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SECOND EDITION

DHAKA SATURDAY JANUARY 31, 2026

REGD. NO. DA 781

VOL. XXXVI No. 18

MAGH 17, 1432 BS

www.thedailystar.net

SHABAN 11, 1447 HIJRI

16 PAGES : Tk 15.00

Tarique seeks vote for 'yes' in referendum

He makes the call publicly for the first time

SAJJAD HOSSAIN from Bogura

BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman yesterday, for the first time, publicly sought votes in support of "yes" in the referendum.

"I request all of you that just as you will put the seal on the sheaf of paddy [BNP's electoral symbol] on February 12, at the same time, on the second ballot paper you will be given, please give your verdict in favour of 'yes,'" the BNP chief told an election rally at Collectorate Eidgah ground in Rangpur yesterday night.

"On the election day, when you go to make your plans successful, you have to do one more thing at the same time. Abu Sayed gave his life to bring back rights. Wasim



Tarique Rahman addressing a roadside rally in Bogura's Shibganj yesterday afternoon.

PHOTO: BNP MEDIA CELL

in Chattogram also gave his life. There are thousands like them who sacrificed their lives for people's voting rights, the right to speak, and economic rights. To properly honour these sacrifices, we must also respect the July charter that we signed."

He added that about two and a half years ago, when the

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Once a vibrant lifeline, the Buriganga is now on the brink of death from relentless pollution. Industrial effluents, tannery waste, sewage, and household garbage have turned the river tar-like and foul-smelling, posing a grave threat to aquatic life. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

'Voting age 16, one crore jobs'

NCP pledges in its 36-point manifesto

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The National Citizen Party (NCP), a member of the 11-party alliance, has unveiled a 36-point manifesto ahead of the 13th national election, pledging to lower the voting age to 16 and create one crore jobs over the next five years.

The manifesto, titled "Declaration of Youth and Dignity", was announced yesterday afternoon at the Lakeshore Grand Hotel in Gulshan, Dhaka.

Convener Nahid Islam and Spokesperson Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuyain were present at the ceremony along with other party leaders and dignitaries.

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People will show 'red card' to 'rotten politics'

Says Jamaat chief; vows to promote merit over heredity

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

People will show "red card" in the upcoming elections to those engaged in the "rotten politics" of the past, which fostered fascism and turned the country into a hub of corruption, Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shahiqur Rahman said yesterday.

He also pledged to end the culture

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12 DAYS TO VOTE

Only 78 women in polls, a third with family link

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR and DIPAN NANDY

At least 78 women are participating in this year's parliamentary elections, a record number in a competitive contest, but experts say this only underscores how far the country still lags in ensuring gender parity in politics. Moreover, nearly a third of them are not independent political actors, but relatives of influential men -- wives, daughters or family members of party leaders and power brokers.

Candidacies are spread across just 67 constituencies, leaving more than two-thirds of seats with no scope for directly elected female representation.

While women make up half the population, they account for only 3.93 percent of the 1,981 candidates in the race, a margin many observers describe as tokenistic and largely dynastic.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 4



- 30 parties field no women
- No female candidate in over two-thirds of seats
- Family ties boost electoral chances, data shows



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SCAN FOR MORE



On the campaign trail... *Clockwise from top left:* BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman meets the family of Shaheed Abu Sayed in Rangpur's Pirganj; Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman addresses an 11-party alliance rally at Feni Government Pilot High School grounds; Fatema Rahman Bithi, Ganosamhati Andolok candidate for Tangail-5, campaigns among farmers; Manisha Chakraborty, Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal candidate for Barishal-5, collects donations saved by ordinary citizens in clay banks at her party office in Barishal city; and Taslima Akhter, Ganosamhati Andolok candidate for Dhaka-12, joins a procession on Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue. The photos were taken yesterday.

