে পেশাদার প্রতিষ্ঠান/লেখক/চিত্রনাট্যকারদের নিকট থেকে পূর্ণাঙ্গ প্যাকেজ প্রস্তাব জমাদানের নিমিত্ত কতিপয় শর্তে গত ০৯ জানুয়ারি ২০২৬ তারিখে বিজ্ঞপ্তি প্রকাশ করা হয়। পূর্ণাঙ্গ প্যাকেজ প্রস্তাব জমাদানের শেষ সময় ২৯ জানুয়ারি ২০২৬ তারিখ নির্ধারিত ছিল।

০২। বিজ্ঞপ্তিতে উল্লিখিত শর্তাবলী অপরিবর্তিত রেখে পূর্ণাঙ্গ প্যাকেজ প্রস্তাব জমাদানের সময়সীমা ০১ মার্চ ২০২৬ তারিখ পর্যন্ত বৃদ্ধি করা হলো। পূর্ণদৈর্ঘ্য ও স্বল্পদৈর্ঘ্য চলচ্চিত্র নির্মাণের জন্য অনুদান প্রাপ্তির লক্ষ্যে গল্প, চিত্রনাট্য এবং চলচ্চিত্র নির্মাণের সার্বিক পরিকল্পনাসহ পূর্ণাঙ্গ প্যাকেজ প্রস্তাব আগামী ০১ মার্চ ২০২৬ তারিখ বিকাল ৫:০০ ঘটিকার মধ্যে তথ্য ও সম্প্রচার মন্ত্রণালয়ের চলচ্চিত্র-২ শাখায় (রুম নং-৮০৮) পৌঁছাতে হবে।


 মোহাঃ শারমিন আখতার
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GD-221



FEBRUARY 12 ELECTION

As the February 12 national election draws closer, these three stories spotlight women navigating the campaign trail in markedly different circumstances. In Chattogram-10, Asma Akter's low-key, on-foot outreach cuts through a culture of loud processions. In Natore-1, first-time BNP candidate Farzana Sharmin Putul takes politics to doorsteps, building trust through personal connection. In Barishal-3, Habiba Kibria campaigns in place of her jailed father, appealing to voters as a daughter rather than a politician.



Asma's quiet presence on Ctg's busy roads

SIFAYET ULLAH, Ctg

At around 11:30am yesterday, a group of five stepped down from a CNG auto-rickshaw at the Badurtala Boro Garage intersection in Chattogram. Two men and three women stood briefly by the roadside. One young man carried a hand microphone and a poster, while the others held leaflets.

The woman leading the group walked up to passers-by and asked for their support. She was Asma Akter, a candidate of the Socialist Party of Bangladesh (Marxist), contesting the Chattogram-10 constituency.

In a seat where electioneering is usually dominated by large processions, blaring microphones and show-of-strength rallies, Asma's quiet, on-foot campaign drew attention.

With limited resources and a small team, she has been canvassing on foot for the past eight days, distributing leaflets and speaking directly to voters at street corners and busy intersections.

"She came quietly and talked to us. That felt different," said Enayet Hossen, a rickshaw puller who paused to take a leaflet from her.

Asma faces multiple challenges, including a lack of funds, minimal organisational backing and a political culture where visibility is often measured by the size of rallies and the volume of slogans.

"Most campaigns here are about showing power," said Mohammed Ibrahim, a local resident and voter in the Badurtala area.

Abdul Kader, a vehicle mechanic and voter, said the sight of a woman

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

Putul's doorstep campaign in Natore-1

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, from Lalpur, Natore

Farzana Sharmin Putul is taking a personal approach to campaigning in Natore-1 ahead of the February 12 parliamentary election, presenting herself to voters not as a traditional political figure but as someone they can relate to and confide in.

A BNP-nominated candidate for

group of associates.

The Daily Star followed her campaign from noon to evening on Wednesday as she visited Balitita Islampur, Ulipara, Sontoshpur and Ramanandapur.

In each village, she interacted with residents and sought votes for the sheaf of paddy symbol, promising development in what she described as a long-neglected area.



the Natore-1 constituency, Putul is a Supreme Court lawyer and the daughter of late BNP minister Fazlur Rahman Patal.

The sole female BNP nominee in the Rajshahi division, Putul is contesting the Natore-1 seat for the first time. Her campaign, however, faces a significant hurdle from a rebel candidate, even as she continues canvassing with a small

Arriving in Balitita Islampur by car, Putul proceeded on foot through dilapidated rural roads. She appeared particularly well received by women and children. Beyond routine campaign exchanges, she entered homes and listened to personal accounts of hardship.

A 70-year-old widow from Ulipur village said no elected representative

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



A daughter's campaign to free her father from jail

SUSHANTA GHOSH, Barishal

From local markets to village haats and riverside communities, Habiba Kibria has been carrying a single appeal to voters in Barishal -- "Your one vote can bring my father back to you."

Habiba, the daughter of Jatiya Party presidium member and Barishal-3 (Babuganj-Muladi) candidate Golam Kibria Tipu, has been campaigning on his behalf as he remains in jail for more than 14 months in connection with multiple cases.

On Thursday, around 1:00pm, she was seen campaigning on foot at the market of Rautakathi union in Babuganj upazila. Accompanied by seven to eight local party activists, she moved slowly through the market, stopping to speak with small traders and shoppers, seeking their

prayers and votes for the plough symbol.

In Tipu's absence, Habiba has taken to the field, appealing to voters on both political and personal grounds.

"From morning, I go from local market to haat, from house to house -- not just to reach homes, but to reach people's hearts," Habiba said. "I convey my father's salam and ask them to help by voting for the plough."

Referring to her father's political career, Habiba said he had been elected MP three times and worked for the development of the area. "During his time, no one was harassed. But after August 5, people have faced extortion and harassment, and they are living in fear," she claimed.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

Strict action if polls officials show bias

Warns home adviser

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Home Adviser Jahangir Alam Chowdhury

yesterday warned that the government would take strict departmental and legal action if evidence is found that anyone engaged in election duty worked in favour of any candidate or sought to implement any party agenda.

Jahangir said government employees are not members of any political party, but salaried state officials appointed with taxpayers' money.

"Therefore, even the slightest bias or biased behaviour towards any political party will not be tolerated," he said at a meeting at the Bangladesh Police Auditorium in Rajarbagh, organised by the home ministry and the Dhaka divisional commissioner's office.



CHATTOGRAM-8 (BOALKHALI-CHANDGAON) Jamaat, NCP tug-of-war leaves voters puzzled

SIFAYET ULLAH, Ctg

Voters in Chattogram-8 (Boalkhali-Chandgaon) are growing increasingly confused as tensions between Jamaat-e-Islami and its alliance partner National Citizen Party (NCP) intensify, disrupting coordinated campaigning and creating uncertainty at the grassroots ahead of the polls.

Although Jobairul Hasan Arif of the NCP has received the alliance's nomination for the seat, seven days into his campaign, Jamaat leaders and supporters are reportedly trying to bring back their withdrawn candidate, Abu Naser, into the race.

They have also carried out activities, including chanting slogans, to openly boycott the NCP.

"Abu Naser is a widely popular figure

who has been working in the area for 30 years. That is why we are trying to convince the party leadership to bring him back," Dr Khorshed Alam, ameer

KEY ISSUES

- NCP-Jamaat discord disrupts joint campaigning
- Jamaat supporters seek return of withdrawn candidate
- Alliance candidate yet to receive Jamaat support

of Jamaat-e-Islami in Boalkhali upazila, told The Daily Star.

Other alliance partners withdrew after the submission of nomination

papers, but the Jamaat candidate did not, meaning his name remains on the ballot. However, Jamaat has officially confirmed the withdrawal of its candidate through a press conference.

Khorshed said they are neither opposing nor campaigning. "Our manpower is not active. We are waiting because we are hopeful that our candidate, Abu Naser, will be allowed to contest this seat," he said.

Meanwhile, the constituency has increasingly turned into a battleground of verbal exchanges between NCP and Jamaat supporters.

To address the situation, the NCP has already held two press conferences.

NCP leaders and activists alleged that, although the Jamaat candidate has stayed off the campaign trail, his

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

'Women can't be at Jamaat helm'

Shafiqur cites religious, biological limitations in Al Jazeera interview

STAR REPORT

Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman has said women cannot lead the party, citing religious obligations and biological limitations.

In an interview with Al Jazeera's Srinivasan Jain, Shafiqur was asked whether a woman could ever head the party. He responded, "It's not possible. It's not possible because Allah made everyone in its own entity. Because you [a man] will never be able to bear a child."

Further clarifying his response, he said, men will never be able to breastfeed a child. "This is God-given. And there are some differences between men and women. What Allah made, we cannot change it."

Al Jazeera uploaded the full interview on YouTube yesterday.

Asked how many women candidates the Jamaat-e-Islami has fielded for the national polls, Shafiqur replied, "Not a single one."

However, he said it is a matter of timing and the country's political culture. "But we are preparing."

"You will not see any substantial number [of women] in other parties also, because this is the cultural entity in Bangladesh. [But] we are getting prepared for that."

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7



Mamunul warns against bid to derail polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Mamunul Haque, the 11-party alliance candidate for the Dhaka-13 constituency and ameer of Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, yesterday demanded justice for the killing of a local Jamaat-e-Islami leader in Sherpur.

Condemning the incident, he said the situation must be handled with patience and restraint, warning that no conspiracy to derail the election should be allowed to succeed. He made the remarks in Dhaka during a "Jagarani Padayatra" organised as part of his election campaign.

Mamunul said the public hacking to death of a Jamaat activist in Sherpur was a deeply tragic incident. "We never wish for such violence. We demand that the perpetrators be identified through a prompt and impartial investigation and brought to justice," he said.

He criticised the Election Commission and the BNP over the incident, alleging failure to act. "The lack of any legal action or arrests so far reflects the Election Commission's failure. The BNP also bears responsibility. As a major political party, they were expected to act responsibly, but they are not doing so," he said.



PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

With the national election less than two weeks away, banners and posters of candidates have sprung up across the port city. However, most of the candidates are breaching the electoral code of conduct by either using multi-colour banners or photographs other than party leaders. Many of these banners are also tied to electric poles, which is also banned. The photo

FACT-CHECKED ✓

Claim of Sherpur Jubo Dal leader's death false

Dismislab confirms

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Fact-checking organisation Dismislab has debunked recent social media claims that Saiful Islam, joint convener of Sherpur's Jhenaigati unit Jubo Dal, was killed following a clash between Jamaat and BNP activists in Sherpur.

WHAT THE CLAIM SAID

On December 29, a Facebook account named Daliaa Rahman posted a video with the caption: "Saiful Islam, joint convener of Jubo Dal in Jhenaigati, Sherpur, has just died after being attacked by Jamaat." The post quickly received

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

Ukraine receives 1,000 bodies from Russia

EU warns drone, missile strikes push Ukraine towards 'humanitarian catastrophe'

AFP, Kyiv

Kyiv said yesterday that it had received from Russia 1,000 remains of people that Moscow said were Ukrainian soldiers killed fighting the Kremlin's army.

The exchange of prisoners of war and the remains of killed soldiers is one of the few remaining areas of cooperation between Kyiv and Moscow, which invaded Ukraine in February 2022.

"Today, repatriation measures took place, under which 1,000 bodies of the deceased, which the Russian side claims belong to Ukrainian defenders, were returned to Ukraine," Kyiv's Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War, said in a statement on social media.

Kremlin aide Vladimir Medinsky confirmed an exchange had taken place, writing on Telegram that the Russian side had received the remains of 38 killed Russian soldiers.

Meanwhile, EU top diplomat Kaja Kallas warned yesterday that Ukraine was facing a "humanitarian catastrophe" as Russian strikes cut power in frigid winter conditions.

Kallas said that despite US-led talks to end the war in Abu Dhabi Russia was "bombing Ukrainians, trying to bomb and freeze them to surrender".

"It's a very hard winter and Ukrainians are really suffering. There is a humanitarian catastrophe coming there," she said at the start of an EU meeting in Brussels.

Russia has stepped up its strikes against Ukraine's power and heating infrastructure, plunging residents into darkness and cold as temperatures have dropped as low as -20C.

The EU is looking to step up support for Ukraine's power grid and is preparing a new round of sanctions on Moscow for the fourth anniversary of its invasion next month.



Mourners carry the body of a Palestinian, who medics said was killed by Israeli gunfire, during a funeral at Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday. Health officials said Israeli fire killed at least two Palestinians.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Iran ready for all military scenarios

Says IRGC as EU, Trump intensify pressure

AGENCIES

Iran's elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) said yesterday the country's armed forces are fully prepared to respond to any military scenario, according to Iran's state news agency IRNA.

Quoting IRGC spokesperson Brigadier General Ali Mohammad Naeini, IRNA reported that detailed action plans are in place to counter what Tehran describes as hostile moves by its adversaries, including

potential military action.

Naeini accused the United States of waging psychological warfare against Iran in recent days, saying Washington has relied on coercion and intimidation to spread fear among the Iranian public.

Iran's army yesterday added 1,000 drones to its combat regiments as its chief vowed a "crushing response" to any attack, state television reported.

European Union foreign ministers, meanwhile, adopted new sanctions on

Iran yesterday targeting individuals and entities involved in a violent crackdown on protesters and in the country's support to Russia, EU diplomats said.

The ministers are also expected to reach a political agreement to include Iran's IRGC on the bloc's list of terrorist organisations.

Turkey will offer to mediate between Washington and Tehran during a visit by Iran's foreign minister today, officials said, as Ankara considers reinforcing security along its border should the dispute escalate.

Venezuela police, military back interim president

Rubio upbeat on co-op

AFP, Caracas

Venezuela's military and police pledged loyalty Wednesday to interim president Delcy Rodriguez, whom the United States kept in power after ousting Nicolas Maduro.

The pledge signifies the support of a key bastion behind Maduro -- the military -- as he braved US pressure and sanctions against his leftwing regime since succeeding Hugo Chavez in 2013.

As Rodriguez tries to shore up support for her leadership, the 56-year-old is walking a tight wire, seeking to please both Maduro loyalists and US President Donald Trump.



"We swear absolute loyalty and subordination," said Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino, who presented Rodriguez with the ceremonial baton and sword of independence hero Simon Bolivar.

Venezuela's powerful interior minister, Diosdado Cabello, pledged loyalty on behalf of police forces. The pledge came as more than 3,000 troops and police in uniform filed past Venezuela's first female leader and commander in chief.

Meanwhile, Venezuela's main opposition leader on Wednesday cast doubt on the trustworthiness of Rodriguez, whom Washington is working with following a military intervention.

BNP, Jamaat trade blame

FROM PAGE 1

On Wednesday afternoon, Rezaul Karim, 42, secretary of Jamaat's Sreebordi upazila unit, was killed in a clash between activists of BNP and Jamaat in Jhenaigati upazila over taking the front-row seats at a programme at the Jhenaigati upazila Mini Stadium.

Over 50 people were also injured on both sides. UNO Ashraful was scheduled to preside over the event.

The body of Rezaul was scheduled to be buried in his village home at Gopalkhilar villager in Sreebordi upazila yesterday night. Victim's father Abdul Aziz said, "My son was very humble. Why was my son killed in such a way? He committed no crime, yet he was killed. I want a proper investigation and justice."

Neighbours also demanded exemplary punishment for those involved in the murder.

Abdur Rahim Dulal, convener of Sreebordi upazila BNP, said Rezaul was a good soul who lost his life to political violence, calling the incident shocking.

Expressing deep shock and sympathy for the bereaved family, Azharul Islam, ameer of Sreebordi upazila Jamaat, also demanded punishment for the killers.

Quoting doctors, Nazrul Islam, in-charge of police camp at Mymensingh Medical College Hospital, said it was primarily known that the Jamaat leader died due to repeated blows to the head from blunt objects.

The actual cause of the death would be known after getting the post mortem report, he added.

Meanwhile, EC Senior Secretary Akhtar Ahmed, at a press briefing in its headquarters in Dhaka, said the electoral code of conduct clearly states that campaigns, including manifesto

unveiling, must be held in a cordial environment. "Unfortunately, a tragic incident occurred there [Jhenaigati]. As part of administrative measures, the UNO and OC have been withdrawn."

Meanwhile, the Jamaat-led II-party electoral alliance yesterday alleged that members of the administration and law enforcement agencies remained inactive during the clashes, adding that the situation would not have escalated if timely action had been taken.

It also accused local BNP leaders and activists of instigating the violence and demanded an investigation into what it described as the "failure" of the upazila administration, calling for immediate remedial measures.

The allegations were made at a press conference held on behalf of the alliance at Jamaat's central office in Dhaka's Moghbazar.

Addressing the briefing, Jamaat Assistant Secretary General and head of its central publicity department Ahsanul Mahboob Zubair said the incident has dimmed the festive atmosphere ahead of the election.

However, Mahdi Amin, spokesperson for BNP Election Steering Committee, described the clash as "unwarranted" and called for a quick and impartial probe.

Speaking at a press conference at the BNP Election Office in Dhaka's Gulshan, Mahdi said several questions need to be examined to determine how the incident unfolded and whether it could have been avoided.

"Why did one party occupy all the chairs before the scheduled time? Why were sticks and batons brought there? And why did that party's candidate choose confrontation despite repeated requests?"

he said, adding that these issues must be properly investigated.

Mahdi said the local administration organised the programme in Sherpur with the participation of all candidates, and seating arrangements had been allocated for each party.

He alleged that Jamaat leaders and activists occupied all the chairs and prevented BNP leaders and activists from sitting in their designated seats, despite repeated requests from the administration.

Mahdi said questions had naturally arisen over how the clash began, who was responsible, and why the administration and law enforcement agencies failed to keep the situation under control.

Referring to video clips circulating on social media, he said they showed repeated requests by police, administration officials, law enforcers, army personnel and even BNP leaders, asking the Jamaat candidate not to take a particular route.

"Despite that, he decided to go that way and was repeatedly heard saying, 'Let life be lost if it must be.'"

Meanwhile, the government expressed deep concern over the violence, describing the loss of life as "completely unacceptable and deeply regrettable."

In a statement, the chief adviser's press wing said police have launched an investigation into the clashes and killing, and that all those involved would be brought to justice. Security in the district has also been beefed up.

With the national election just two weeks away, the government urged all political parties, including BNP and Jamaat, to demonstrate responsible leadership and ensure restraint among their supporters.

[Our Mymensingh correspondent contributed to this report]

Apologise

FROM PAGE 2

Without naming any party directly, Fakhru said, those responsible should apologise for their actions during the Liberation War, admit their mistakes, and then seek votes from the people.

"But instead, they are now abusing us and questioning why we fought the Liberation War in 1971."

The BNP leader emphasised the importance of freedom and patriotism, recalling that former president Ziaur Rahman declared independence and Khaleda Zia upheld the same flag.

"Today, Tarique Rahman is carrying that flag, and we will continue to move forward with it."

He added that in the election, which is only days away, "failing to make the right choice would lead to

further suffering".

Saying the party had nationwide popularity, Fakhru expressed confidence that BNP would form the government.

He also sought votes for himself personally from the residents of Thakurgaon-1 and made promises of various development initiatives.

"If you elect me... I will create job opportunities and set up agro-based industries, an EPZ, a medical college, a university, and an airport.

"To achieve all this, there is no alternative to the sheaf of paddy."