PHOTO: BNP MEDIA CELL/STAR/TITU DAS/FIROZ AHMED



'Persecutors of Hindus in 1971 back in polls' Says Salahuddin

UNB, COX'S BAZAR



BNP Standing Committee Member Salahuddin Ahmed yesterday said those who persecuted the country's Hindu community during the Liberation War have returned in a new form to contest elections, raising concerns about the safety of all citizens in Bangladesh.

He made the remarks at an interaction meeting with members of the Hindu and Buddhist communities in Bishwas Para of Pekua upazila in Cox's Bazar.

"During the Liberation War, a religion-based group inflicted the most suffering on our Hindu brothers and sisters. Those who did not believe in independence or opposed it were responsible for this persecution," Salahuddin said.

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Hasnat slams 'biased admin', 'broker media'

Warns they will face 'people's court'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cumilla



NCP Chief Organiser (South) Hasnat Abdullah yesterday issued a stern warning to the media, police, and administration, urging them to remain accountable to the people rather than to any political party.

"If another revolution takes place, it will be against the media and the administration," Hasnat, the 11-party alliance candidate from Cumilla-4 (Debidwar), told a rally in Laksham.

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'BNP-Jamaat rule made country champion in graft' Says IAB chief

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



Islami Andolan Bangladesh Ameer Mufti Syed Muhammad Rezaul Karim yesterday said neither BNP nor Jamaat can be trusted, as both parties had failed to fulfil people's aspirations despite being in power.

Addressing a campaign rally at Konabari College Field in Gazipur, the IAB chief, also known as Charmonai Pir, referred to the BNP-Jamaat alliance's 2001-06 tenure and said the country became the world's most corrupt nation five times in a row during that period.

"The nation was tormented by terrorism. Corruption spread through every layer of the state. The responsibility for 1/11 in 2006 also lies with BNP-Jamaat. Due to their manipulation of the caretaker government system, the

SEE PAGE 9 COL 7

12 hurt in pre-polls violence in 3 districts

STAR REPORT

At least 12 people were injured in pre-polls violence in Noakhali, Bhola and Natore since Thursday night.

In Noakhali's Hatia upazila, eight people were injured in a clash between activists of BNP and NCP during the inauguration of a ferry service on the Nalchira-Chairman Ghat route around 4:00pm yesterday.

Supporters of NCP candidate for Noakhali-6 Abdul Hannan Masud and BNP aspirant Mahbubur Rahman Shameem present at the programme were chanting slogans in favour of their respective candidates, triggering tension. At one stage, the two groups got into an altercation, which escalated into a clash.

Later, security personnel charged batons to disperse the groups and brought the situation under control. None of the candidates were present at the spot.

Talking to journalists, Hannan Masud and Mahbubur Rahman Shameem traded allegations against each other's supporters and demanded their immediate arrest.

Confirming the incident, Hatia Upazila Nirbahi Officer Md Alauddin said eight to 10 people were injured.

Contacted, Hatia upazila health and family planning officer Dr Manoshi Rani Sarker said eight people were admitted to the upazila health complex.

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Tarique seeks vote for 'yes' in referendum

FROM PAGE 1
fascist rule gripped the country, BNP placed a 31-point reform proposal before the nation.

The BNP chief said they later saw that the interim government formed a reform commission and invited most political parties of Bangladesh there. "We also went. We placed our reform proposals. And largely, the proposals they placed were similar to the ones we had already presented before the people much earlier."

"There may be differences with us on some points. But if there are differences we did not hide anything. We openly told the people which points we agreed with and where we have some disagreements. There is nothing hidden or secret about this."

In his speech, which lasted around 25 minutes, Tarique made pledges that BNP would ensure the repayment of microloans taken from registered NGOs, waive agricultural loans of up to Tk 10,000 with interest, and provide special support to establish agriculture-based industries.

Party leaders and activists began gathering at the venue from noon. They arrived in small processions, carrying sheaves of paddy and placards bearing photos of candidates. As Tarique spoke, the ground became packed with supporters.

Tarique said if BNP forms the government, it will begin work as quickly as possible to fulfil the dream of the Teesta barrage for the people of this area.

Outlining the Teesta masterplan, he said it would include canal excavation, forest conservation and job creation.

At the rally, hinting at Jamaat, the BNP chief questioned why a party remained an alliance partner for five years if BNP was a "bad" political party.

"There is a party that has been spreading lies against BNP for the last few days; they did so again today [yesterday]."

Earlier, he offered Juma prayers at Bogura town's Baitur Rahman Central Mosque, whose foundation stone he laid on March 26, 2004.

After offering prayers, Tarique told the devotees, "This mosque was built for the people of Bogura. Allah gave us the opportunity to build such a mosque in a place like Bogura. Many works of the mosque are still unfinished. What we had planned could not be fully implemented. If Allah gives us the opportunity, the mosque will be developed properly in the future so that the people of Bogura can feel proud."

"Everyone must work together. If Allah gives us the chance and we are given responsibility of the country in the future, we will work across the whole country."

ABU SAYED'S GRAVE

Around 5:50pm, Tarique visited the grave of Abu Sayed in Babanpur Jafarpura village of Rangpur's Pirganj upazila.

He then spoke to Sayed's father Mokbul Hossain, mother Monowara, brothers, and other family members.

Sayed's father told him, "If Allah brings you to power, you must first ensure justice for the killing of my son and all those killed during the July uprising. You must arrange proper treatment and rehabilitation for the injured. You must also create jobs for the people of Pirganj and across Bangladesh."

The BNP chief assured that if BNP is elected, justice will be ensured.

Before he reached the spot, members of police, BGB, and Rab took positions at different points in the area. Only journalists were allowed to remain at the spot.

Tarique then went to a madrasa field in the same area.

Speaking there at a rally, he said he has come to the area many times in winter to distribute blankets. "I seek your votes for the sheaf of paddy."

[Our Bogura and Lalmonirhat correspondents also contributed to this report.]

'Voting age 16, one crore jobs'

FROM PAGE 1
The manifesto targets 36 key issues, focusing on sectors spanning governance, economy, social welfare, environment, and defence.

Targeting governance and justice, the manifesto pledges to establish an independent commission to oversee reform commitments, form a "Truth and Reconciliation Commission" to investigate past atrocities and extrajudicial killings, and require ministers, MPs, and senior officials to publicly disclose their assets and income.

Under defence modernisation, the manifesto has plans to create a reserve force twice the size of the regular armed forces, establish a UAV (Unmanned Aerial Vehicle) brigade, and acquire at least eight medium-range surface-to-air missile batteries.

On foreign policy, NCP pledges a firm stance on border killings and water sharing disputes with India while committing to ASEAN engagement to resolve the Rohingya crisis.

On the economic front, NCP promises to create one crore jobs within five years, lower inflation to six percent, and raise the tax-to-GDP ratio to 12 percent. To improve the business climate, it also vows to eliminate extortion and political levies through hotlines and strict enforcement.

To encourage youth and civic participation, there are proposals to lower the voting age to 16 and establish a "Youth Civic Council" to institutionalise young voices in policymaking.

Education reform includes the creation of an "Education Reform Commission", mandatory six-month internships or thesis research for undergraduates, and funding to reverse brain drain by bringing back skilled professionals.

For the modernisation of the healthcare sector, NCP wants to build specialised health zones for complex diseases, introduce NID-linked digital health records, and gradually expand national health insurance.

Social welfare pledges include six

KEY PLEDGES

1 Mandatory asset disclosure for ministers, MPs, officials

2 Reserve force, UAV brigade, missile batteries for military

3 Firm stance on border killings and water-sharing disputes with India

rather a clear list of what issues will be prioritised if it becomes a partner in the government."