He stressed the need to guide students in the right direction as a key step toward the country's development.

Local BNP leaders were present during the electioneering programme.

Remain strictly

FROM PAGE 2

importance of discipline, patience, and citizen-friendly conduct.

He inspected the activities of army personnel deployed under the "in aid to the civil power" arrangement and provided necessary operational directives on the ground, the ISPR said.

Those present during the visit included the General Officer Commanding of the Army Training and Doctrine Command, the GOC of

the 10 Infantry Division and Cox's Bazar Area Commander, the Air Officer Commanding of Bangladesh Air Force Base Cox's Bazar, the military secretary to the army chief, and other senior officers from Army Headquarters and the Cox's Bazar Area.

The Chattogram divisional commissioner, senior officials of the civil administration and law enforcement agencies, and representatives of different media outlets were also present.

Ensure policy

FROM PAGE 2

"Prosperity Dialogue: Strengthening Thoughts for Industry and Trade of Bangladesh", organised by the party at a city hotel last night.

A large number of trade body leaders, businessmen, exporters, and importers attended the dialogue, which the party said was aimed at outlining its political pledges to the business community.

Responding to the demands, Jamaat Ameer Shafiqur Rahman assured the business community that if his party comes to power, it will provide policy support, dismantle bureaucratic red tape, and improve the ease of doing business.

He also said Jamaat would reduce working hours for female workers from eight to five hours a day "to honour them as they also have to bear

children", adding that the government would compensate factory owners for the reduced working hours.

He further pledged to improve the law and order situation if Jamaat wins the polls.

In his speech, AK Azad, vice-president of the International Chamber of Commerce-Bangladesh (ICC-B), said a renowned denim mill owner became a loan defaulter after low gas pressure had prevented his plant from producing goods.

"He now has to repay a large bank loan by selling his house in a posh area of Dhaka. But he cannot even sell the house because there are no buyers," Azad said, adding that the businessman is currently suffering.

He also stressed the need to improve law and order and give ministers more freedom to work.

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বিজ্ঞপ্তি
"ইয়ুথ ভলান্টিয়ার অ্যাওয়ার্ড ২০২৬"

যুবকলাপ তহবিল আইন, ২০১৬ মোতাবেক সামাজিক ক্ষেত্রে অসাধারণ অবদানের জন্য যুবদের চলতি ২০২৫-২০২৬ অর্থবছরে নিয়ে উল্লিখিত ০৮টি ক্যাটাগরিতে "ইয়ুথ ভলান্টিয়ার অ্যাওয়ার্ড ২০২৬" প্রদানের নিমিত্ত নিম্নলিখিত শর্তাবলী অনুযায়ী আগ্রহী প্রার্থীদের নিকট হতে দরখাস্ত আহ্বান করা যাচ্ছে:

পুরস্কার ক্যাটাগরির নাম

ক্রমিক নং	ক্যাটাগরির নাম	পুরস্কার সংখ্যা	পুরস্কারের ধরণ (প্রতিটির ক্ষেত্রে)
(১)	আত্মকর্মসংস্থান ও উদ্যোক্তা উন্নয়নে অসাধারণ অবদান	০২ (দুই)টি	প্রতিটি অ্যাওয়ার্ডে থাকবে
(২)	ক্রীড়া উন্নয়নে অসাধারণ অবদান	০২ (দুই)টি	১,০০,০০০/- (এক লক্ষ) টাকার
(৩)	সমাজসেবা ও জনকল্যাণে (স্বেচ্ছা ও অসহায়/পুঙ্খস্বদের প্রতি আদর্শসেবা) অসাধারণ অবদান	০২ (দুই)টি	ক্রসড চেক, একটিকে-এক এবং
(৪)	বিজ্ঞান, প্রযুক্তি ও কারিগরি ক্ষেত্রে অসাধারণ অবদান	০২ (দুই)টি	একটি
(৫)	নারী ও শিশু উন্নয়নে অসাধারণ অবদান	০২ (দুই)টি	সম্মাননাপত্র।
(৬)	শিক্ষার উন্নয়ন ও প্রসারে অসাধারণ অবদান	০২ (দুই)টি	
(৭)	পরিবেশ, জলবায়ু পরিবর্তন ও দুর্যোগ মোকাবেলার ক্ষেত্রে অসাধারণ অবদান	০২ (দুই)টি	
(৮)	কলা ও সংস্কৃতিতে অসাধারণ অবদান	০২ (দুই)টি	

আবেদনের শর্তাবলী

- আবেদনকারীকে অবশ্যই বিদ্যালয় জাতীয় যুব নীতি অনুযায়ী ১৮ হতে ৩৫ বছরের বয়সসীমার নারী-পুরুষ নির্বিশেষে বাংলাদেশের নাগরিক হতে হবে।
- অলাভজনক, অরাজনৈতিক এবং অবেতনিকভাবে স্বেচ্ছাসেবক হিসেবে সেবা ও উন্নয়নমূলক কর্মে নিয়োজিত যুবরা (যুবনারী ও যুবপুরুষ) শুধুমাত্র এ অ্যাওয়ার্ডের জন্য আবেদন করতে পারবেন।
- আগ্রহী যুবগণ স্ব স্ব উপজেলার সংশ্লিষ্ট কমিটির সভাপতি হিসেবে উপজেলা নির্বাহী অফিসার রববার নির্ধারিত ফরমে আবেদন দাখিল করবেন। মহানগরীর ক্ষেত্রে যেখানে উপজেলা কার্যালয় নেই। সরাসরি সংশ্লিষ্ট জেলা কমিটির সভাপতি হিসেবে সংশ্লিষ্ট জেলার জেলা প্রশাসক রববার আবেদন করতে হবে।
- ক্যাটাগরিভিত্তিক প্রত্যয়নের ক্ষেত্রে উল্লিখিত ক্যাটাগরির বিষয় সংশ্লিষ্ট সরকারি, আধাসরকারি/ স্বায়ত্বশাসিত/ রাষ্ট্রায়ত্ত সংস্থার ২০১৫ সালের জাতীয় বেতন স্কেলের ৯ম গ্রেড বা সমতুল্য বা তদুর্ধ্ব পদে কর্মরত কর্মকর্তা/ একজন কর্মকর্তার প্রত্যয়নপত্র সংযুক্ত করতে হবে।
- একজন আবেদনকারী যে কোনো একটি ক্যাটাগরিতে আবেদন করতে পারবেন।
- ফৌজদারী মামলায় দণ্ডিত কোনো ব্যক্তি এ অ্যাওয়ার্ডের লক্ষ্যে আবেদনের জন্য বিবেচিত হবেন না।
- স্বাস্থ্য বা সমাজ বা রাষ্ট্র বিরোধী বা আইন শৃঙ্খলা বিরোধী কাজে লিপ্ত কোনো যুব অ্যাওয়ার্ডের লক্ষ্যে আবেদনের জন্য বিবেচিত হবেন না।
- ঋণশেখালাপি কোনো ব্যক্তি এই অ্যাওয়ার্ডের জন্য বিবেচিত হবেন না।
- চূড়ান্তভাবে মনোনীত প্রার্থীকে জোপ টেস্টে যোগ্য বিবেচিত হতে হবে। কোন বিজয়ী জোপ টেস্টে অযোগ্য বিবেচিত হলে তার পরিবর্তে ক্যাটাগরির মেধাক্রম অনুযায়ী পরবর্তী প্রার্থী বিজয়ী হিসেবে নির্বাচিত হবেন।
- আবেদনকারী যুব ও ক্রীড়া মন্ত্রণালয় কর্তৃক অন্য কোনো অ্যাওয়ার্ড/পুরস্কারে ভূষিত হলে এ অ্যাওয়ার্ডের জন্য বিবেচিত হবেন না।
- আওয়ার্ড প্রদানের বিষয়ে যুবকলাপ তহবিল ব্যবস্থাপনা বোর্ডের সিদ্ধান্তই চূড়ান্ত বলে গণ্য হবে।

- যুব ও ক্রীড়া মন্ত্রণালয়ের ওয়েবসাইট (www.moysports.gov.bd)-এ প্রবেশ করে সেবা বক্সে নাগরিক ই-সেবার আওতাভুক্ত ইয়ুথ ভলান্টিয়ার অ্যাওয়ার্ড ২০২৬ ক্লিক করে ক্যাটাগরি সংশ্লিষ্ট আবেদনের নির্ধারিত ফরম সংগ্রহপূর্বক তা যথাযথভাবে পূরণপূর্বক এসসে/ অনুচ্ছেদভিত্তিক চাহিত তথ্যাদি সংযুক্ত করে আবেদন আগামী ০১ মার্চ ২০২৬ খ্রিষ্টাব্দ তারিখ (১৬ ফাল্গুন ১৪৩২ বঙ্গাব্দ) রবিবার অফিস সময়ের মধ্যে নির্ধারিত স্থানে (শর্তাবলীর 'গ' উপঅনুচ্ছেদ অনুযায়ী) সরাসরি দাখিল করতে হবে। উল্লেখ্য, নির্ধারিত তারিখের পর কোনো আবেদন গ্রহণ করা হবে না।
- আবেদন ফরমে উল্লিখিত চাহিত সকল প্রমাণক (সনদপত্র, প্রত্যয়নপত্র, ছবি, ভিডিও, পেনড্রাইভ ও অন্যান্য তথ্যাদি) সংযুক্ত করতে হবে।
- সংশ্লিষ্ট বিষয়ে প্রয়োজনে যুব উন্নয়ন অধিদপ্তরের জেলা কার্যালয়ের উপপরিচালক ও উপজেলা যুব উন্নয়ন কর্মকর্তাদের (মেট্রোপলিটন ইউনিট থানা যুব উন্নয়ন কর্মকর্তাদের) সাথে যোগাযোগ করা যেতে পারে। প্রযোজ্য ক্ষেত্রে এ মন্ত্রণালয়ের সংশ্লিষ্ট নির্বাহী কর্মকর্তার সাথে ০১৭৯৬২০৩০৬৬ মোবাইল নম্বরে যোগাযোগ করা যেতে পারে।

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MINNEAPOLIS SHOOTING ICE to focus on 'targeted' ops

Says Trump border czar Homan

REUTERS, Minneapolis

US border czar Tom Homan, newly installed as commander of President Donald Trump's immigration enforcement surge in Minneapolis, said yesterday that federal agents would focus on "targeted, strategic enforcement operations," marking a shift in the aggressive tactics that have drawn national outrage.

Homan also said he intended to reduce the 3,000-strong force of agents deployed to the city after what he said were productive meetings with Minnesota Governor Tim Walz, Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey and other local leaders.

"We can do better," he said. "We made some significant gains, significant coordination and cooperation, and you're going to see some massive changes occurring here in this city." His appearance suggested a continued escalation from Trump's administration, which has been under intensifying political pressure to recalibrate its approach in Minneapolis after two US citizens were shot dead by federal agents.

A newly issued internal memo from a high-ranking Immigration and Customs Enforcement official directs federal officers to refrain from any unnecessary communication and engagement with "agitators" so as to avoid "inflaming the situation."

The directive also orders ICE officers to only target immigrants who have records of criminal charges or convictions, a departure from earlier tactics that included randomly stopping people on the street to demand documented proof of legal US residence or citizenship.



Demonstrators from the youth collective "Generation Z" hold a giant Peruvian flag during a protest in Lima, Peru on Wednesday, demanding President Jose Jeri's resignation over a corruption scandal and justice for those killed in the 2023 protests under former president Dina Boluarte.

PHOTO: REUTERS

EU eyes migration clampdown

AFP, Brussels

The European Union yesterday laid out plans to overhaul its visa system and step up deportations as part of a five-year migration strategy that cements a hardening line on the hot-button issue.

Irregular arrivals in the 27-nation bloc were down by more than a quarter in 2025, but political pressure to act remains high.

"The priority is clear: bringing illegal arrival numbers down and keeping them down," Magnus Brunner, EU's migration commissioner, said.

The strategy unveiled yesterday stressed the need to boost deportations of failed asylum-seekers among the bloc's priorities.

"Abuse gives migration a bad name -- it undermines public trust and ultimately takes away from our ability to provide protection and undercuts our drive to attract talent," said Brunner.

Pak launches checks for Nipah virus

REUTERS, Lahore

Authorities in Pakistan have ordered enhanced screening of people entering the country for signs of infections of the deadly Nipah virus after India confirmed two cases, adding to the number of Asian countries stepping up controls.

Thailand, Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam have also tightened screening at airports. But an Indian official said there were no plans to introduce screening at the country's airports and said there was no sign of any outbreak.

The Nipah virus can cause fever and brain inflammation and has a high mortality rate. There is also no vaccine. But transmission from person to person is not easy and typically requires prolonged contact with an infected individual.

"It has become imperative to strengthen preventative and surveillance measures at Pakistan's borders," the Border Health Services department said.

"All travelers shall undergo thermal screening and clinical assessment at the Point of Entry," which includes seaports, land borders and airports, the department added.

UK PM signals China reset in talks with Xi

Eyes security, economic gains amid Trump tensions

REUTERS, Beijing

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer told Chinese President Xi Jinping yesterday that he wanted to build a "sophisticated relationship" with Beijing to bolster security and the economy, signalling a reset after years of strained ties.

On the key day of his four-day visit to China, the first by a British prime minister in eight years, Starmer spent around three hours with Xi during a formal summit and a lunch, during which the pair also chatted about soccer and Shakespeare.

The British leader, whose centre-left Labour government has struggled to deliver the economic growth it promised, has made improving relations with the world's second largest economy a priority, despite misgivings about espionage and human rights.

"China is a vital player on the global stage, and it's vital that we build a more sophisticated relationship where we can identify opportunities to collaborate, but of course, also allow a meaningful dialogue on areas where we disagree," Starmer told Xi at the start of their meeting.

Xi said ties with Britain had gone through "twists and turns" that did not serve the interests of either country and that China was ready to develop a long-term

partnership.

"We can deliver a result that can withstand the test of history," the Chinese leader told Starmer, flanked by his top ministers, at their summit at the Great Hall of the People.

follows that of Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, who signed an economic deal with Beijing to tear down trade barriers, drawing Trump's ire.

The British leader told reporters he had made progress



Starmer is the latest Western leader to engage in a flurry of diplomacy with China, as nations hedge against unpredictability from the United States under President Donald Trump.

Trump's on-off threats of trade tariffs and pledges to grab control of Greenland, an autonomous territory of Denmark, have rankled long-standing allies like Britain.

Starmer's visit immediately

in discussions with Beijing to reduce tariffs on whisky, while Xi said China would consider waiving visas for British nationals.

"The relationship is in a good place, a strong place," said Starmer, who is being accompanied by more than 50 business leaders on the trip.

Asked by a reporter if Xi was someone he could do business with, Starmer simply replied 'yes'.

15 dead in Colombia plane crash

AFP, Bogota

An airplane carrying 15 people, including a lawmaker, crashed near Colombia's border with Venezuela on Wednesday, killing all passengers and crew, Colombia's civil aviation authority said.

The plane, which was operated by state airline Satena, took off from the border city of Cucuta and lost contact with control towers shortly before it was due to land in nearby Ocana around noon.

"There are no survivors," an official from the aviation authority told AFP. There were 13 passengers and two crew members aboard. The Cucuta area is mountainous with changeable weather and swaths are controlled by largest guerrilla group, the National Liberation Army.

The government deployed the Air Force to search for the plane and recover the bodies. One lawmaker and one legislative candidate are feared to have been aboard.

"We have received with concern the information about the air accident... where my colleague Diogenes Quintero, Carlos Salcedo and their teams were traveling," local parliamentarian Wilmer Carrillo said.

GUNFIRE, BLASTS Heavy security near Niger capital's airport

AFP, Niamey

Security forces were deployed around the international airport in Niger's capital yesterday after heavy gunfire and explosions erupted overnight in what several observers said bore the hallmark of a jihadist attack.

Niger, a Sahelian country regularly hit by jihadist violence, has been led for more than two years by Abdourahmane Tiani, the head of a junta that overthrew the elected civilian president in 2023.

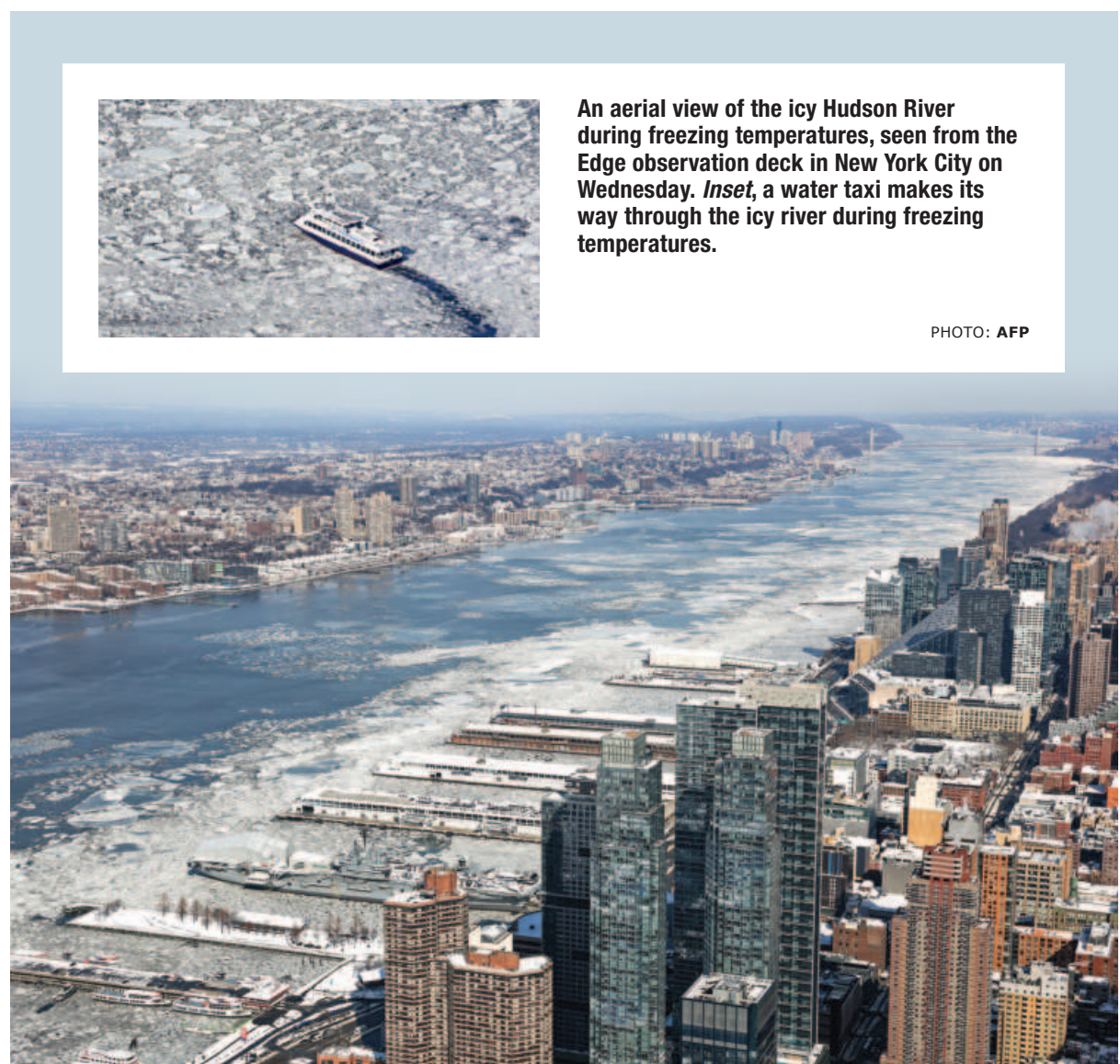
The shooting began shortly after midnight, according to residents of a neighbourhood near the airport in Niamey.

Calm returned two hours later, they told AFP.

Videos filmed by local people showed streaks of light in the sky with the sound of loud explosions, while other images showed flames several metres high and charred cars. The capital's Diori Hamani International Airport houses an air force base and is located 10 kilometres from the presidential palace.

A heavy security deployment was seen early yesterday in the area of the airport, where police and soldiers controlled access, especially to the military base, and an armoured vehicle was stationed, an AFP journalist saw.

It was not immediately clear what had caused the gunfire and whether there were any casualties. Residents recounted their nighttime "fear" including from "roofs that were shaking", as people in the capital went about their normal business early yesterday.



An aerial view of the icy Hudson River during freezing temperatures, seen from the Edge observation deck in New York City on Wednesday. Inset, a water taxi makes its way through the icy river during freezing temperatures.

PHOTO: AFP

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Office of the Project Director
Establishment of Madaripur Textile Engineering College, Shibchar, Madaripur (2nd Revised)
Department of Textiles, BTMC Bhabon (11th Floor)
7-9, Kawran Bazar, Dhaka-1215.

Memo No:24.02.0000.075.07.057.23-306 Date: 29/01/2026

e-Re-Tender Notice

e-Tender is invited in the e-GP Portal for the procurement of the following goods:

Sl No.	Re-Tender ID	Description of Goods & Related Services	Tender Publishing, Tender Opening Date & Time
01	1159893	Procurement of Machineries and Equipment for Knitting Department, Apparel Engineering Department, Fashion & Design Department, Wet Process Engineering Department, Mechanical Engineering & Workshop Machineries for Madaripur Textile Engineering College, Shibchar, Madaripur.	29 January 2026, 2.00 pm & 19 February 2026, 03.00 pm

This is an online tender where only e-Tender will be accepted in National e-GP Portal <https://www.eprocure.gov.bd> and no offline/ hard copies will be accepted.

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System portal and e-GP help desk (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd/helpdesk.jsp>).

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Project Director
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29/01/26

GD-220

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR: LATE S. M. ALI

EU-India deal calls for proactive action

Bangladesh must safeguard its export markets from competitors

With the European Union and India signing a new free trade agreement (FTA), Bangladesh's readymade garments (RMG) exports post-LDC graduation appear increasingly vulnerable. Once the EU-India deal comes into effect in 2027, Indian apparel will start enjoying zero percent tariffs in the EU market, down from the current 9-12 percent. In other words, Bangladesh's competitive edge of duty-free access for garment products to Europe is set to disappear.

Currently, Bangladesh enjoys LDC preferential treatment in the EU, paying zero tariffs on its garment exports. Leveraging this benefit, Bangladesh has been able to expand its share in the EU's apparel market, its top destination for RMG exports. Garment exports to the EU accounted for 50.10 percent of the country's total apparel shipments in FY 2024-2025, followed by 19.18 percent to the US. However, this advantage will not last. After its LDC graduation in November this year, Bangladeshi apparel can retain duty-free access to the EU market only for three more years. Unless a successor trade arrangement is secured, it may face tariffs as high as 12 percent. In such a scenario, RMG exports may fall by around 16 percent, according to experts.

Moreover, the European market has already become a battleground for exporters following the US's reciprocal tariff imposition, which has given EU buyers greater negotiating power in terms of pricing and lead-time expectations. India's strength in raw cotton and backward linkages also provides it with a competitive advantage over Bangladesh.

Given the situation, Bangladesh has few options but to aggressively pursue bilateral free trade agreements or secure the EU's Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+) status after LDC graduation. Bangladesh's relatively high dependence on imported fabric could also make it difficult to meet the EU's strict rules of origin requirements for apparel (for example, knitting/weaving and cutting/sewing occurring in the same country) post-graduation. Therefore, both active engagement with EU countries to relax those rules and a simultaneous reduction in import dependence should be a priority. The upcoming government in Bangladesh should also prioritise policies that help businesses diversify into higher-end products and explore new markets. Other areas requiring government support include reliable and low-cost energy, efficient logistics and ports, access to finance, and the development of a skilled workforce.

Graduation from LDC status is not going to affect only the RMG industry; leaders from several other sectors also expressed their concerns about this on Tuesday at a roundtable in the capital. While the interim government has not sought to defer graduation, political parties should make their stance on the issue clear ahead of the 13th parliamentary election. Though deferment has its challenges, the post-graduation scenario for Bangladesh, which does not yet seem ready for such a transition, also appears far from promising. Political parties aiming to form the next government must outline clear strategies to navigate these challenges. A bumpier road lies ahead for Bangladesh's economy, and businesses need to understand how the future government plans to steer through it.

Why are so many dying by suicide?

State, institutions, and communities must step up to address the crisis

It is concerning to learn of the unchecked prevalence of suicides in Bangladesh. According to a report quoting sources at the Police Headquarters, some 13,491 people took their own lives between January and November in 2025, averaging 41 deaths per day. These findings are consistent with the annual figures provided by police in recent years. For instance, in the five years between 2020 and 2024, a total of 73,597 people had died by suicide, amounting to an average of 14,719 suicides per year or about 40 per day. These numbers are stark by any measure, and demand proper intervention.

The picture we get from these figures is not just one of a public health emergency—which is apparently the second-highest cause of death in the country—but also of a social crisis unfolding largely out of public sight. Many of those who died had been reportedly struggling with family disputes, marital tensions, financial strain, social isolation, untreated mental health challenges, etc. Yet, as revealed by a *Samakal* investigation, a striking number never sought professional help. The risks also amplify when people feel uncertain about their livelihoods, disconnected from support systems, or unable to rely on institutions during moments of distress.

Some of the recent cases also reveal why both proper psychological care and social interventions are important. Housewife Hafeza Khatun (35) was perhaps the latest to die by suicide, on Monday, at a railway crossing in Pubail, Gazipur, along with her two children. Reportedly, she couldn't be deterred despite being alerted by the gateman to an approaching train. Earlier, the deaths of the wife and infant of jailed Chhatra League leader Jewel Hasan Saddam—and the subsequent denial of parole to Saddam—made national headlines. The background stories of many such incidents show that vulnerability deepens when social or state support systems fail to intervene in time. Individuals navigating hardship alone are more likely to face such tragic consequences.

The responsibility, therefore, cannot rest on families or individuals alone. While there is no alternative to raising awareness of mental health challenges and providing timely treatment, it is equally important that we build a strong support network so that troubled individuals do not feel abandoned. This requires coordinated efforts from the state, communities, educational institutions, and healthcare providers to ensure accessible counselling, early intervention, and the removal of stigma surrounding psychological care. Equally, strengthening social safety nets and fostering a culture of empathy can help people recognise that any crisis, however overwhelming, can be addressed with collective support.

Media reform in Bangladesh needs precision, not pressure



Dr S.M. Rezwan Ul-Alam is associate professor and chair of Media, Communication, and Journalism Department at North South University.

S.M. REZWAN-UL-ALAM

Bangladesh is entering a decisive phase in its approach to governing its media. The proposed Broadcasting Ordinance, 2026 and the National Media Commission Ordinance, 2026 make this evident. Together, these proposed Ordinances signal the aspiration to update an old regulatory system to suit a media environment that has changed faster than the laws have been able to keep pace.

The ambition deserves recognition. Media regulation is no longer a simple matter of managing television channels and radio frequencies. Digital platforms, online journalism, and hybrid forms of broadcasting have reshaped how information circulates. Governments across the world are struggling to keep pace. Bangladesh is not late to this conversation. In fact, in some ways, it is arriving at the right moment—when lessons from elsewhere are already becoming apparent.

The real question, then, is not whether reform is necessary. It is whether reform is being calibrated carefully enough to make it sustainable. There is much in the draft laws that point in the right direction. Moving away from scattered, informal oversight towards commission-based regulation is a structural improvement. It replaces uncertainty with institutional order. The focus on professional standards, ethical conduct, and dispute resolution also reflects an understanding that media quality, and not just media control, matters. Even the decision to bring digital and online media into the conversation shows an awareness that regulation cannot stay trapped in the analogue age.

These are not small steps. They form a solid base. But a solid base still needs careful design above ground. One area where the drafts feel unfinished is their treatment of freedom of expression. The laws acknowledge constitutional guarantees of free speech and press freedom, but mostly in passing. What they do not do in their current form is make those freedoms an active guide for regulatory action.

In practice, effective media regulation works on a simple logic. Regulators intervene only when the law clearly allows it, there is a genuine public interest factor, and only to the extent necessary. This idea—often described as legality, necessity, and proportionality—is not an abstract theory. It is how regulators in countries

like the UK justify decisions that restrict content while still protecting free expression.

When these principles are written directly into the operational parts of a law, they protect everyone. They protect journalists from arbitrary interference, regulators from accusations of overreach, and governments from legal and political fallout. Including such guidance would not weaken Bangladesh's regulatory hand. It would steady it.

Another issue lies in institutional



FILE VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

design. Under the proposed framework, both the Broadcast Commission and the National Media Commission are given broad responsibilities. Licensing, content oversight, ethics, dispute resolution, and directive powers all sit within a relatively small institutional space.

Coordination is essential, but overlap can be risky. When mandates blur, confusion follows—about who decides what, who is accountable, and where authority begins and ends. European regulatory systems tend to avoid this by drawing more precise functional lines. Broadcasting regulation is often kept narrowly focused, while broader ethical or professional issues are handled through separate or co-regulatory mechanisms. This is not about ideology. It is about administrative clarity. Clear boundaries reduce conflict, make

standards—defined broadly. Flexibility is functional, but vagueness carries risks. It opens space for uneven interpretation and discretionary enforcement, which benefits no one. Many European systems handle this by pairing general legal principles with detailed codes developed through consultation. That approach allows standards to evolve without leaving everyone guessing. Bangladesh could move in a similar direction with relatively minor technical adjustments.

Due process is another quiet but essential concern. The proposed commissions have the power to issue directives and resolve disputes, yet the laws do not consistently spell out basic procedural safeguards. Notice, the right to be heard, reasoned decisions, and access to judicial review are not luxuries. They are what make regulation legitimate in practice.

drafts offer limited scope for structured consultation or public reasoning behind decisions. Yet experience from the UK and Europe shows that open consultation does not slow regulation; it strengthens it. When rules are explained and stakeholders are heard, compliance improves, and conflict decreases. None of these points argues against reform. They say to get it right.

Bangladesh has an opportunity to show that strong regulation and media freedom are not opposites but partners. With a few careful, low-cost refinements—embedding guiding principles, clarifying mandates, strengthening procedural safeguards, and improving transparency—the country can build a media governance framework that is firm, fair, and ready for the future. That kind of balance is more complex than passing a law. But it is also what lasts.

Confrontational election politics shows that little has changed

Azman Rahman is a political commentator.

AZMAN RAHMAN

It has been about a week since the window for official campaigning for the upcoming election opened, and things are already settling into a familiar pattern. The slogans sound updated, and social media is louder than ever. Still, the behaviour, language, and logic of competition remain largely unchanged. This does not feel like the start of a new chapter in politics, as many had expected after the uprising, but like a return to an old routine.

Recent incidents during electioneering supports this notion. With the election getting closer, personal attacks are frequently replacing serious debate, and symbolic insults are forming political messages. These incidents are not trivial; they shape how politics is practised on the ground. When leaders speak without restraint, supporters get the message that restraint is optional, leading to the shift in political discourse from persuasion to dominance.

This change is already evident. In Sherpur, a Jamaat-e-Islami leader named Md Rezaul Karim died after sustaining critical injuries in clashes between activists of BNP and Jamaat. Even before this incident, there was a turn towards confrontation in campaigning: scuffles broke out

between rival supporters and activists, and even alliance partners, over trifling matters. This suggests that what should have been a contest of ideas is turning, again, into a cycle of intimidation despite the changed hopes and dreams following the uprising.

The Liberation War has once again become a tool to be used to score political brownie points. Rather than serving as a common ground for national unity, it is being pulled into partisan disputes. Questions of loyalty and legitimacy are resurfacing. Identity politics is also playing a central role. The Jamaat-led alliance seems to be leaning heavily on anti-India sentiment as a campaign theme. Jamaat leaders have accused the BNP of making a deal with India. BNP has rejected the claim and responded in equally sharp language. These exchanges are not about foreign policy or national interest, but about mobilising fear and suspicion. India becomes a symbol rather than a subject of serious discussion—an external enemy, to avoid accountability for domestic failures.

Religion is also being used. Jamaat leaders have publicly claimed that those who vote for them will go to *jannah*. BNP has responded by saying that no party has the authority to issue entry to heaven and that such claims are tantamount to serious moral and religious violations. This exchange shows how far the campaign has drifted from democratic reasoning. Faith is being turned into a political incentive, insulting both religious sentiments and

politics. It also places pressure on many voters instead of encouraging informed choice.

These messages spread quickly online, turning social media into a second battleground. Coordinated networks circulate false or misleading content. The goal is not always persuasion; often, it seems to be exhaustion. When people stop trusting what they see, they disengage. That disengagement benefits organised

To be fair, this is not the most repressive or electorally disruptive period in the country's history. Yet, the promise of a new political era was not about being slightly better than before. It was about doing politics differently. If old tactics continue to deliver results, parties will keep using them.

groups that rely on pressure rather than broad consent.

Online spaces are filled with memes and trolling, yet constructive discussion is largely absent. At the same time, distrust is reinforced by early claims of vote-rigging and fears of the capture of polling stations. BNP has urged supporters to reach polling centres

early in the morning, even before voting begins. These concerns may be valid in some cases, but when raised in advance, they create panic and shape expectations in risky ways. Some voters decide that participation is pointless. Others prepare for confrontation. In both cases, confidence in the process weakens.

To be fair, this is not the most repressive or electorally disruptive period in the country's history. Yet, the promise of a new political era was not about being slightly better than before. It was about doing politics differently. If old tactics continue to deliver results, parties will keep using them. If religious pressure, blaming foreign interference, or intimidation tactics continue to work, political reform will remain a dream. Real change requires more than new alliances or leadership. It requires breaking habits that reward division and aggression. Elections should be about choice, not fear. Faith should guide personal ethics, not determine ballots. Foreign relations deserve facts, and political competition should never cost lives.

For now, the promise of change remains a promise. What was described as an uprising in 2024 is beginning to look less like a turning point. The confrontational language, behaviour and logic of political actors during this electoral campaign season suggest that without a conscious effort to reset the tone, the nation risks rehearsing the very politics it once vowed to leave behind in the July uprising.

Yes, no, and 'confused'

A closer look at the July charter as the referendum nears



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KALLOL MUSTAFA

Following prolonged discussions between the National Consensus Commission (NCC) and various political parties on reforms in key state institutions, the July National Charter was signed on October 17, 2025. After the interim government assumed office in August 2024, six reform commissions were formed initially. Recommendations from five of these commissions—on constitutional reform, the electoral system, public administration, Anti-Corruption Commission, and judiciary—were distilled into 166 reform proposals.

In the first phase, the NCC held discussions with 32 political parties, followed by talks with 30 parties in the second phase. Through this process, the July charter was finalised with 84 reform proposals, many of them accompanied by notes of dissent from political parties. Several parties refrained from signing the charter, citing objections such as proposed changes to the fundamental principles of the constitution, failure to present an accurate historical context, a commitment not to challenge the charter in court, and the absence of clarity regarding the charter's legal basis and implementation mechanisms.

Areas where consensus was reached

The July charter contains a number of significant reform commitments on which participating political parties reached consensus. If the signatory parties implement these pledges upon assuming power, they could play an important role in Bangladesh's democratic transition.

As part of the parliamentary reform, the charter proposes amending Article 70 of the constitution to allow members of parliament to vote independently on all matters except budgetary and confidence votes. The BNP supports this reform, albeit with conditions including constitutional amendments and exceptions related to national security or wartime situations. There is also consensus on limiting an individual's tenure as prime minister to a maximum of 10 years, appointing opposition members as chairs of parliamentary standing committees (including the Public Accounts Committee) in proportion to their seats, and nominating an opposition MP as deputy speaker.

All political parties agreed on appointing the chief adviser of a non-partisan caretaker government through a five-member selection committee comprising the prime minister, leader of the opposition, and others. Similarly, the formation of the Election Commission would no longer depend solely on the prime minister's preference; instead, election commissioners would be appointed through a five-member selection committee that would include the prime minister, leader of the opposition, and a judge of the Appellate Division.

The president would be granted authority to appoint key constitutional officeholders without the prime minister's recommendation in certain cases, including appointments to the National Human Rights Commission, Information Commission, Bangladesh Press Council, and Law Commission. At the same time, the president's discretionary power to grant pardons would be curtailed. Pardons would only be possible under legally defined principles and standards, and with the consent of the victim or the victim's family.

To effectively separate the judiciary from the executive, the charter proposes establishing a separate secretariat for the Supreme Court and ensuring its financial autonomy. This secretariat would oversee the promotion, transfer, and discipline of subordinate court judges. Instead of appointing the chief justice at the prime minister's discretion, the president would appoint the chief justice from the senior most judge or from the two most senior judges of the Appellate Division. There is also consensus on forming an independent Judicial Appointment Commission led by the chief justice.

On anti-corruption reforms, consensus includes abolishing the requirement for prior approval before filing cases against

government employees, mandating annual public disclosure of income and assets by elected representatives and their family members, enacting beneficial ownership laws to curb corruption and money laundering, and introducing separate legislation to prevent conflicts of interest and abuse of state power.

Regarding police reform, political parties agreed to establish an independent police commission headed by a retired Appellate Division judge, tasked with investigating and resolving complaints against the police.

Consensus was reached—except by Jamaat-e-Islami—on granting financial autonomy to local governments and placing government officials under elected local representatives. All parties except Gano Forum and Nagorik Oikya agreed that local governments should have the authority to raise their own funds.

Areas without consensus

The Constitution Reform Commission had proposed forming a national constitutional council comprising representatives from the

a bicameral parliament, consensus was not reached on the method of selecting members of the upper house. The Constitution Reform Commission proposed proportional representation based on vote share, but the BNP and others favoured allocating seats in proportion to lower house representation. The intended purpose of the upper house—to prevent absolute dominance by a single party in constitutional amendments and approval of major international treaties—would not be achieved if it simply mirrored the lower house. Notably, several parties, including the BNP, have also expressed dissent over the proposal that constitutional amendments and the ratification of international treaties should require approval from both chambers of parliament.

No consensus was reached on changing the fundamental principles of the constitution, with dissent expressed by Gano Forum, JSD, Bangladesh JASAD, CPB, BASAD, and BASAD (Marxist). Jamaat and several others objected to reforms related to local government autonomy, placing local officials under elected representatives, amending the Official Secrets Act, and recruiting teachers and doctors through separate service commissions.

The absence of women and representatives of religious and ethnic minorities in the NCC also shaped the charter's limitations. Although there was agreement to gradually increase women's representation in parliament to 100 seats, no decision was finalised—despite demands from the Women's Affairs Reform Commission—on

no visible initiative was taken. Nor did the government clarify how these second phase recommendations would be implemented, rendering their future uncertain.