NCP spokesperson Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuyain said the manifesto reflects extensive youth surveys, expert discussions, and nationwide seminars.

"We have made promises that can actually be implemented. Over the next five years, our main goals are higher allocations for health and education, stronger social security, and major economic reforms."

Poet, writer, and thinker Farhad Mazhar, The Daily Star Editor and Publisher Mahfuz Anam, Dhaka University teacher Shehreen Amin Bhuiyan, and foreign diplomats stationed in Dhaka were also present at the event.

COVERAGE OF PROTESTS Trump attorney general orders arrest of ex-CNN anchor

AFP, Minneapolis

The Trump administration said yesterday that it had ordered the arrest of a prominent journalist over coverage of immigration protests in Minneapolis, as the president branded a nurse shot dead by federal agents in the city an "agitator."

The arrest of former CNN anchor Don Lemon came as President Donald Trump walked back his conciliatory tone following public outrage over the killings of Alexei Pappas, a veterans' hospital nurse, and another American citizen in Minneapolis.

Attorney General Pam Bondi said in a post on X that Lemon and several other people had been arrested "at my direction" on unspecified federal charges in connection with what she called a "coordinated attack" on the Cities Church in St. Paul, the twin city of Minneapolis.

DHAKA

Uphold dignity of children with disabilities: Tarique

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman yesterday urged everyone to stand by children with disabilities.

"Let us all take an oath today to support children with disabilities around us from our own positions. Let us try together to build a Bangladesh where all people, in one way or another, will have dignity and where everyone can live with self-respect," he said at a wheelchair give-away programme for persons with disabilities at a Bogura hotel around 12:00pm.

The programme was organised by the non-government organisation CSF Global, on behalf of Tarique's wife Zubaida Rahman, for children and adolescents with special needs.

Urging for support for persons with disabilities from both social and state positions, Tarique said proper support would help nurture talent across the country.

"It does not take much. What is needed is opportunity, so that they can move freely in the light and air of the world like everyone else. Minimum



SEE PAGE 4 COL 6



Battery-run auto-rickshaws continue to ply Dhaka streets despite a ban. Although law enforcers carry out drives against them, their operations persist. The photo was taken on North-South Road in the Siddique Bazar area yesterday. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Bandarban voters demand more than promises

MONG SING HAI MARMA, Bandarban

The remote hill district of Bandarban comprises a single parliamentary constituency, designated as constituency 300.

Ahead of the 13th national election, the electoral contest in Bandarban is no longer just about numbers. Instead, voters find themselves at a crossroads, balancing a growing desire for change against decades of perceived neglect.

Although four candidates are in the race, conversations among voters across both indigenous communities and Bangalees largely centre on two names: BNP candidate Sachingpru Jery, contesting with the sheaf of paddy symbol, and National Citizen Party (NCP) candidate Abu Sayeed Md Sujauddin, running with the water lily bud symbol.



According to the district election office, the Bandarban-300 constituency has a total of 3,15,422 voters, including 1,53,667 women and 1,61,775 men. Of them, 30,671 are new voters, most of whom are young people expected to play a decisive role in shaping the outcome.

Employment opportunities, education, connectivity and security dominate discussions among young voters, reflecting both their immediate concerns and long-term aspirations.

Many voters say they are hoping for an election in which they can cast their ballots freely and see their voices meaningfully reflected in national politics.

"Everyone comes during elections with promises to seek votes, but they disappear later," said Kanuching Marma of Thanchi upazila. "This time, we want someone who will actually work for our betterment."

Menle Mro of Alifikadam upazila echoed similar sentiments.

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DHAKA-4 CONSTITUENCY Pro-people dev, accountability Pledges independent candidate Mizanur in election manifesto



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Mizanur Rahman, an independent candidate from Dhaka-4 (Shyampur, Kadamtali and parts of Jatrabari) constituency, yesterday unveiled his election manifesto, pledging people-centred development, environmental protection, and strict accountability of public institutions.

The manifesto was announced at a press conference held beside an unplanned garbage dumping site at Munshibari Intersection in Jatrabari, a location chosen to symbolically highlight what he described as years of unplanned development, neglect and mismanagement that have turned the entire Dhaka-4 area into a dumping ground of civic problems.

Presenting himself as a representative of citizens

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

PEACEBUILDING Bangladesh elected vice chair of UN commission

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh has been elected as the vice-chair of the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) for the year 2026.

The election of the five-member bureau of the PBC was held at the UN Headquarters in New York on Thursday.

The members of the commission during its first meeting of the 20th session elected Morocco as chair while Germany, Brazil and Croatia and Bangladesh were elected as vice chairs.

The Peacebuilding Commission is an international advisory body that supports peace efforts in conflict-affected countries.

The commission is composed of 31 member states, elected from the General Assembly, the Security Council, the

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7



Border Guard Bangladesh searches a vehicle as BGB strengthens security measures ahead of the February 12 parliamentary elections. The photo was taken in front of Rajshahi city's Postal Academy yesterday. PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

FEB 12 ELECTION 35,000 BGB members being deployed from tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

More than 35,000 members of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) will be deployed across the country from tomorrow to help maintain law and order for the February 12 national election.

In several districts, BGB members have already been deployed and have begun setting up base camps.

A total of 1,210 platoons of BGB will be deployed across all 64 districts from February 1, Shariful Islam, public relations officer of BGB Headquarters, told The Daily Star.

In Narayanganj, 17 platoons of BGB have been deployed, with camps set up across all five upazilas of the district.

During a press briefing at the BGB permanent camp in Jalkuri yesterday, Lt Col Mirza Mohammad Arafat, commanding

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

16 countries sending polls observers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 16 countries have accepted Bangladesh's invitation to send election observers for the upcoming 13th National Parliamentary Election and referendum, scheduled for February 12.

The information was disclosed in an official statement by Chief Adviser's Press Wing yesterday.

These observers will join several hundred international monitors from the European Union, the Commonwealth, and other global organisations.

Malaysia will send the largest contingent with 14 observers, led by Dato Sri Ramli Bin Dato Harun, chairman of the Election Commission of Malaysia.

Turkey will dispatch 12 observers, headed by Mehmet Vakur Erkul, a former Turkish ambassador to Bangladesh.

Other countries confirming observer teams include Indonesia (5), Japan (4), Pakistan (3),

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

Manisha to fund campaign with clay bank donations

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

Bangladeshi Samajtantrik Dal (BSD) candidate in Barishal-5 constituency, Dr Manisha Chakraborty, yesterday launched a grassroots initiative to raise funds for her election campaign.

In the first phase, Tk 10,000 was collected from 10 clay banks (earthen money box), previously distributed among the public to deposit donation.

Manisha, contesting with the "moi" (ladder) symbol, inaugurated the programme at the party's Barishal office around 11:00am.

She said more than a hundred clay banks had earlier been handed over to workers and supporters. Of those, 10 were opened in the first phase and the remaining 90 will be opened gradually.

She also called on her supporters to contribute to the campaign through mobile financial services.

"In elections, money often becomes the deciding factor. We want to break free from that culture," Manisha said, adding that the use of "black money" (undeclared wealth) in elections forces candidates

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

Journo's wife found dead at Rajshahi home Husband critically injured

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A woman was found dead, and her husband, a journalist, critically injured at their residence in Rajshahi city last night, police said.

The deceased is Roushan Ara, 50. Her husband, Golam Kibria Kamal, 55, deputy editor of local daily Rajshahi Sangbad, was admitted to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital.

Dr Billal Uddin of the hospital's emergency department said Roushan was brought in dead, with a piece of cloth around her neck. "The exact cause of death will be confirmed after autopsy."