The implementation order and referendum
On November 13, 2025, the interim government issued the July National Charter (Constitutional Reform) Implementation Order. Under this order, the parliamentary election and a referendum on the charter will be held on the same day. The referendum will be conducted on four constitutional reform proposals, and voters will be required to cast a single "Yes" or "No" vote on all four collectively.

If the referendum passes, elected representatives will form a Constitutional Reform Council, serving concurrently as MPs. The council must complete constitutional reforms within 180 working days. Within 30 working days of completing the reforms, an upper house will be formed based on proportional representation of votes received in the parliamentary election.

Among the four proposals to be put to the referendum, the first states that the caretaker government, the Election Commission, and other constitutional bodies will be formed in accordance with the procedures described in the July charter. The second proposal states that a 100-member upper house will be formed in proportion to the votes received by political parties in the election. Any amendment to the constitution will require the majority approval of the upper house. The third proposal states

the charter states that political parties would mention their notes of dissent in their election manifestos, seek public consent, and then act accordingly. However, the way the referendum proposal has been framed in the implementation order does not give due importance to political parties' notes of dissent regarding the formation of the upper house, caretaker government, EC, and other constitutional bodies. If the "Yes" vote prevails in the referendum, an obligation will arise to implement the proposed reforms regarding the formation of the caretaker government, EC, and "other constitutional bodies" exactly as described by the National Consensus Commission in the July charter. Since it has not been clearly specified, complications may also arise regarding which bodies are meant by the term "other constitutional bodies."

Second, if the outcome of discussions with political parties is disregarded and public opinion is sought directly, then the question arises: why should a referendum be held only on constitutional reform proposals? Why not hold a referendum on all the recommendations given by the 11 reform commissions?

Third, lengthy debates among political parties took place on constitutional reform proposals, yet consensus was not achieved on all issues. How reasonable is it, then, to ask the public to express their opinion with a single "Yes" or "No" on all these matters? Like political parties, ordinary citizens may agree on some issues and disagree on others. In that case, how can they express their views on all constitutional reform proposals with a single word? Moreover, has the public been adequately informed about all the positive and negative aspects of these reform proposals? Generally, referendums are held to seek public opinion on a constitution that has been adopted through majority voting after discussions and debates in a constituent assembly. Here, the exact opposite is being done: first holding a referendum and then asking the constitutional reform council to amend the constitution accordingly.

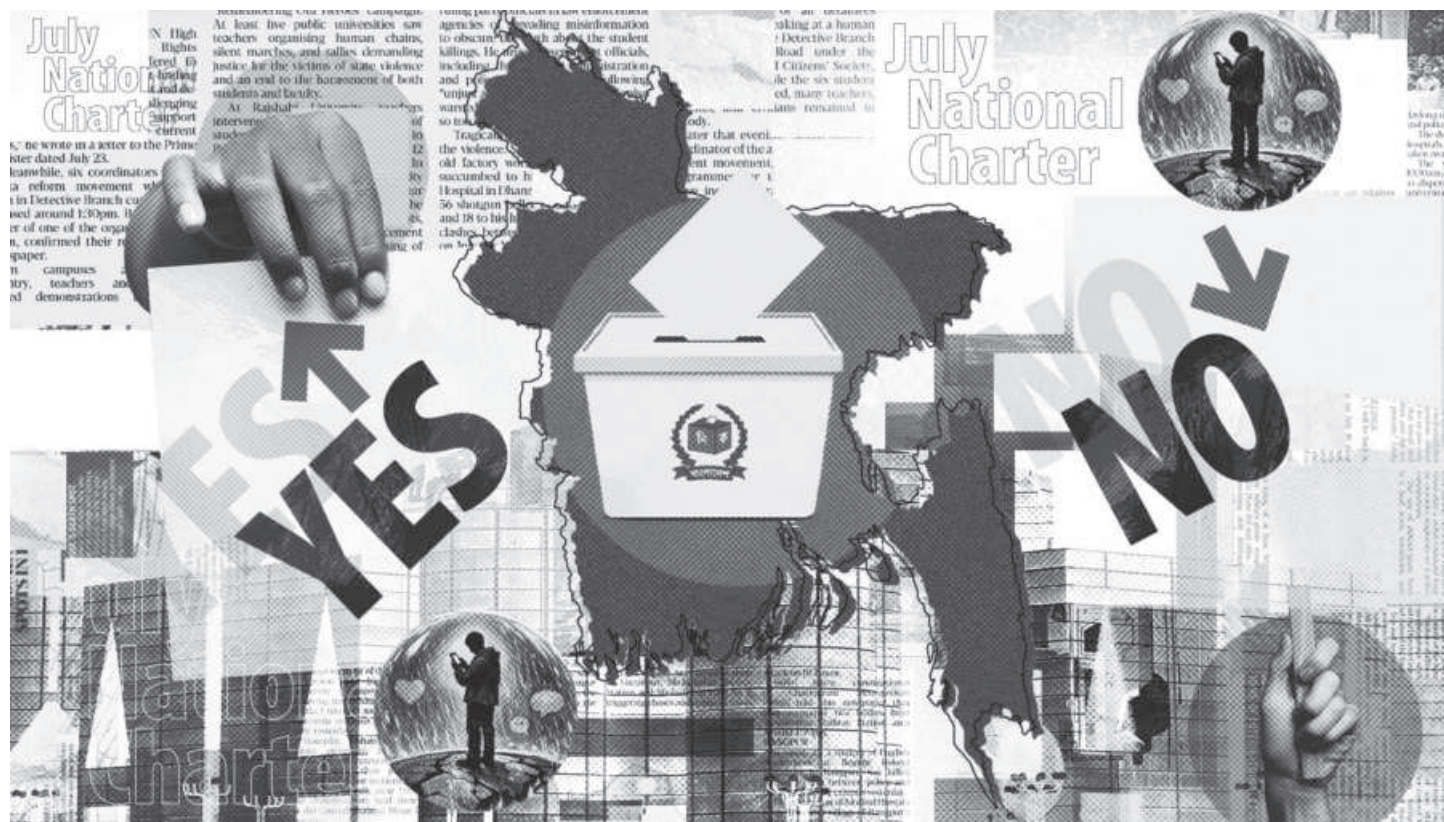
Fourth, by disregarding the political parties' differing opinions on proportional representation in the upper house, formation of the caretaker government, and appointments to constitutional offices in the referendum question, the implementation of the entire July charter may be put at risk. This is because if a political party considers safeguarding these dissenting positions to be essential, it may campaign for a "No" vote against the entire referendum package. Since the referendum does not allow separate voting on the four proposals—even though there are four questions, there is only one answer—if any party disagrees strongly with even one proposal, it may be motivated to vote "No" for the entire referendum. By contrast, if the referendum had accommodated dissenting views, those parties would have voted "Yes" and would then have been bound to implement their respective promised reforms upon coming to power. Due to the interim government's current referendum proposal, not only the dissenting proposals but also the implementation of the agreed-upon reform proposals may now fall into jeopardy. Even if the "Yes" vote prevails, the party or coalition forming the government after the election may refuse to implement certain reforms by citing their notes of dissent in the signed July charter, which could then create a different set of legal, constitutional and political complications.

How certain is implementation?

Even if the July National Charter secures popular approval through a referendum and gains the highest legal standing, its implementation will ultimately depend on the political will of future governments. Past experience offers little reassurance.

In 1990, during the anti-autocracy movement, three major political alliances published a joint roadmap promising free elections, independent state media, judicial independence, and protection of fundamental rights. None of these commitments were fully realised by subsequent governments.

There is no guarantee that the charter will not meet the same fate. Ensuring its implementation will, therefore, require vigilant oversight by political actors and civil society, alongside sustained pressure to enact reform recommendations excluded from the charter. Otherwise, as late Local Government Reform Commission Chair Prof Tofail Ahmed once warned, these reports may add little more than archival value to history.



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

executive, judiciary, and legislature to ensure balance of power in key appointments, but it was dropped due to objections from the BNP and several other parties. Later, the National Consensus Commission suggested incorporating provisions in the constitution for appointing members of the Election Commission, Public Service Commission, Anti-Corruption Commission, Comptroller and Auditor General, and Ombudsman through selection committees. While there was consensus on EC appointments, several parties—including the BNP—dissented on applying this method to the other four institutions.

According to the existing constitution, the president is required to act on the advice of the prime minister in all matters except the appointment of the prime minister and the chief justice. Although the NCC initially proposed expanding presidential powers to appoint officials in 12 institutions, discussions ultimately narrowed this scope. The president would make appointments to the NHRC, Information Commission, press council, Law Commission, Bangladesh Bank governorship, and Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC) without the prime minister's advice. However, the BNP and some other parties dissented on appointments to Bangladesh Bank and the BERC.

While there was agreement on establishing

direct elections to reserved seats. There was partial consensus, with dissent, on requiring political parties to nominate at least five percent women candidates in the next general election and increasing this proportion by five percent in subsequent elections until reaching 33 percent. However, this provision will not be enshrined in the constitution.

What the July charter doesn't include

Many important recommendations from the first-phase reform commissions were never discussed by the National Consensus Commission, and no effort was made to build political consensus around them. While the charter mentions expanding citizens' fundamental rights, it does not specify which rights will be expanded or how. Instead, it states that detailed proposals will be outlined in the commission's report.

Moreover, the NCC did not hold discussions on recommendations made by the second-phase reform commissions on labour, media, local government, women, and health. The heads of these commissions urged Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus to incorporate their recommendations into the July charter. They said in order to institutionalise democracy and build a new Bangladesh, reform initiatives in line with the recommendations of the second phase commissions were equally essential. But

that the political parties that win the next election will be bound to implement the 30 proposals on which consensus was reached in the July National Charter. The fourth proposal states that the remaining reforms described in the July charter will be implemented in accordance with the commitments made by the political parties.

It is noteworthy that the way the referendum proposal on the July charter has been framed allows some reforms to be implemented in line with the political parties' notes of dissent, while other reforms do not allow for implementation based on notes of dissent. If the "Yes" vote prevails in the referendum, the reform proposals for which political parties' notes of dissent will no longer remain effective include the formation of the caretaker government, EC, appointments to various constitutional offices, and the formation of the upper house through a PR system. This has been ensured through the first and second proposals of the referendum. For the remaining issues, the fourth proposal of the referendum states that political parties will be able to implement reforms in accordance with their respective notes of dissent or differing opinions.

This order for implementing the July National Charter may give rise to various complexities.

First, the referendum question included in the implementation order conflicts with the July charter that was signed. This is because

CROSSWORD
BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 "In Cold Blood" writer
- 7 Matador's need
- 11 Sauntered
- 12 Weary sigh
- 13 Up-and-comers
- 15 High-level execs
- 16 Writer Harte
- 18 Go fast
- 21 Foot features
- 22 Code
- 24 Worker in a colony
- 25 Gear part
- 26 Yale student
- 27 Sack material
- 29 Like an abyss
- 30 Bath need
- 31 Ocean bird

DOWN

- 1 Sedan or SUV
- 2 French friend
- 3 "Nova" network
- 4 Martini garnishes
- 5 Doctrine
- 6 Keeness
- 7 Burger topper
- 8 In the style of
- 9 Golf goal
- 10 Twisty turn
- 14 Parsley unit

- 16 Worker's reward
- 17 Stylishly quaint
- 19 Very thin
- 20 Daughter of Leda
- 21 Bar bill
- 22 Beat walker
- 23 Tear
- 25 Island off Naples
- 28 Soup servers
- 29 Reduce in rank
- 31 Touch base
- 33 Son of Seth
- 34 Like the Beatles
- 35 Pub quaff
- 36 Record book
- 37 Purpose
- 38 Danson of "The Good Place"
- 39 Pig's place

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TUESDAY'S ANSWERS

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LAW OPINION

Reframing the debate on polygamy laws

Polygamy without the first wife's consent at its root has implications for her economic well-being and livelihood as well. A society where an overwhelming majority of married women are structurally made dependent on their husbands for everything, and divorced women still bear the stigma of being home wreckers, does not leave much scope for wives to go against their husbands' desires.

SHAIKH MIRAZUR RAHMAN

The recently published verdict of the High Court Division (HCD) on the legality of the polygamy provision in the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance, 1961 (MFLO) has revived the age-old debate concerning wife's consent to a subsequent marriage by the husband. The HCD has reaffirmed the existing law, citing section 6 of the MFLO as it is. However, the matter needs to be reframed, scrutinised more humanely, and in its context, women's marital rights requires re-evaluation.

Muslim personal matters like marriage are governed by the MFLO, amongst other laws, in Bangladesh. Under section 6 of the Ordinance, a married Muslim man is required to obtain the prior permission of the arbitration council (a 3-member ad-hoc body) should he want to remarry. A written application is filed with the necessary fees for the Council to sit and reach a decision. Sub-section 5 of the said provision specifies that if a man remarries without the permission of the Council under this provision, he will have to pay the due dower amount at once and also face a penalty. Thus, the provision merely makes the process of polygamy slightly more difficult.

Unfortunately, the law does not concern itself with the consent of the first wife in deciding whether the husband should be allowed to remarry. Section 6(2) read with Rule 14 of the Muslim Family Laws Rules, 1961 states that in the application to the arbitration council,



whether the permission of the existing wife/ wives has been obtained needs to be mentioned. However, nowhere in the MFLO or in its Rules does it make the wife's consent a precondition for the permission. Rather, the arbitration council just takes note of it as an ancillary matter in the procedure.

Moreover, the arbitration council is temporary in nature. Hence, it often lacks the judicial prudence and permanence to take such a material decision. Although the council has representation from both the husband's and the wife's side, it is mostly the elderly men or father-figures who participate in the arbitration. When represented by men, this can and does lead to oversight of the wife's interests and emotions. On the other hand, the local government

leadership is, statistically seen, to be male dominated. As such, it is not uncommon that the wife's consent against the second marriage, even if expressed, potentially gets disregarded.

It needs to be kept in mind that the causes of the apparent disparity between the spouses' positions on polygamy are both structural and societal. First, a technical-textual reading of section 6 of MFLO makes it clear that failure to comply with the provision of taking permission from the Arbitration Council only imposes a small penalty on the husband but does not invalidate any second marriage contracted in violation of the provision. Hence, as noted before, the system is merely a procedural hurdle to male polygamy, not a substantive bar on

the practice. In rural Bangladesh, it translates to the subjugation of a wife's opinion, eventually leading to the economically and emotionally dependent wives accepting their fates.

Second, polygamy without the first wife's consent at its root has implications for her economic well-being and livelihood as well. A society where an overwhelming majority of married women are structurally made dependent on their husbands for everything, and divorced women still bear the stigma of being home wreckers, does not leave much scope for wives to go against their husbands' desires. Third, the act of circumventing a woman's conjugal autonomy with a mere procedural step is an absolute disregard to her rights. In effect, the

provision deprives a wife of her conjugal freedom, for the sake of the husband's unilateral decisions.

Pertinently, the Hanafi school of jurisprudence, which is predominant in Bangladesh, is silent on the question whether a wife's consent is necessary in permitting the husband's subsequent marriage. Many Islamic scholars have discouraged polygamy on the grounds of conjugal injustice. In my opinion, in today's world, a wife's voluntary and informed consent should also be a deciding factor for allowing polygamy, a position that is assumed by many Muslim countries.

For example, the Indonesian law mandates the consent of the first wife in the husband's polygamy, whereas Turkey and Morocco have adopted a different approach by allowing the wife to file for divorce on the grounds of the husband's polygamy. Saudi Arabia, much like Bangladesh, does not mandate a wife's prior consent for husband's remarriage. Rather, it allows the wife to insert a 'no-polygamy clause' in the marriage contract. All these procedures effectively ensure marital equity.

In conclusion, it is time we elevated the status of wives' consent in polygamy matters from a mere footnote to a make-or-break element and thus break away from interpretations that disparately impact women.

The writer is lecturer of law at East West University.

LAW REVIEW

Reviewing the latest amendments on smoking and tobacco products

SATIRTHA CHAKMA

The interim government has recently enacted the *Smoking and Tobacco Products Usage (Control) (Amendment) Ordinance, 2025* (the 'Ordinance') marking a significant step in strengthening Bangladesh's tobacco control regime. The fresh ordinance redefines 'tobacco' and broadens the meaning of 'tobacco products' to include e-cigarettes, Electronic Nicotine Delivery System (ENDS), Heated Tobacco Product (HTP) and similar devices that have rapidly gained popularity, particularly among the younger users.

The most consequential change lies in redefining what constitutes a 'public place.' Previously, in the *Smoking and Tobacco Products Usage (Control) Act, 2005* (the Act), the definition remained vague and insufficient, leaving loopholes for interpretation and enforcement. However, the new ordinance explicitly includes 'indoor workplace' removing the ambiguity surrounding offices and enclosed work environments. Notably, no clear meaning attached to the term 'private offices' earlier, although it was included in the previous definition. The 2025 ordinance clarifies the term, thereby enabling its broader and more substantive interpretation aligned with public health objectives.

The ordinance imposes ban on tobacco advertising and promotion in all media platforms, including print, electronic, internet, social media, Point of Sales (POS) display, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities and event sponsorships. Further, the amended section 6 (kha) of the Act now prohibits the sale of tobacco products within 100 meters of educational institutions, hospitals, clinics, playgrounds, and children's amusement parks. This provision, which did not exist in the previous Act, addresses the potential risk of exposure of tobacco products in immediate surroundings and mandates preventive measures.

Furthermore, section 6 (gha) imposes a ban on the production, marketing, and use of bidis made from Kumbi and Tendu leaves and consequently repeals the *Bidi Manufacture (Prohibition) Ordinance, 1975* through section 18. In addition, the amended section 10(l) mandates strict colour pictorial health warnings covering 75% of tobacco packaging, along with compulsory warning messages, bringing Bangladesh closer to global best practices in tobacco control.

Penalties under the ordinance have been significantly enhanced too. The amended section 4(2) increases the fine for violations

from Tk 300 to Tk 2,000, with double penalties for repeated offences, while section 6(ga) of the amended Act introduces a fine of Tk 5,000 for vaping related violations. The ordinance also prohibits the use of trademarks of tobacco manufacturing companies in the name of Corporate Social Responsibility products, further limiting the brand visibility and appeal.

The ordinance will affect everyday life and living of many, with roadside *tong* (floating tea stalls) selling tobacco products are likely to face increased scrutiny. For companies, the law introduces stronger sanctions, including licence cancellation and seizure of goods. However, fine and penalties cannot be the ultimate solution. Rather, a holistic approach to tobacco regulation that integrates enforcement, public awareness, economic transition strategies, and institutional accountability is essential. Equally important is the cultivation of civic responsibility to ensure compliance and social acceptance of the law.

Again, there also lies a strong economic contribution arising out of the tobacco industry. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2022-23, Bangladesh's cigarette industry contributed BDT 346.4 billion (about 11.6% of total tax revenue), generated around Tk 40,000 crore in FY 2023-24 with 16% growth, and supports approximately 1.6 million jobs across the economy—additionally creating employment opportunities. Any regulatory framework must therefore be carefully curved considering public health priorities with economic and employment considerations.

A noticeable shift from conventional cigarettes to vapes or e-cigarettes is increasingly evident among younger generations, driven by the misconception that these products are less harmful. In reality, tobacco contains radioactive elements, most notably Polonium 210 (Po-210) and Lead-210 (Pb-210), which pose serious and potentially fatal health risks not only to smokers but also to non-smokers exposed to second-hand smoke.

Despite these robust legal provisions, the core challenge remains is implementation. Bangladesh does not suffer from a shortage of tobacco control laws; rather, weak enforcement and coupled with lack of accountability often render such legislation to symbolic gestures. Without consistent monitoring and institutional responsibility, even the strongest laws risk becoming mere showpieces.

The writer is official contributor to the Law Desk.



FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Reforming land registration in Bangladesh

TASHDIA TARAFDAR RIDISHA

The promulgation of the Registration (Amendment) Ordinance 2026 marks a significant step towards modernising the land and property registration system of Bangladesh. The Ordinance modifies the core of the century-old Registration Act, 1908 by incorporating electronic registration (e-registration), and updating various provisions of the procedure to make deed registrations more efficient, accountable and transparent. In this write-up, I will discuss the most important changes brought.

First, the ordinance allows deeds to be presented, received and registered electronically through the insertion of a new Part XIA and section 77A to the Registration Act. This change can help to cut down bureaucratic time wastage, limit discretionary abuse, and minimise physical interaction, which has been viewed as root of corruption in land offices. Online registration also offers the prospects of enhancing record keeping, simplifying document retrieval and their long-term incorporation with land records, mutation systems, and taxation databases. If implemented effectively, e-registration has the potential to prevent disputes that may result from lost or manipulated documents.

The ordinance further amends the current deadlines so that the registration process becomes more practical. The amended section 17A has raised the time frame of registering some of the documents to 60 days from 30 days. Similarly, under section 26, the maximum permissible delay has been increased

from four months to six months. These modifications are especially beneficial for land transactions in rural settings and in transactions that involve multiple parties. Although stricter deadlines provide certainty, excessive rigidity in deadlines usually leads to procedural injustice. In my view, the updated time limits provide a balance between the administrative discipline and practical flexibility.

Another significant amendment came with regard to the registration of *hiba* (gift under Muslim personal law) and the declaration of gift under Hindu, Christian, as well as Buddhist personal laws. Through amendments to section 52A, the ordinance formally brings declarations of gift and donation alongside sale deeds within the registration framework. Moreover, the incorporation of the word *donor* in addition to the word *seller* is both accommodating and legally consistent. This reform strengthens documentary evidence of title, and may help prevent disputes over informal or unregistered transfers, which often clog the civil courts in Bangladesh.

Next, with the amendment of section 68, a new sub-section has been incorporated that indicates that where a registering officer registers a document without fees, taxes and service charges or duties, this will be considered as a misconduct. Moreover, the amount of money unpaid will be retrieved directly through the concerned officer. In my view, this modification will potentially strike at the root of collusion and negligence that have been longstanding within the land administration. By imposing a personal

financial liability, the law establishes a clear message that compliance with the procedures is not optional.

The ordinance also sets specific deadlines to be used in disposing appeals and applications with the aim of minimising administrative delays. Under the amended section 72, an appeal shall be disposed of in 45 days from the date of filing it. Similarly, under section 73, the applications to registrars where sub-registrars refuse to register on the ground of denial or execution has to be decided within 30 days. Such timelines will prove essential in improving public confidence in the registration system. Delayed decisions often lead to uncertainty, increased litigation, and exploitation of weak parties.

All in all, the legal framework presented by the ordinance is progressive, but only its effective implementation will make it useful. This will require, among others, proper infrastructure, training of registration officers and public awareness. The problem of digital reforms is that they may unintentionally marginalise certain sections of the citizens in case technological access and literacy are not tackled properly. In addition, data protection and cybersecurity should be provided alongside digital land records due to the sensitivity of property information. With proper implementation, nurturing, and supervision, the new changes have the potential to benefit the citizens, investors, and the justice system at large.

The writer is law student, BRAC University.



RICKSHAW ART FESTIVAL 2026 celebrates Bangladesh's colourful heritage

Rickshaw Art Festival 2026 is more than just an exhibition. It is a cultural platform that connects heritage with contemporary Audiences.

ANIKA TAHSIN HAFSA

Rickshaw art is often called a moving canvas because it carries the colours, stories and imagination of Bangladesh through the streets. From birds and flowers to film stars and fantasy characters, rickshaw paintings reflect both our traditions and popular culture. This vibrant art form is now being celebrated at the Rickshaw Art Festival 2026, currently taking place at North South University. The festival was inaugurated on January 28 at 11 am, presented by Awake Coffee Roasters and jointly organised by Shei Dhaka and NSU APC.

Walking through the exhibition feels like stepping into a world of bold and lively colours. Instead of canvas, many artworks are painted on steel rickshaw backs, staying true to the original form. Bright shades of red, orange, yellow and green dominate the works. Visitors



PHOTOS: COURTESY

can see portraits of actors and actresses, colourful peacocks, birds, flowers, and scenes reflecting Bangladeshi culture and animal life.

One of the most interesting aspects of the exhibition is how rickshaw art blends tradition with global pop culture. Characters like Michael Jackson, Mr Bean, Jack Sparrow and Harry Potter appear in rickshaw-paint avatars. Alongside these are rickshaw-style versions of old Bangladeshi cinema posters and modern series such as *Sherlock Holmes*, *The Office*, *Breaking Bad* and *Stranger Things*. The juxtaposition reflects rickshaw art's ability to evolve while preserving its distinctive identity.

The festival showcases works by renowned rickshaw artists Mohammad Hanif Pappu, Dilip Kumar, Syed Ahmad Hossain, Rafiqul Islam, and Monir Hossain (Monir). The inauguration ceremony was attended by photojournalist Shahidul Alam, Adviser to the Ministry of Cultural Affairs Mostofa Sarwar Farooki, a representative from the Embassy of Kosovo, and Dr Abdul Hannan Chowdhury, Vice-Chancellor of North South University. Their presence highlighted the importance of preserving Bangladesh's visual

and cinematic heritage.

Alongside the art exhibition, the festival features a cinematic showcase of modern Bengali classics such as *Aynabaji*, *Monpura*, and *Rickshaw Girl*. These screenings celebrate culturally rooted storytelling. The festival also includes workshops and live art sessions. On January 28, university students received training, while school students will learn live rickshaw painting on the upcoming days. A panel discussion titled *How Can We Preserve & Promote Rickshaw & Cinema Art Globally? A Heritage at Risk of Fading* will be held on January 31. The discussion will feature prominent cultural figures, including representatives from UNESCO and leading cultural institutions.

Rickshaw Art Festival 2026 is more than just an exhibition. It is a cultural platform that connects heritage with contemporary audiences. By bringing together rickshaw art, cinema and storytelling, the festival celebrates Bangladesh's vibrant identity and encourages future generations to value and protect this colourful tradition. The festival is open to the visitors until January 31, from 10 am to 6 pm daily.



Springsteen's 'Streets of Minneapolis' protests ICE violence

Bruce Springsteen has released a new protest song condemning US immigration enforcement amid an intensified federal crackdown.

Titled *Streets of Minneapolis*, the four-and-a-half-minute track was released on January 28 and responds to what Springsteen called "the state terror being visited on the city of Minneapolis". He said he wrote, recorded, and released the song within days of the fatal shootings of Alex Pretti, an ICU nurse, and Renee Good, whom he says were killed by a federal ICE agent during protests in the city.



In a statement, Springsteen said the song was for Minneapolis and "our immigrant neighbors", and dedicated it to Pretti and Good. The lyrics directly attack federal enforcement, referring to "King Trump's private army" and "Trump's federal thugs".

Springsteen has long positioned himself as a vocal critic of Trump and his policies, using interviews, stage remarks, and music to challenge the administration. He has previously called the US president a "threat to our democracy" and has repeatedly warned about what he sees as the erosion of civil liberties.

WHAT'S THE HAPS?

'Chhayachhanda: Gaan-e Gaan-e Nostalgia'

Organised by Dhaka University Film Society, this evocative evening honours the timeless lyricists, composers, and singers who shaped Bengali cinema. Through songs, memories, and tributes, the programme reconnects language, film, and cultural resistance—reviving the golden melodies that once defined collective imagination and continue to shape Bengali artistic identity.

DATE: TODAY | JANUARY 30, 2026
TIME: 5 PM ONWARDS
VENUE: TSC, DHAKA UNIVERSITY



Badhan going to Rotterdam Film Festival with 'Master'

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

Rezwan Shahriar Sumit's *Master*, starring Azmeri Haque Badhan, is set to make its international debut even before its theatrical release. The film has been selected for the 55th edition of the International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR), where it will have its world premiere.

Master has been chosen for screening in the festival's prestigious Big Screen Competition section. Badhan plays a significant role in the film.

Badhan is scheduled to depart for the Netherlands today (January 30), while director Rezwan Shahriar Sumit has already arrived in Rotterdam.

Reacting to the selection, Badhan said, "It is a great joy for me that *Master*, a film I acted in, is competing in the Big Screen Competition section of the International Film Festival Rotterdam. At the same time, it feels wonderful as a Bangladeshi film. It is truly a big achievement and

very happy news for me."

She added, "Since a Bangladeshi film and a film I acted in are competing there, I am also going. Actors Nasir Uddin Khan and Zakia Bari Mamo will also be attending."

Speaking about the film's world premiere, Badhan said, "Alongside competing, *Master* will also have its world premiere. The premiere will take place on February 2. I will be present and will be able to understand the audience's reactions."

Sharing details about her role, Badhan said she has appeared in a completely new kind of character in *Master*. "Audiences may view my character somewhat negatively. I play the role of a UNO (Upazila Nirbahi Officer), which has been a new experience for me."

Describing the film, she said, "*Master* is a political thriller and a very timely film. Viewers will be able to relate to many realities of our country. The story reflects how leadership changes over time and how moral decay can gradually set in."

Badhan also praised the director, saying, "Rezwan Shahriar Sumit is a wonderful person. He has narrated the story beautifully and worked with great care."

She further lauded her co-actors, adding, "My fellow actors have performed brilliantly. I truly enjoyed working with them. Most importantly, I had the opportunity to work with a very strong and dedicated team."



'Lutfar Pradeep' returns to Shilpakala in February

Theatre troupe Samata will stage its production *Lutfar Pradeep* at Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy on February 7 and 8, with performances scheduled for 7 pm at the Experimental Theatre Hall.

Written by Tanvir Mokammel and directed by Sagir Mostafa, the play premiered in Dhaka last month. Its opening show was held on January 3 at Bangladesh Mohila Samity, marking Samata's formal entry into the capital's theatre circuit.

Lutfar Pradeep is a solo performance by veteran actor Chitralekha Guha, marking her first one-woman stage act in over four decades. The play revisits a poignant chapter of colonial Bengal, centred on Lutfunnesa, wife of Nawab Siraj al-Dawlah, who lit a lamp at his grave every evening until her death.

By centring a single woman within a decisive historical rupture, *Lutfar Pradeep* revisits political loss through endurance, memory, and the quiet power of ritual—asking who keeps history alive when empires fall.



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

Fast deals, flimsy scrutiny

FROM PAGE 1
Together, these obligations will force elected leaders to bear financial and political burdens they had no role in designing.

As the clock ticks down to the election on February 12, the flurry of dealmaking is not merely a lapse in fiscal prudence or macroeconomic management; it is a "fundamental breach of principle," according to Debapriya Bhattacharya, a distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue. "It is, in principle, not morally correct," Bhattacharya said, suggesting that a transitional administration should not be tethering the nation's future to multi-billion-dollar obligations in its final hours.

"Whether by design or by default, they are making it immensely difficult for the incoming government to manage the economy, especially given the current disruptive global developments," he said, adding, "It surprises me that those who intend to come to power are not taking these developments, which will make their lives difficult, seriously enough."

By committing the state to massive expenditures, the interim government is creating what Bhattacharya calls a "difficult benchmark" for the incoming administration.

Prof Anu Muhammad, an eminent economist, said the deals with foreign entities lack public transparency, and the methods reek of those of the previous regime. He noted that last minute scramble and ignoring opinions of political parties and the public reminded one of the last autocratic regime. "The interim government assumed power with the promise of reforming and stabilising the democratic system following the mass uprising. Yet, we see that the government itself is not adhering to reforms," he said.

"Instead, it is perpetuating undemocratic processes that will plunge the people into a deep, long term crisis," said Anu Muhammad.

"Once this government is dissolved, there will be no accountability of these advisers and special assistants. They will move on. So, who do we hold accountable?" he said.

DEFENCE INDUSTRIAL ZONE

The interim government has moved into a sensitive arena: defence manufacturing policy, a sector intertwined with national security, foreign relations, and long-term industrial planning. At a meeting of the Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority (BEZA), chaired by Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus on January 26, the government decided to earmark around 850 acres in Mirsarai, Chattogram, for a proposed Defence Industrial Zone.

After the meeting, BEZA Executive Chairman Ashik Chowdhury said the land is currently vacant and was previously designated for the Indian Economic Zone

cancelled last year. Officials say the Defence Industrial Zone is intended to strengthen domestic military production capacity and position Bangladesh for the growing global defence manufacturing market.

But critics argue the project illustrates the interim government's broader pattern: taking long-term strategic decisions without electoral legitimacy. BEZA clarified the zone is not meant to replicate Bangladesh Ordnance Factories through state-run plants, but rather pursue technology transfer, joint ventures and supplier arrangements with foreign partners, with private sector participation.

PAY HIKE PROPOSAL
Criticism intensified after the Ninth National Pay Commission, led by former finance secretary Zakir Ahmed Khan, proposed a civil service pay increase so steep that it could double the government's recurring wage bill if implemented.

The rationale for the pay hike is not entirely groundless. Civil servants have not seen a pay revision in a decade and inflation has eroded purchasing power. But implementing the proposed structure would require an additional Tk 1.06 lakh crore per year, on top of the Tk 1.31 lakh crore the state already spends on salaries and pensions for 14 lakh employees and nine lakh pensioners.

For a treasury strained by debt and missed revenue targets, economists call the proposal a fiscal landmine – especially if it becomes a political inducement rather than a disciplined reform.

AVIATION DIPLOMACY
Yunus's government won a high-stakes diplomatic reprieve with Washington. Facing a protectionist Trump administration threatening tariffs of 37 percent on Bangladeshi garment exports, his team negotiated it down to 20 percent. For a country dependent on garments for the majority of export earnings, it probably averted a disaster.

But economists argue the relief came with a price. In late 2025, Biman Bangladesh Airlines was directed to purchase 14 Boeing aircraft in a multi-billion-dollar deal backed by a sovereign guarantee. What's more, the deal is proceeding without a comparative analysis between Boeing and Airbus.

Governance concerns grew further after a sudden reshuffle of Biman's board weeks before the election. Three officials were appointed to the board of the state-run airline: Khalilur Rahman, the national security adviser and high representative on the Rohingya issue; Faiz Ahmad Taiyeb, special assistant to the chief adviser; and Akhtar Ahmed, senior secretary of the Election Commission.

RECRUITMENT AGENCY LICENCES
The expatriates' welfare ministry approved licences for 252 new overseas recruitment agencies, swelling the total to 2,646, the highest in South Asia.

The ministry claims more competition will break syndicates, but analysts interviewed by The Daily Star argue that oversight is already weak and the expansion will worsen corruption.

The human cost is visible. With markets like Malaysia and the UAE restricted or suspended due to past abuses, illegal migration has risen. The International Organisation for Migration reports Bangladesh ranked first in illegal sea crossings to Europe in 2025, with over 22,000 attempting the dangerous Mediterranean route.

ELECTION-EVE SPENDING SURGE

In perhaps the clearest example of the interim government's end-of-tenure decision-making, the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecneec) on January 25 approved a sweeping package of infrastructure and social spending, authorising 25 new and revised development projects worth a combined Tk 45,191 crore.

While officials argue the decisions were necessary to clear administrative backlogs and sustain economic momentum, the timing has sparked debate about whether a transitional administration should commit the state to major financial obligations so close to a transition.

A key driver of this late-stage spending surge is the first major revision of the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant project, which Ecneec approved with a massive Tk 25,592 crore cost increase, raising the total to Tk 138,685 crore. The project deadline has also been extended by two and a half years, pushing completion to June 2028.

The committee also approved the Bangladesh-China Friendship General Hospital, a 1,000-bed facility for the northern region costing Tk 2,459 crore, with most of the funding expected from China.

The interim government has also moved quickly on massive energy procurement – an area that carries heavy fiscal risk for future administrations. On January 27, the government's purchase committee approved a proposal to procure five LNG cargoes in 2026, citing the need to meet rising domestic energy demand. Petrobangla will procure LNG directly from Aramco Trading Singapore. That's just the latest in a series of energy purchases.

RAB VEHICLES AHEAD OF POLLS

The interim government has given initial approval to purchase 163 vehicles for the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) through direct procurement, citing the need to strengthen the force's operational capability ahead of the national election. The procurement would include three Jeeps, 100 pickup trucks, and 60 microbuses. The final cost will only be known after approval by the government purchase committee.

The move has drawn

scrutiny because the Rab has faced serious domestic and international criticism over alleged human rights violations. The interim government's own Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances recommended abolishing this unit in a report to the chief adviser. Rights organisations, including Human Rights Watch, have also called for the force to be disbanded.

Against this backdrop, questions have been raised over why the interim government is approving such procurement as it approaches the end of its tenure. Home Ministry Senior Secretary Nasimul Gani defended the decision to bypass open tenders, saying the ministry wanted to purchase the vehicles from state-owned Pragati Industries. "We are keeping government money within the government," he added.

SOCIAL SAFETY PLANS FOR FY27

The interim government has also decided to increase monthly allowances and expand beneficiary coverage for 15 social safety net programmes (SSNPs) for the upcoming fiscal year, which begins on July 1. This move has also drawn criticism from policy experts who noted that implementation will fall to the next elected government, which may have different priorities.

In an earlier interview with The Daily Star, Mustafa K Mujeri, executive director of the Institute for Inclusive Finance and Development (InFM), said such decisions are difficult to justify at this stage. He added that if the government intended to cushion low-income groups amid persistent inflation, it could have increased allowances and expanded coverage during the current fiscal year.

PROMOTIONS ACCELERATED

In another significant administrative move, the government promoted 118 joint secretaries to the rank of additional secretary on January 27.

The timing of these promotions has drawn attention as the interim government prepares to hand over power, raising questions about whether such large-scale bureaucratic reshuffles should be finalised at the last minute.

"Now that the countdown is there, and they are running out of gas. They should have concentrated on completing the reforms they had committed to," Bhattacharya said.

He questioned whether these decisions represent the "whole government" or are being steered by specific individual interest groups looking to secure personal gains before the transition.

"These developments lack transparency, lack stakeholder discussion or professional discussion," he said, continuing, "so the question is, are they creating this difficult benchmark for the next government by design or by default?"

Will take ruthless action against extortionists

FROM PAGE 1
In his speech, Shafiqur stressed the need for establishing justice in society alongside restoring equality. "Extortionists, land grabbers, case manipulators and the corrupt swoop on ordinary people like birds of prey."

At one point, he called upon businesspeople to stand up against extortion, adding that the signs surrounding the election were not encouraging.

"Women are being harassed, people are being killed in attacks, offices are being set on fire, election campaigns are being obstructed, and attempts are being made to provoke clashes," the Jamaat leader said.

He called on the

government and the Election Commission to take appropriate steps to gain public trust.

Addressing rivals, he said they should respect others and practice the democracy they so loudly preach.

CORRUPTION
Since the start of the campaign, Jamaat leaders, including the party ameer, have repeatedly been saying that the BNP government of the past was riddled with graft and pointed out Bangladesh ranking top on global corruption indices at the time.

In this context, BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman, hinting at Jamaat, told a rally in Mymensingh, "My question is, from 2001 to 2006, two members of a

party were also in the BNP government. If the BNP was so bad, why didn't those two resign?"

Jamaat chief yesterday responded by saying, "We did not leave so that at least three ministries could be saved and protected from corruption."

Earlier around 11:00am, the main election office of Shafiqur's constituency, Dhaka-15, and a "multimedia bus" for Jamaat's digital campaign were inaugurated in the Water Tank area of Mirpur-10.

At the event, the Jamaat ameer spoke about the death of Maulana Rezaul Karim, secretary of Jamaat's Sreebardi upazila unit, who was killed in a clash between Jamaat and BNP activists in Jhenaigati,

Sherpur. When a reporter asked him about the incident, Shafiqur said, "It indicates intolerance. It indicates a lack of confidence in the people. It indicates an inability to tolerate others' victory."

He added that the incident raised questions about a level playing field during the election. "We will not allow anyone to trample on it."

The Jamaat chief said their electoral fight was not for any party, individual or family, but for the welfare of 180 million people. "We don't seek Jamaat's victory alone, want the people's collective victory."

Shafiqur later joined rallies in Dhaka-14, Dhaka-16 and Dhaka-17.

People of Dhalghata want homes alongside growth

FROM PAGE 2
When asked what kind of candidate they want in the upcoming election, local residents said they had largely accepted the need to give up land for development projects. However, they are unwilling to completely abandon their birthplace. Their main demand is for the government to establish a planned township in the area so that affected families can continue living there despite land acquisition.

Ward No. 3 member Jomir Uddin said the government had taken over land, leaving many residents unemployed. He said the primary demands of local people are employment opportunities and assured housing.

From an economic standpoint, the Cox's Bazar-2 seat (Moheshkhali and Kutubdia) is considered one of the most important constituencies. The island-based constituency in the Bay of Bengal is viewed as a future economic hub, which is why heavyweight candidates traditionally contest elections here.

There are 3.88 lakh voters in Moheshkhali and Kutubdia region, as per EC data.

In the 13th parliamentary election, four candidates are in the race. However, local voters say the main contest will be between BNP-nominated candidate Alamgir Mohammad Mahfullah Farid, a two-time former lawmaker contesting with the Sheaf of Paddy symbol, and Jamaat-e-Islami Assistant Secretary General and former MP Hamidur Rahman Azad, contesting with the "Scales" symbol.

US resumes food aid to Somalia

AFP, Nairobi
The United States yesterday announced the resumption of food distribution in Somalia, weeks after the destruction of a US-funded World Food Programme (WFP) warehouse at Mogadishu's port.

Both candidates are actively campaigning door to door. Hamidur Rahman Azad, a resident of Kutubdia, has been staying in the Matarbari area of Moheshkhali since Monday to conduct campaign activities. He has been meeting voters, shaking hands and exchanging greetings.

At around 11:30am on Tuesday, Azad arrived in the Nasir's Dail area of Dhalghata with two convoys. Jamaat leaders and supporters gathered in large numbers, chanting slogans in favour of the Scales symbol. He greeted familiar voters



in the local market, embraced supporters, and urged them to work for his victory. Later, he entered residential areas along a narrow coastal road, visiting homes and speaking with women voters to seek support.

At a street rally at Matarbari on the same day, Azad said that if the Moheshkhali Master Plan is implemented, South Chattogram will emerge as one of the country's most important commercial hubs.

He said, "The Moheshkhali Master Plan is not just an infrastructure project; it is a blueprint for

Bangladesh's economic transformation. If implemented, it will significantly boost employment generation, industrialisation, power production, port-centric trade and international investment in the Maheshkhali-Kutubdia area."

Dr Hamidur Rahman Azad further said that the launch of the Matarbari deep seaport would open a new horizon for the country's import and export sector. He added that through ensuring energy security, establishing special economic zones and industrial parks, and

meeting voters, exchanging greetings and seeking votes in favour of the Sheaf of Paddy symbol. About the upcoming development projects, Alamgir said once they become operational, local people would benefit economically. "... after the deep seaport becomes functional, local youths would be provided with jobs there."

Speaking against the projects, Moheshkhali Rakkha Andolon Organiser Abdul Mannan Rana said, "Moheshkhali is not just an island; it is one of Bangladesh's most resource-rich natural regions. Nearly five lakh people here depend on agriculture, fisheries, salt production and betel leaf cultivation for their lives and livelihoods. If the government's Moheshkhali Integrated Development Authority project is implemented, it will bring a devastating impact on this traditional and nature-based way of life."

He said that under the project, there is a plan to acquire more than 34,000 acres of land from the region. "Around 12,000 acres have already been acquired, where several development projects are currently underway."

He added that in areas where development projects are ongoing, most of the land is salt fields, and so far about 200 families had been relocated from these areas.

Rana warned that if the project is implemented, nearly two lakh people could be displaced within the next 10 years.

Meanwhile, BNP candidate Alamgir Farid is also campaigning intensively, visiting different localities with his supporters. He has been warned any future aid would depend on the Somali government taking accountability, a stance Mogadishu countered by saying the warehouse demolition was part of the port's "expansion and repurposing works."

On Wednesday, however, the Somali government

working under three mandates – reform, justice, and election.

"Elections are not organised by the government; the government creates a favourable environment, while the Election Commission conducts the polls. Similarly, justice is administered by the courts, while the government only ensures a supportive environment. Therefore, the core mandate of the government is state reform," he said.

Addressing claims that such a referendum has never been held before, Riaz noted that between 1972 and 2024, a total of 48 referendums took place worldwide, and in most cases governments campaigned in favour of a "yes" vote.

"Therefore, internationally this is an accepted practice. Morally, it is our duty and responsibility, and legally there is no barrier," he said.

He further said the interim government is

Govt, EC at odds over civil servants' push for 'yes/no'

FROM PAGE 1
regarding the issue.

According to Section 21 of the Referendum Ordinance, 2025 and Article 86 of the Representation of the People Order (RPO), 1972, any person engaged in the service of the republic may inform and make the public aware of the referendum. "However, none shall in any way call upon the people to vote 'yes' or 'no' in the referendum, because such activities may affect the result of the referendum," the letter said.

Contacted, Election Commissioner Anwarul Islam Sarkar told The Daily Star, "According to the Referendum Ordinance, government officials cannot campaign for either 'yes' or 'no'. If they do, it will be a punishable offence."

Section 21 of the Referendum Ordinance states that in the 13th parliamentary election, any action deemed an offence or a violation of the electoral code of conduct under

the RPO, 1972 and related rules shall also, as far as applicable, be considered an offence or a violation in the referendum.

Article 86 of the RPO, 1972 says a person in the service of Bangladesh is guilty of an offence, punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to five years and shall not be less than one year, and also with fine, if they misuse their official position in a manner calculated to influence the result of the election.

Under the Election Officers (Special Provisions) Act, 1991, the EC appoints government officials to election duties. Deputy commissioners and divisional commissioners are appointed as returning officers, while upazila nirbahi officers and other officials serve as assistant returning officers.

The act states that when any person is appointed as an election officer, he shall, from the date of such

appointment until relieved of his election duties, be deemed to be on deputation under the EC, in addition to his regular employment.

During this period, the election officer remains under the supervision of the commission and, as applicable, the returning officer, and must comply with all lawful orders or instructions issued by them. Election-related responsibilities take precedence, and other duties may be performed only if they do not conflict with election work.

If an election officer willfully fails or refuses to comply with any order or instruction issued by the EC or violates any provision of election law, they shall be deemed to have engaged in misconduct, which is punishable under the service rules.

Despite this, several advisers and senior government officials are campaigning in favour of a "yes" vote.

According to a Press Information Department (PID) handout issued yesterday night, Religious Affairs Adviser AFM Khalid Hossain urged everyone to build public opinion in favour of voting "yes".

If "yes" passes, dictatorship will never again emerge in the country, he said, speaking at a views exchange meeting at the Dharmarajik Buddhist Monastery in Basabo, Dhaka, organised jointly by the Buddhist Religious Welfare Trust and the Christian Religious Welfare Trust to promote the referendum and encourage voter participation.

Speaking at the same programme, Prof Ali Riaz, special assistant to the chief adviser, also urged everyone to vote "yes" to prevent fascism.

On January 7, the Cabinet Division directed secretaries of all ministries and divisions, divisional commissioners, and deputy commissioners to use the referendum

logo in all government communications, including letters, orders, circulars, and gazettes, and to display two banners at all government, semi-government, and autonomous offices.

The division also provided the text for the banners, to be displayed vertically. One reads, "Poribortoner Jonyo Ha" (Yes for Change).

The other lists issues that could be incorporated into the constitution if the "yes" vote wins and states, "By casting a 'Yes' vote, you will get all these things mentioned here; if you vote 'No,' you will not get anything."

Following the directives, government offices have been displaying the banners. The Daily Star yesterday contacted Prof Riaz, who is also the chief coordinator of public awareness campaign activities related to the referendum and national polls, for his comments on the matter.

"We have seen the EC letter. We will give our

reaction after analysing it and consulting with lawyers," he said, without elaborating.

He had earlier said there was no legal barrier preventing government officials from campaigning in favour of a "yes" vote.

He made the remarks at a meeting organised by the Sylhet divisional administration on January 24 to promote the referendum and encourage voter participation.

Prof Riaz had headed the National Consensus Commission that drafted the July charter after months of discussions with political parties.

Speaking at the Sylhet meeting, he said the referendum is a major step toward realising the rights for which people sacrificed their lives in the July uprising, while families are still searching for the unclaimed bodies of their loved ones.

"Neither the existing constitution, the

working under three mandates – reform, justice, and election. "Elections are not organised by the government; the government creates a favourable environment, while the Election Commission conducts the polls. Similarly, justice is administered by the courts, while the government only ensures a supportive environment. Therefore, the core mandate of the government is state reform," he said.

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"Therefore, internationally this is an accepted practice. Morally, it is our duty and responsibility, and legally there is no barrier," he said.

He further said the interim government is

'A non-serious proposition'

FROM PAGE 16
system and a few helpless NGOs being sent around the country to persuade people to vote 'yes' for reforms," he said.

He said the interim government wants to oblige the July uprising leaders and thus a cosmetic arrangement has been created.

"But the objective reality is that until you have a government in office for the next five years, capable of carrying out reforms, and until you can evaluate the quality and sincerity of their implementation, reforms do not truly take place."

Prof Sobhan said political settlement requires the main players coming to an understanding over the rules of the game, identifying the principal players and also those who can disrupt it and then finding ways to re-accommodate them within the political system.

"Unfortunately, at the moment, you have blackwashed – or whitewashed – one of the players completely out of

the game," Prof Sobhan said, referring to the banning of Awami League's activities.

Mahfuj Alam, leader of the July uprising and former adviser to the interim government, said he was in favour of reconciling with the Awami League and holding accountable the ones responsible for massive crimes.

The core objective of the anti-discrimination movement was transforming the entire state system, Mahfuj said, but added that the vision could not be fully communicated to the audience supporting the uprising, particularly the students.

The major resistance to reforms came from the civil-military bureaucracy, he said, adding that the reform efforts in these areas "failed disastrously".

Mahfuj said building consensus among political parties proved to be a major challenge.

Although there was ideological unity during the uprising, a subsequent

shift toward one side of the political spectrum created a trust deficit among stakeholders, he said, adding that part of the civil society became critical of the government because of violent activities.

Naomi Hossain, a professor of Development Studies at SOAS University of London, said she expected the next government to recognise political violence as a critical problem for Bangladesh.

"That means removing the impunity of incumbent power to commit violence and reducing the incentives for violence to be part of political competition. Until that changes, I don't see how we can truly consolidate democracy or move forward."

In an earlier session, Prof Ali Riaz, special assistant to the chief adviser, said civil society had "completely failed" after the uprising and would "fail another round" when the next opportunity arises.

He said it adopted a self-declared apolitical posture

that ultimately aligned it with partisan interests.

Prof Riaz said the interim government lacked the political command to control the state apparatus, allowing the bureaucracy to regain dominance, while the "ancient regime" remained embedded in state structures.

"You are asking them [the bureaucracy] to support you while telling them their authority will be reduced. Why would they?"

Shaheen Anam, executive director of Manusher Jonno Foundation, rejected Prof Riaz's characterisation of civil society and said their actions since July were political by nature.

"All the protests, all the statements that we have made so far are all political," Shaheen said, adding that civil society took positions against discrimination because it believed the interim government had a mandate to protect inclusivity.

Mirza M Hasan, a senior research fellow at BIGD, said the post-uprising period should be read as what

Antonio Gramsci called a "time of monsters", when the old order is dying but the new has not yet been born.

Sayed Ferdous, a professor at Jahangirnagar University, said student leaders who initially appeared as "superheroes" or "mavericks" were quickly absorbed into the system.

"In their minds, they too became small autocrats," he said, adding that marginalised groups remained among the worst affected despite promises of ending discrimination.

Prof Samina Luthfa of Dhaka University said the political transition that followed was shaped largely by elite negotiations rather than grassroots control.

She said student leaders who had mobilised people on the streets gradually moved closer to formal power, weakening ties with supporters.

The rapid move to form a political party, she added, left little space for internal debate on ideology, goals and organisation, she added.

981 hurt in polls-related violence since Oct last year

FROM PAGE 3
Khondoker Rafiqul Islam, additional inspector general (crime and operations) at Police Headquarters, told The Daily Star that election-time violence is not new and urged people not to treat it as something unusual.

"It is unfortunate," he said, adding that Bangladesh has often failed to move beyond a culture of confrontation during elections.

Rafiqul said police, other law enforcement agencies and returning officers are trying to bring rival sides to the table and ensure that the electoral code of conduct is followed.

But he said many people do not heed advice and act with "other agendas".

Referring to the Sherpur killing, he said a manifesto-reading programme that should have been orderly

turned into chair throwing, clashes and, eventually, a death.

Rafiqul said police tried to move the groups in different directions, but tensions continued for hours as the sides stayed close to one another.

He said cases have been filed against those responsible.

Tawohidul Haque, an associate professor at Dhaka University's Institute of Social Welfare and Research, however, said the measures taken by law enforcement agencies on the ground were "very weak".

He said the Election Commission is only issuing verbal warnings, with no visible steps on the field.

Tawohidul said political parties also bear responsibility, as public expectations of political leaders and activists after the

July uprising have not been reflected in their conduct.

"They are behaving violently as before," he said.

An analysis of reported incidents since January 22 shows that most clashes have taken place between the BNP-led alliance and the Jamaat-led alliance.

In recent days, election-related clashes were reported in at least seven places, including Dhaka, Faridpur, Cumilla, Shariatpur, Sherpur, Pabna, Chattogram and Bhola.

HRSS said several women activists faced attacks, beatings and humiliation while campaigning in different districts, as political vendettas spilt onto the streets.

Such acts undermine women's political participation and interfere with civic and voting rights,

personal freedom and freedom of expression, it said.

A high official at Police Headquarters told The Daily Star that their analysis of recent violence found clashes were fuelled by rumours, offensive posts and provocative information on Facebook, alongside local disputes.

"We reviewed such information and took necessary measures," the official said.

Meanwhile, Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam yesterday said, "We hope the coming days will be much better. With the gradual deployment of security forces, the situation will further improve."

Responding to a question while briefing journalists at the Foreign Service Academy, Shafiqul said political parties

have so far shown restraint and tolerance while carrying out election campaigns.

Noting that according to police data, four people have been killed so far since the formal election campaign began on January 22, he said, "If you compare this with previous elections, though it is tough to reach a conclusion as two weeks are still left to the polls, you will see that 115 people were killed before the elections on January 5, 2014."

"In that reality, we believe there is still a sufficient level of tolerance among the political parties. They are campaigning in a good manner, and they are abiding by electoral laws and following the code of conduct," the press secretary said.

He, however, acknowledged that "a few isolated incidents" have taken place.

Two ordinances to protect women, kids in all spaces

FROM PAGE 16
It strictly prohibits any form of retaliatory action for filing a complaint and includes provisions to address such behaviour, said the press release.

At the same time, the ordinance incorporates specific safeguards to ensure fairness in cases of false complaints, so that genuine victims are not discouraged from coming forward.

If forming an ICC is not feasible, the ordinance provides for the establishment of local complaint committees through deputy commissioners and upazila

nirbahi officers, ensuring that citizens still have an effective channel to lodge complaints.

To ensure effective implementation, monitoring committees will be established at both district and upazila levels. In addition, a special fund will be created to support victims with financial assistance, rehabilitation, counselling, legal aid and awareness-building initiatives.

The draft ordinance has four chapters and 20 sections, said Suchismita Tihi, assistant press secretary, at a press briefing

yesterday. "One important aspect is that the draft includes physical, verbal, mental, suggestive and digital-space behaviour as sexual harassment."

A women-led committee will be able to receive complaints verbally, in writing or online and the investigation must be completed within 90 days of receiving the complaint.

The ordinance considers providing security and mental support to the complainant and includes special provisions separately for children and persons with disabilities,

she added.

Also at yesterday's advisory council meeting chaired by Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, the draft Domestic Violence Prevention Ordinance, 2026 and nine other ordinances, proposals and policies were approved.

The draft Domestic Violence Prevention Ordinance 2026, which will replace the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010, aims to protect women and children, prevent domestic abuse, ensure speedy trials and establish survivor-centric

remedies. It introduces a more comprehensive and timely legal framework, broadens the definition of domestic violence to include physical and psychological abuse, sexual conduct or abuse and economic abuse within its scope.

The ordinance seeks to uphold families as safe and secure spaces while ensuring swift protection for women and children who faced such abuse, their safe shelter, medical care, legal aid and rehabilitation, according to the press release from the CA's Press Wing.

No legal bar on NCT deal with DP World

FROM PAGE 16
for awarding the contract for operation and maintenance of NCT was in accordance with the 2017 Procurement Policy, which allows for direct selection or appointment when implementing projects.

The law, which vests the relevant authority with the power, was not challenged in this case, the HC bench said.

The writ petition is premature as no work order has been issued, it added.

Following the SC chamber judge's order, there is no legal bar for the government to initiate the process of awarding the contract to DP World for

container handling at NCT, Aneek R Haque, additional attorney general, told The Daily Star.

The government and Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) are close to finalising the procedures of signing a concession agreement with UAE-based DP World for the operation and maintenance of NCT under a public-private partnership (PPP).

The matter is still sub judice, so the government cannot go ahead with the deal, Md Anwar Hossen, a lawyer for the writ petitioner, told The Daily Star.

The apex chamber judge has asked the Bangladesh

Jubo Arthanitibid Forum to file a leave to appeal petition with the SC against the HC verdict after receiving the certified copy, he said.

Details of the HC verdict will be known once its full text is released.

The CPA in coordination with the PPP Authority and shipping ministry is close to finalising the deal procedures, The Daily Star has learnt from people involved with the proceedings.

The government recently revised the timeline targeting the first week of February for completing the deal signing, they said.

On January 20, the CPA formed a 10-member

sub-committee to assist the seven-member tender evaluation committee regarding the appointment of a private operator for NCT.

Senior CPA officials including the project director and the evaluation committee members are working in Dhaka for the last few days to complete the technical and financial evaluation of the bid submitted by DP World.

Meanwhile, leaders and activists of Chattogram Bandar Jatiyatabadi Srnamik Dal and former Chattogram Port CBA yesterday announced an eight-hour work abstention on Saturday and Sunday

demanding the cancellation of the proposed deal.

They threatened tougher movement like collapsing the port operations from Monday unless the government changes its decision.

They also brought out a protest procession in front of the Bandar Bhaban (administrative building of Chattogram port) around 12:00pm. A section of port employees joined the procession that paraded through the premises.

At one stage, they entered the administrative building and staged a demonstration chanting slogans like 'Go Back DP World'.

Set up one commission for media, not two

FROM PAGE 16
the government was sincere in drafting the two ordinances, adding that a legal framework is essential for independent journalism.

"For this, we want to complete these media-related ordinances even though we have a limited time left," she said.

Kamal Ahmed, head of the Media Reform Commission, argued that there should be only one commission for the media. He said the government

could enact a separate law for broadcasting, but the oversight body should remain unified.

"The way the commission is proposed in the current draft, it will just become another department under the information ministry, rather than an independent commission," he said.

Matiur Rahman Chowdhury, chief editor of Daily Manab Zamin, said, "I feel afraid whenever I hear about laws because I don't believe in control."

He said the law should not be rushed and that more time is needed, adding that there is no guarantee a future political government would accept it.

Obaidur Rahman Shahin, president of the Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ), pointed out that many key stakeholders were absent from the meeting. He said the laws should be drafted only after consultations with all stakeholders, instead of being rushed.

After the meeting, Rizwana told reporters that there was a general consensus on formulating an ordinance.

Responding to concerns that the process was being hurried, she said, "This hasn't happened in 54 years. We believe it is better late than never. This will improve the quality of journalism."

Regarding the absence of key stakeholders, she said many might have missed the meeting as it

was called with only one day's notice. "We will talk to them later," she added.

The meeting was attended by Fayeze Ahmad Taiyeb, special assistant to the chief adviser; Mahbuba Farjana, secretary of the information and broadcasting ministry; Prof Gitara Nasreen of Dhaka University; Shahidul Islam, president of the Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ); and representatives of various online media organisations.

Hasina, Kamal, 6 others charged

FROM PAGE 16
earlier that month.

Police officials later claimed that "nine militants" were killed in a joint counter-terrorism operation, codenamed Storm 26, after hours of gunfire and grenade explosions.

Law enforcers said they recovered a large cache of explosives, firearms and knives, along with black flags and clothing bearing symbols commonly associated with the Islamic State. They also claimed the group was likely affiliated with the banned Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh.

According to officials, an injured suspect detained hours earlier provided crucial intelligence that enabled the operation. The militants were described as young and educated, with possible links to earlier high-profile attacks, including the Holey Artisan Bakery siege.

Placing the formal charge yesterday, prosecutor Gazi Monwar Hossain Tami told the tribunal that the operation was staged and that the victims – madrasa students and religious youths – had

been illegally detained, forcibly disappeared and later killed.

Eight of the victims were identified as Motaleb alias Abdullah; Raihan alias Raihanul Kabir alias Tarek; Matiur Rahman; Md Jubayer Hossain; Sejad Rauf alias Orko; Taj Ul Haque alias Rashik; Abu Hakim alias Naim; and Akifuzzaman Khan. The other remains unidentified.

According to the prosecution, the youths were picked up from different parts of the country, held at secret detention facilities run by DMP's Detective Branch, CTTC and other units, and later confined at the Jahaj Building under the guise of a "block raid".

Tamim alleged that members of CTTC's SWAT team opened fire on the detainees shortly after midnight on July 26, killing nine of them and critically injuring Md Rakibul Hasan alias Rigen.

A false case was later filed to legitimise the operation, while a fabricated seizure list was prepared on the instruction of Monirul Islam, the prosecutor said. He further alleged that

the crimes were committed with the instruction, consent and knowledge of the accused, including Hasina, Kamal, Shahidul Hoque and Asaduzzaman Mia. Other accused senior officers were present at the scene and supervised.

At a press briefing on July 26, 2016, Asaduzzaman Mia had presented the deceased as militants.

The charges also note that Hasina and Kamal allegedly awarded officers involved in the operation with the Bangladesh Police Medal and President's Police Medal.

Tamim said the allegations disclose prima facie offences of murder, abduction, enforced disappearance, confinement, torture, conspiracy, abetment and other inhumane acts under the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, 1973.

After hearing the charges, the three-member tribunal ordered the authorities concerned to produce the accused already in custody before it and to arrest and produce the remaining accused in the next hearing fixed for February 8.

They walk out of jail without bail

FROM PAGE 16
case filed with Tarakanada Police Station.

The release occurred after a "production warrant" was mistakenly treated as a bail order.

Meanwhile, Zakaria Intiaz, a deputy jailer of Mymensingh Central

Jail, has been suspended in connection with the incident, he said.

"Zakaria Intiaz told us that the accused were mistakenly released due to a lack of caution," Touhidul said.

A three-member probe committee was formed

today to investigate the matter and will submit its report within three working days, the DIG prison said.

The committee will determine the exact cause, and legal action will be taken against those responsible, he added.

Tiny shoes that'll never be worn

FROM PAGE 16
"When I reached inside the hole, he held my hand for a while," Mim says in a trembling voice.

"I kept shouting for help. But I couldn't save my brother."

Mim, a class three student, says Misbah often wanted to go to school with her.

"He was too small, so I couldn't take him," she says softly. "I thought I would take him next year."

This correspondent saw that the uncovered pit was just 20 to 25 feet from the house and five feet away from a tubewell used by the family and neighbours.

Overgrown weeds had concealed the pit for years. After clearing the bushes only recently, it became exposed, turning into a

deadly trap for unsuspecting playful children.

Firefighters recovered Misbah after a four-hour rescue operation around 8:30pm.

Inside the small home, allotted under the Ashrayan project, silence hangs heavy. The father, Saiful Alam, a day labourer, is in tears in one room. In the other room, neighbours try to console Misbah's mother.

The family of four used to sleep in the same room. "I thought having a daughter and a son was enough. No matter how poor we are, I wanted to educate them both."

Neighbour Ismail Hossain says the incident should not be dismissed as an accident. "These houses and tube wells were

built under a government project. Leaving an abandoned pit open like this is criminal negligence. Those responsible must be identified and held accountable."

Raozan Upazila Nirbahi Officer SM Rahatul Islam told The Daily Star that a three-member investigation committee, headed by Upazila Engineer Abul Kalam, has been formed to determine responsibility.

The committee has been asked to submit its report within seven working days. "If negligence is found, action will be taken," he said.

Back at the house, Mim clutches the bucket with her brother's clothes. Gone is the simple dream of walking to school together.

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২য় পুনঃ দরপত্র বিক্রয় নং-০৮ তারিখ: ২৯/০১/২০২৬ খ্রি.

১. প্রকল্প পরিচালকের কার্যালয়, "অর্থনৈতিক জীবনচক্র হারানো রাবার গাছ কর্তন, পুনঃবাপান সূজন ও রাবার প্রক্রিয়াকরণ আধুনিকায়ন" শীর্ষক প্রকল্প, বিএফআইডিসি, সদর দপ্তর, "বনশিল্প ভবন", ৭৩, মতিঝিল বা/এ, ঢাকা।
২. মহাব্যবস্থাপকের কার্যালয়, বিএফআইডিসি, রাবার বিভাগ, সিলেট জোন, ত্রিশাকলা।

দরপত্র দাখিলের স্থান

১. প্রকল্প পরিচালকের কার্যালয়, "অর্থনৈতিক জীবনচক্র হারানো রাবার গাছ কর্তন, পুনঃবাপান সূজন ও রাবার প্রক্রিয়াকরণ আধুনিকায়ন" শীর্ষক প্রকল্প, বিএফআইডিসি, সদর দপ্তর, "বনশিল্প ভবন", ৭৩, মতিঝিল বা/এ, ঢাকা।
২. ব্যবস্থাপকের কার্যালয়, বিএফআইডিসি, ইটালি উড ওয়ার্কস, জেজিএস শা/এ, ঢাকা।
৩. ব্যবস্থাপকের কার্যালয়, বিএফআইডিসি, সিএমপি মিরপুর, ঢাকা।

(ড. মোহাম্মদ মাসুদুর রহমান হুইয়া)
প্রকল্প পরিচালক (যুগ্মাধিকারী)
অর্থনৈতিক জীবনচক্র হারানো রাবার গাছ কর্তন, পুনঃবাপান সূজন ও রাবার প্রক্রিয়াকরণ আধুনিকায়ন" শীর্ষক প্রকল্প
বাংলাদেশ বনশিল্প উন্নয়ন কর্পোরেশন, ঢাকা

GD-222



(From left) A tombstone at the christian cemetery; a monument at the entrance of Our lady of the Holy Rosary Cathedral; and a monument at the Chattogram War Cemetery honouring the fallen soldiers of World War II.

Three cemeteries that tell Chattogram's LAYERED PAST



ELIZA BINTE ELAHI

has so far visited more than 50 countries across the globe. Eliza, who teaches at the University of South Asia as an adjunct faculty, considers herself a history and heritage lover.

Want to share your travel experiences with us? Please send your stories to

holiday@thedailystar.net

Travelling to cemeteries is neither common nor particularly popular in our part of the world. Even heritage tourism itself was barely acknowledged as a serious form of travel a decade ago. While things have changed slightly, heritage travel still occupies a modest corner of travellers' imaginations today. Yet, slowly and steadily, it is finding its place among history enthusiasts and curious wanderers.

Cemetery travel, in particular, invites raised eyebrows. And yet, a little reflection reveals that some of the world's most visited landmarks are, at heart, burial sites: the pyramids of Egypt, the Taj Mahal, Timur's tomb, mausoleums of rulers, leaders, and historical figures whose resting places have become gateways into the past.

Chattogram -- the Queen of the East -- is an ancient settlement overflowing with archaeological wealth. Historians continue to debate exactly how old this port city is, but they agree on one thing: Chattogram and its international port are at least two thousand years old.

Each name marks a turn in history, a change of rulers, traders, settlers, and travellers who arrived from distant lands and often stayed for

This is among the oldest cemeteries in Bangladesh -- hardly surprising in one of the world's most ancient port cities. Merchants, sailors, administrators, and travellers from Europe and beyond passed through Chattogram for centuries.

What immediately caught my eye were the obelisk-shaped tombs. My first encounter with an obelisk was at Bahadur Shah Park in Dhaka. Until recently, that Dhaka monument was widely considered Bangladesh's only obelisk. But this cemetery adds a new layer to that narrative.

Several obelisk-like tombs stand here, including one with a sharp pyramidal top still intact. The Christian cemetery in Narinda, Dhaka, has similar structures, though none as tall. By that measure, Chattogram can rightfully claim to host Bangladesh's second obelisk.

Among all the cemeteries I have visited across the country, this is the richest in surviving graves -- around 300 in total. Yet many epitaphs are weathered beyond reading, pleading for restoration.

The oldest surviving grave belongs to 17-year-old Hannah Ross, wife of James Ross, who died



A memorial register listing 6,500 merchant navy sailors who perished during the WWII at Chattogram War Cemetery.

laws -- a cemetery so vast it cannot be explored on foot. Chattogram's war cemetery is smaller, but no less moving.

World War II reshaped the globe. At the time, Bangladesh was under British rule. To honour fallen soldiers, two war cemeteries were built here -- one in Chattogram and the other in Cumilla's Mainamati. Both are maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

Located on Badsha Mia Chowdhury Road in Mehediabag, near the Chattogram Institute of Fine Arts, the cemetery sits on a sloping hillside.

Here lie 755 soldiers who died in the Burma Front -- from Britain, British India, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Myanmar, East and West Africa, the Netherlands, and Japan.

Upon entering, a central altar marked with a cross and sword motif draws the eye. Two red-brick cottages flank the gate. One houses

a memorial book listing 6,500 merchant navy sailors who perished during the war. The other contains a register detailing the names and brief biographies of the 755 soldiers buried here.

What makes this cemetery exceptional is that soldiers here are buried according to their religious traditions.

Construction began in the early 1950s. Initially, there were 400 graves. Notably, alongside Commonwealth forces lie 19 Japanese soldiers, commemorated by a slightly elevated memorial -- a rare symbol of reconciliation.

During the war, Chattogram hosted Allied training facilities, the Fourteenth Army's forward base, and British General Hospital No. 152, active from December 1944 to October 1945. After the war, remains from temporary graves across the region were shifted here.

Standing amid the perfectly tended lawns, I could not help wishing the Christian cemetery received even a fraction of this care.

OUR LADY OF THE HOLY ROSARY CATHEDRAL AND CEMETERY

British writer John A Radford notes in Chittagong Christian Cemetery that Roman Catholic priest Father Francisco Fernandez arrived in Porto Grande (Chattogram) from Goa in 1598. However, the Portuguese presence in the area dates back to 1518.

The first Christian church in Chattogram was established around 1600 AD. Though initially welcomed by the Arakan kings, it was later destroyed, and priests were imprisoned. A second church, built in 1602, was lost to natural disasters.

The Our Lady of the Holy Rosary Cathedral, located on Bandar Road, Patharghata and established in 1843, is among the oldest churches in Bangladesh, locally known as the Patharghata Church.

It was built on one acre of land by Francis Auguste Gairaud and Jean Barbier and dedicated to Lady Rosary. The last renovation of the church, which can accommodate 500 worshippers, was carried out in 1933. Inside, murals and oil paintings of Jesus adorn the walls.

East of the church stands a memorial to Father Francisco Fernandez SJ. Born in Toledo, Spain, in 1550, he died under torture on November 14, 1602, after attempting to rescue enslaved children from Arakan.

Roaming the cathedral was a bonus -- the atmosphere there was serene, luminous, and immaculately kept.



generations. Many lived here, raised families here, and eventually died here. Their graves scattered across the city form silent archives, each tombstone a page of history, many unread, many forgotten.

Much of Chattogram's tangible heritage has vanished. What once stood proudly now survives only in books and fading memories. What little remains is under constant threat from neglect and relentless urbanisation. To me, mysterious and magnetic Chattogram is a paradise waiting to be rediscovered through heritage tourism.

And among its most evocative sites are its cemeteries.

THE CHRISTIAN CEMETERY

One of my favourite places in Chattogram is the Christian Cemetery, established in 1700 AD, tucked away in the Sholoshahar area. No heritage tour of the city feels complete without a visit here. I have returned several times, and each visit leaves me quietly spellbound.

The first time I entered, I was struck by an unexpected stillness. Just past the entrance lies a small sitting area. I lingered there in silence, feeling as if the graves might begin whispering stories if I stepped closer. The place felt uncannily alive.

on September 26, 1774.

One striking obelisk marks the grave of Hulda Hinrichs, a German woman who died on March 1, 1892. She lived in Chattogram with her husband, Capi C Hinrichs, whose profession remains unrecorded -- an unusual omission for the time.

Equally compelling is the Mughal-style tomb of Charles Crofts, chief collector of Chattogram, who died in 1786. A close associate of Warren Hastings, Bengal's first governor general, Crofts was also a member of the Bengal Board of Revenue.

Globally, obelisks have long adorned cities and graves -- from Greece, where the concept originated, to Egypt, France, Italy, England, Turkey, and the United States. Seeing them here, weathered yet dignified, connects Chattogram to that broader architectural and cultural lineage.

Sadly, neglect is eroding this place. Overgrown bushes, insects, broken boundary walls, and nearby garbage dumps threaten its dignity. During monsoons, bats and snakes reportedly seek shelter here. These are not inevitable problems -- care and maintenance can easily control them.

This space deserves to be safe, accessible, and respected so that visitors can explore without fear. Its architectural diversity and historical depth make it irreplaceable.

CHATTOGRAM WAR CEMETERY

Whenever war cemeteries are mentioned, my mind drifts to Manila, where 17,000 soldiers of World War II rest beneath endless green



Non-payment woes return to BPL

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

The Bangladesh Premier League's (BPL's) chronic non-payment issue has re-emerged after the end of the 12th edition with its governing council already having sent a letter to all franchises to clear all outstanding dues.

The letter was sent on January 27, instructing all teams to complete payments by the next 15 days, an official informed.

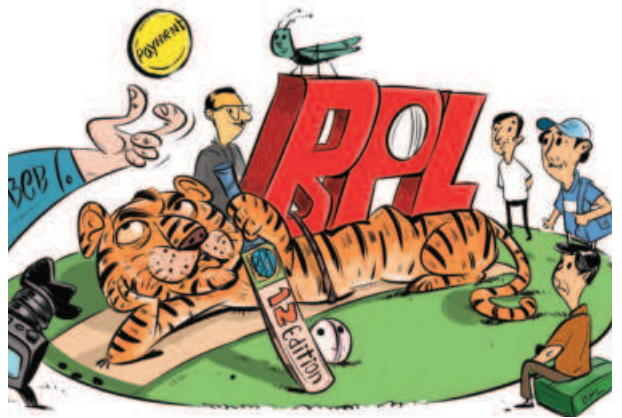
Unlike the previous season, players' non-payment issue did not come under the spotlight during the 12th edition, which came to a close on January 23.

It was overshadowed by other issues like the uncertainty over Bangladesh's T20 World Cup campaign, a players' boycott which held up the league for over a day, and the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) having to take over Chattogram Royals after its owners left the franchise a day before the tournament began.

However, a week after the tournament's conclusion, some players are expressing frustrations over not being paid.

One Noakhali Express player informed on Thursday that the franchise has paid players 25 percent of the total dues till now. "You can ask the other players too. Our cheques bounced on January 20, and it happened to all the players," he informed The Daily Star, requesting anonymity.

The information was corroborated by other players. "BCB asked us about the payments and we are expecting



the payments will be made soon," said the Noakhali player, who is owed over Tk 10 lakh from the franchise.

Dhaka Capitals players had confirmed a week ago that they received 25 percent of their payments during the tournament and a small amount was disbursed to the players' accounts afterwards. The franchise had said last week that they would clear all dues during the ongoing week.

Champions Rajshahi Warriors claim to have cleared all payments, which was confirmed by the board and some players. There appears to be no issues with Rangpur Riders' payments, one Sylhet Titans player said fifty percent of his payment was made, and Chattogram players will be paid by the board.

BPL member secretary Iftexhar Rahman Mithu accepted that some franchises are behind on their payment but hinted that in the case of non-payment, the board would utilise the bank guarantees and franchise fee to clear all dues.

"Altogether, Noakhali have around Tk 1.45 crore in outstanding payments. We have Tk 2 crore [as franchise fee] from them. Dhaka have provided us with a Tk 5 crore bank guarantee. Cheques have bounced but we have the funds for their payments with us," he said.

"We issued a letter on the 27th that in 15 days from then, the franchises will have to complete all payment and give us a list which would include the names of all team management, foreign and local players. We will scrutinise the list by calling each and every one," he added.



NO HANDSHAKE

Belarusian world No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka crushed Ukraine's Elina Svitolina 6-2, 6-3 in a politically charged Australian Open semifinal yesterday and will face Elena Rybakina, who defeated Jessica Pegula in straight sets, for a third Melbourne title on Saturday. There was no handshake after the match, following an announcement at Rod Laver Arena asking fans to "respect" the decision. Like other Ukrainian players, Svitolina avoids handshakes with opponents from Russia or Belarus due to the war, and the two also kept their distance during pre-match formalities and photos.

PHOTO: REUTERS



Melbourne set for blockbuster semifinals



AGENCIES

Novak Djokovic knows better than anyone the mountain he must climb to capture a record 25th Grand Slam title, but the Serbian legend is far from surrendering.

The 38-year-old cruised into the Australian Open semifinals after Lorenzo Musetti retired while trailing 6-4, 6-3, 1-3, following an earlier walkover against Jakub Mensik.

His reward is a blockbuster clash with world number two

and defending champion Jannik Sinner, who has beaten Djokovic in their last five meetings. Djokovic will need to reverse that trend to reach his 11th Australian Open final, where either Carlos Alcaraz or Alexander Zverev awaits.

Despite heavy losses to Sinner at the French Open and Wimbledon last year, Djokovic remains defiant, insisting he will "fight until the last shot" as he chases history. The ten-time Melbourne champion is seeking his first major since

the 2023 US Open, but the rise of Sinner and Alcaraz has made the task tougher.

Sinner, however, was full of respect, calling Djokovic an inspiration and praising his professionalism and experience.

Meanwhile, Alcaraz is chasing a career Grand Slam at just 22 and faces Zverev, who is pain-free and playing aggressive tennis. With two thrilling semi-finals ahead, Melbourne is set for a dramatic showdown.

'Future of cricket is based on aggression'

Despite playing more than 30 matches in the lead-up to the ICC Under-19 World Cup, Bangladesh failed to reach the semifinals. Ahead of their final Super Sixes match against hosts Zimbabwe tomorrow, Bangladesh Under-19 head coach Naveed Nawaz spoke to The Daily Star's Samsul Arefin Khan about the team's campaign, lessons learned, and other issues. Excerpts follow:

The Daily Star (DS): What are your thoughts on the World Cup journey?

Naveed Nawaz (NN): Both of our practice matches were affected by rain, which made things very difficult. With DLS coming into play against India, we needed to score over seven runs an over. The wicket got wet, balls stayed low, and unfortunately, we couldn't keep up. The New Zealand game was washed out, and we batted poorly in our last game against England.

DS: Did losing to India after dominating most of that game affect the team mentally?

NN: More than being mentally down, I think the boys didn't play enough cricket from the Asia Cup onwards, as many matches were rain-affected. That disrupted momentum and confidence.

DS: Why does Bangladesh often struggle in pressure situations?

NN: We try to address that by playing a lot of cricket at the Under-19 level. But if you look at India, their players play a massive volume of cricket. I read about a school cricketer in India who scored 29,000 runs and 29 centuries. Mental strength and the ability to handle pressure only improve by playing more and more cricket.

DS: What is your take on the heavy travel schedule during tournaments?

NN: We travelled more than 2,000 kilometres. After arriving in Harare, we travelled 600 kilometres to play two practice matches. For our first game against India, we had to travel another 450 kilometres [BCB arranged a flight at their own cost later]. When we saw the schedule, we wrote to the ICC to object, but there was no change. Travel fatigue is definitely an issue in a tournament like this.

DS: Do we need to change approach in this fast-evolving game?

NN: We have players like Zawad Abrar, who is an aggressive player. The future of cricket is based on aggression. It's not fair to say we don't have that capability, but we struggled with patience and execution in the middle.

DS: How do you see your future as your contract ends after this World Cup?

NN: I haven't had any discussions with the BCB yet. Bangladesh produces a lot of talent every year, which is surprising given that the junior system isn't as strong as India or Sri Lanka. The BCB's development department has done significant work at district and divisional levels, and working with such players remains my priority.



Keeper who could not be kept out



Qualified Directly To Last 16: Arsenal, Bayern Munich, Liverpool, Tottenham, Barcelona, Chelsea, Sporting Lisbon, Manchester City

Playoff Places: Real Madrid, Inter Milan, PSG, Newcastle, Juventus, Atletico Madrid, Atalanta, Bayer Leverkusen, Borussia Dortmund, Olympiacos, Club Brugge, Galatasaray, AS Monaco, Qarabag, Bodo/Glimt, Benfica



PHOTO: AFP

Sixty-one goals, a table resembling a football stock market that never stood still, and drama at every turn – capped by a goalkeeper rising for a final, telling touch to keep his team alive. That was the final day of the Champions League league phase, with 18 fixtures kicking off simultaneously across Europe.

When Benfica coach Jose Mourinho signalled goalkeeper Anatoliy Trubin to go up for a free-kick deep into stoppage time, thousands of kilometres away at the

Etihad Stadium, Manchester City coach Pep Guardiola questioned: "Why you go?" Guardiola, watching the Real Madrid vs Benfica match with his entire squad in the dressing room, was unaware that his old rival Mourinho needed one more goal to secure Benfica's place in the playoffs. He only knew that a late Real Madrid goal would push City out of the top eight and end their hopes of direct qualification to the last 16.

Instead, Benfica emerged with a 4-2

win, the decisive goal coming from Trubin himself. The goalkeeper's 98th-minute header also earned him a congratulatory hug from his opposite number, Madrid keeper Thibaut Courtois.

Trubin's goal finally settled the Champions League standings, with Real Madrid dropping from third to ninth and forced into the playoffs. Benfica, meanwhile, edged out Marseille on goal difference to claim the final qualification spot and keep their campaign alive.

SHORT CORNER

Pakistan beat Australia in T20Is after 7 years

Pakistan sealed a 22-run victory over Australia yesterday in the first of the three-match T20I series, being played as a build-up to next month's T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka. Pakistan restricted Australia to 146 for eight, after posting 168 for eight at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore. Pakistan lost their previous seven T20Is with Australia, with their last victory coming in in Dubai 2018.

English power surge in Champions League

Premier League clubs have flexed their muscle across Europe, with five English sides finishing in the top eight of the Champions League group phase. Arsenal, Liverpool, Tottenham, Manchester City, Newcastle and Chelsea all recorded higher win percentages in Europe than in this season's Premier League.

Pakistan booked to fly out for T20 WC: report

Despite talks of Pakistan boycotting the upcoming T20 World Cup, set to be held in Sri Lanka and India from February 7 to March 8, reports have emerged that the team has already booked flights to Colombo for the marquee event. "The Pakistan team is booked with the Australian team to fly to Colombo via an Air Lanka flight from Lahore," sources were quoted as saying by Telecom Asia Sport.

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No legal bar to NCT deal with DP World

SC upholds HC verdict; port workers call strike

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

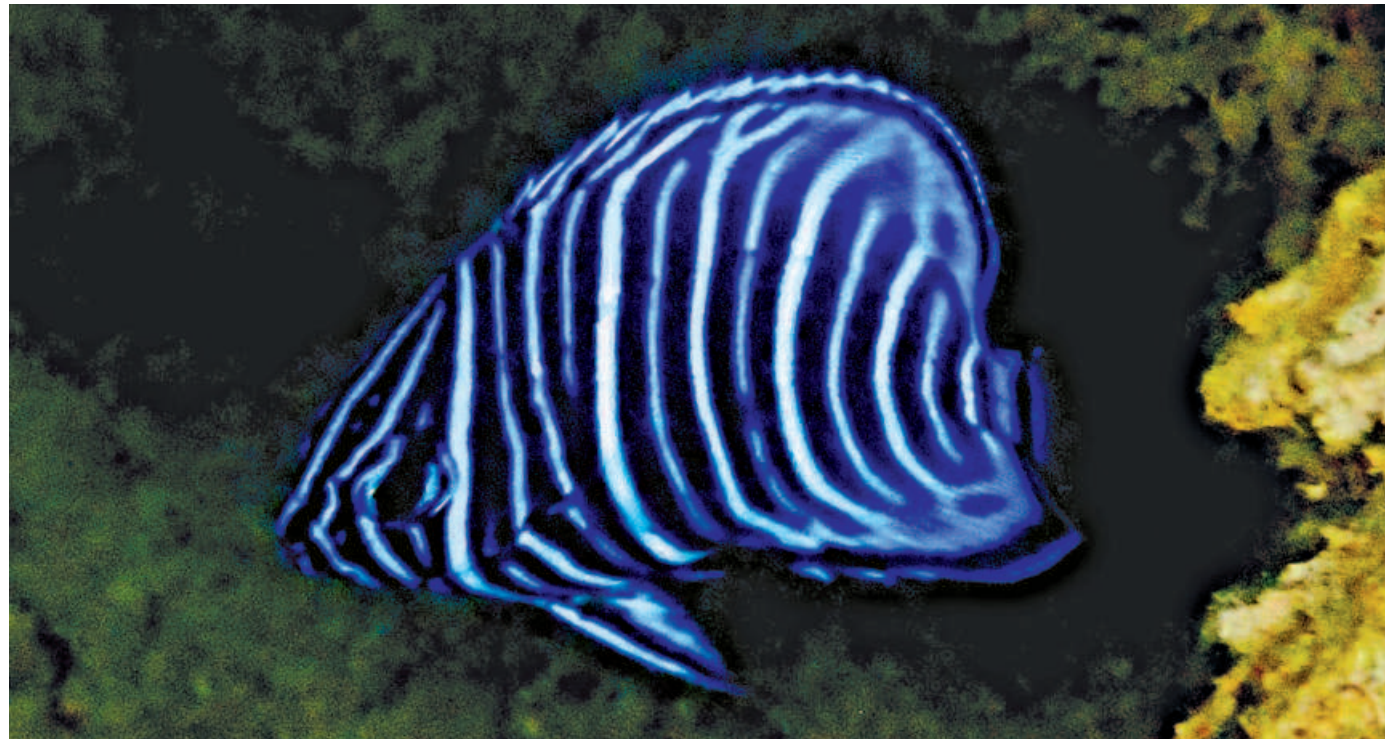
The Supreme Court chamber judge yesterday upheld a High Court verdict rejecting a writ petition that challenged the legality of the government's move to award a contract to UAE-based DP World for container handling at the New Mooring Container Terminal (NCT), the largest functional facility of Chattogram port.

Justice Md Rezaul Haque, chamber judge of the Appellate Division of the SC, passed the "no order" on a petition filed by the Bangladesh Jubo Arthanitibid Forum challenging the HC verdict and seeking an order of status quo on the entire process of awarding the contract for NCT.

The Bangladesh Jubo Arthanitibid Forum, a philanthropic organisation, filed the petition as a public interest litigation with the HC last year.

Earlier in the day, the HC bench of Justice Zafar Ahmed rejected the writ petition as the process

SEE PAGE 13 COL 1



BLUES IN MOTION

A juvenile semicircle angelfish glowing under the Bay of Bengal off Saint Martin's Island. Native to the Indo-Pacific, from the Red Sea and East Africa to Japan and Australia, these angelfish drift through coral reefs, lagoons, and rubble slopes, sheltering in crevices when startled. Their diet is eclectic and reef-bound: sponges and tunicates form the core, with algae and small invertebrates rounding it out. With age, the inky blue fades into greenish-blue, a bold black mask forms, and the tail turns bright yellow. Listed as Least Concern by the IUCN, the species still faces local threats from coral loss due to rampant water pollution.

PHOTO: SHARIF SARWAR



REFERENDUM 'A non-serious proposition'

Prof Sobhan says reforms proposals too complicated for most to understand

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Reforms through the referendum, being conducted in an opaque manner, is a non-serious proposition, said noted economist and political scientist Prof Rehman Sobhan.

He said people are being asked to approve 38 complicated reform proposals which ordinary citizens do not understand.

Prof Sobhan was speaking at a session of the day-long conference titled "Rupture, Reform, and Reimagining Democracy" organised by the Brac Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) at the BRAC Centre yesterday.

"This non-seriousness is evident in the current election campaign. The revealed preference of the main players is clear: no one is talking about reforms," he said.

He said he has not heard either of the two alliances stand up and say "here are 38 essential reforms required to reimagine your democracy – let us mobilise public consciousness around them".

"Instead, what we have are employees of the banking



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2016 KALYANPUR KILLINGS Hasina, Kamal, 6 others charged

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The prosecution yesterday brought charges against deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina, former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal and six former senior police officers over the killing of nine youths in what it described as a "staged anti-militant operation" at Kalyanpur's Jahaj Building in 2016.

The International Crimes Tribunal-1 accepted the charges after taking the formal charges into cognisance and issued arrest warrants against six accused who remain absconding.

Two of the accused – former inspector general of police

The case dates back to an operation on July 26, 2016 at a fourth-floor flat of the six-storey Jahaj Building in Kalyanpur, following the Holey Artisan Bakery attack earlier that month.

AKM Shahidul Hoque and former Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) commissioner Asaduzzaman Mia – are already in custody.

The four other cops accused are former DMP additional commissioner Sheikh Mohammad Maruf Hasan; former CTTC chief who later became the SB chief Md Monirul Islam; then DMP joint commissioners Krishna Pada Roy and Mohammad Abdul Baten, who were later promoted to additional IGP and deputy inspector general respectively.

The case dates back to an operation on July 26, 2016 at a fourth-floor flat of the six-storey Jahaj Building in Kalyanpur, following the Holey Artisan Bakery attack

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3 MURDER SUSPECTS They walk out of jail without bail

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Mymensingh

Three accused in a murder case have been mistakenly released from Mymensingh Central Jail without any bail order from court, prison authorities confirmed yesterday.

The murder suspects are Anis Mia, Rashedul Islam, and Jakirul Islam – sons of Hazrat Ali of Tarati Paschimpara village in Tarakanda upazila of Mymensingh.

Aminul Islam, senior jail superintendent of Mymensingh Central Jail, told The Daily Star that prison officials wrongfully released the trio on Tuesday evening.

"It was a wrongful release. The details of the incident will be known later," he said, adding that police and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab-14) have already been informed to arrest the three.

Mohammad Touhidul Islam, deputy inspector general (DIG) of prisons for Mymensingh division, said the three accused were sent to jail by a court on January 23 this year in a murder

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Two ordinances to protect women, kids in all spaces

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The interim government yesterday gave the final approval to a draft ordinance aimed at preventing sexual harassment at workplaces and educational institutions.

Called 'Workplace and Educational Institutions Sexual Harassment Prevention Ordinance, 2026', it defines sexual harassment broadly to include all forms of unwanted and degrading physical, verbal, non-verbal and online conduct.

It also brings sexual harassment through social media, email, messaging platforms and other digital technologies under its purview. It makes these protections enforceable across the country as well as in other government-affiliated organisations operating outside Bangladesh.

The development comes 16 years after the High Court issued a set of guidelines and directives defining sexual misdemeanours to prevent any kind of physical, mental or sexual harassment of women, girls and children at their workplaces, educational institutions and other public places including roads.

The directive, which comes following a writ petition, stipulates the authorities concerned to form a five-member harassment complaint committee headed by a woman at every workplace and institution to investigate allegations of harassment of women.

It also directed the government to make a law on the basis of the guidelines and ruled that the guidelines will be treated as a law until the law is made. However, no law was enacted and the directives were seldom observed.

In April 2010, the education ministry issued a circular directing all educational institutions to form such committees within three weeks.

While many institutions did set up the committees, they have largely remained

ineffective due to the absence of any monitoring mechanism.

The ordinance approved yesterday is expected to provide a strong legal foundation for ensuring safety, justice and accountability in workplaces and educational institutions.

It will play a pivotal role in fostering an honourable, inclusive and humane society, according to a press release from the Chief Adviser's Press Wing.

Every workplace and educational institution will be required to set up an Internal Complaint Committee (ICC) within a stipulated timeframe.

The ICC will be tasked with receiving

- Internal complaint committee at every workplace
- Penalties include reprimand, demotion, termination, expulsion
- Survivor-centric procedures to safeguard complainant's safety
- Safeguards to ensure fairness in cases of false complaints

and investigating complaints, ensuring the complainant's safety during the inquiry and recommending appropriate disciplinary action. Penalties may range from formal reprimand to demotion, termination or even expulsion in the case of educational institutions.

The ordinance mandates survivor-centric procedures to safeguard the complainant's safety, confidentiality and dignity.

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Tiny shoes that'll never be worn again

Sister recalls holding
her brother's hand
when he fell into
the pit

MOHAMMAD SUMAN

Nine-year-old Mim Akhter sat quietly at the doorway of her family's small home in an Ashrahan project at Raozan upazila of Chattogram yesterday. In her lap was a plastic bucket filled with her three-year-old brother Misbah's clothes. She picked out two tiny pairs of shoes that Misbah will never wear again.



On Wednesday afternoon around 4:30pm, Misbah was playing outside when he slipped into a deep, narrow tube-well pit near their house that was abandoned and left uncovered.

Mim was next to him. As he fell into the nearly 30-ft hole, she managed to grab his hand and held on for several minutes.

But her grip gave way.

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NATIONAL FILM AWARDS 2023 'Sataao' wins Best Film, Afran Nisho Best Actor

A&E DESK

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting yesterday announced the names of 30 films, artists, and technicians across 28 categories for the National Film Awards 2023.

In a gazette notification, it announced that the lifetime achievement awards are being conferred on Tareque Masud and Abdul Latif Bachchu for their outstanding contributions to Bangladeshi cinema.

The film "Sataao" has been selected as Best Film, while its director, Khandaker Sumon, will receive the Best Director award.

Afran Nisho is set to get his first National Award as Best Actor award for his first film "Surongo", while "Sataao" actress Aynun Putul has been named Best Actress.

Among other notable winners, Monir Ahmed Shakeel has received the Best Supporting Actor award for "Surongo"; Nazia Haque Orsha for Best Supporting Actress for "Ora 7 Jon"; Ashish Khandakar for as Best Actor/Actress in a Negative Role; and Shahiduzzaman Selim for Best Actor/Actress in a Comic Role. Mohammad Leon has been recognised as Best Child Artist. In the music categories, Balam is set to get Best Male Singer for "Priyotoma"; Abanti Sithi Best Female Singer for the song "Gaa Chuye Bolo" from "Surongo", while Shomeshwar Oli has received the Best Lyricist award for "Ishwar" from "Priyotoma". Prince Mahmud has won Best Composer for "Ishwar" from "Priyotoma".



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Bangladesh women's futsal team players celebrate atop an open-top bus in Dhaka yesterday after returning home from Bangkok, Thailand, following their triumph in the maiden SAFF Women's Futsal Championship. The women in red and green topped the seven-team round-robin tournament with 16 points from six matches, finishing four points clear of runners-up India.

Set up one commission for media, not two Recommend jurnos at consultation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Most media professionals yesterday recommended the establishment of a single media commission instead of having two separate bodies.

They expressed their views at a consultation meeting held at the Department of Films and Publications (DFP) to discuss two draft ordinances – the Broadcast Ordinance, 2026 and the National Media Commission Ordinance, 2026.

The event was organised by the information and broadcasting ministry.

While many media professionals attended, representatives of several key organisations, including the Association of Television Channel Owners (ATCO), Editors' Council, Jatiya Press Club, Dhaka Reporters Unity (DRU) and Broadcast Journalist Centre (BJC), were absent despite being invited.

At the meeting, Information Adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan said

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