He said Kamal sustained injuries to his hands and legs, and a chemical substance was detected in his stomach.

Police said the couple lived in a rented flat in Hargram Bazar. When officers arrived after a 999 call, Roushan was found lying on the floor, while Kamal was discovered injured on the bed.

Rajshahi Metropolitan Police spokesperson Additional Deputy Commissioner Gaziur Rahman said police and a CID team are investigating the incident.

SAUDI ARABIA

One-way airfare for workers now Tk 20,000

BSS, Dhaka

The government has taken an initiative to ensure affordable travel facilities for Bangladeshi workers in Saudi Arabia.

Under the initiative, the one-way airfare on the Saudi Arabia-Bangladesh route has been set at only Tk 20,000, making it easier and more economical for migrant workers to visit their families, the Chief Adviser's Press Wing said yesterday morning.

About the initiative, Civil Aviation and Tourism Adviser Sk Bashir Uddin said under this special arrangement, a target has been set to sell 80,000 tickets in Saudi Arabia and Bangladesh.

"Through this initiative, expatriate workers will benefit directly, while the state-owned airline, Biman Bangladesh Airlines, is also expected to gain significant financial benefits," he said.

The adviser said particularly in the operation of Hajj flights, the long-standing practice of operating empty one-way flights will be effectively utilised through this initiative.

"As a result, for the first time in the history of Biman, there is a realistic possibility of earning more than Tk 100 crore in additional revenue," he added.

Bashir said under this special arrangement, the minimum one-way fare on the Madinah-Dhaka and Jeddah-Dhaka routes has been fixed at Tk 20,500, while the minimum return fare on the Madinah-Dhaka-Madinah and Jeddah-Dhaka-Jeddah routes has been set at Tk 42,000.

This special fare will be applicable for arrivals in Bangladesh from April 18, 2026 to May 25, 2026, and for departures from Bangladesh from May 30, 2026 to June 30, 2026, he said.

Describing the initiative as an important milestone in the implementation of a pro-expatriate Bangladeshi policy, Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus said such practical decisions in the future would further ease the lives of expatriate Bangladeshis and make a positive contribution to the national economy.



Sidewalks on several major roads and busy areas of Khulna city have been illegally occupied by permanent and mobile stalls, forcing pedestrians to walk on the roadway and increasing accident risks. Despite periodic eviction drives, the encroachment quickly returns. The photo was taken on Clay Road in Dakbandi yesterday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Bandarban voters

FROM PAGE 3
Meanwhile, candidates are campaigning in full swing to reach voters across the constituency.

BNP candidate Sachingpru Jery said people in the hill districts have long suffered from neglect, land disputes and disparities in education and healthcare access. "Ensuring the constitutional rights of Indigenous communities is my core objective," he said.

NCP candidate Sujauddin, who is not a local resident and hails from Moheshkhali upazila in Chattogram, said he aims to introduce a new political culture. "The people of Bandarban no longer want politics

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based on promises alone. They want transparency, accountability and equal citizenship," he said.

Abu Jafar Mohammad Walilullah, the candidate of Jatiya Party (GM Quader), has prioritised tourism and infrastructural development, while Abul Kalam Azad of Islami Andolok Bangladesh (IAB) has emphasised ethical and corruption-free politics.

Voting in Bandarban presents a range of logistical challenges. Election officials must traverse steep hills, rivers and remote terrain to reach polling centres. Of the constituency's 186 polling centres, 11 have been identified as high risk.

Election officials said ballot papers, ballot boxes and other election materials will be transported to those centres by helicopter. Additional security measures are also being put in place to maintain law and order, said Shamim Ara Rini, deputy commissioner and returning officer in Bandarban.

Notice is hereby given to all concerned that the Petitioner above-named has filed and moved an application under section 81(2) read with section 85(3) of the Companies Act, 1994 for condonation of delay in holding the Annual General Meeting of the abovementioned Respondent No. 01 Company before the High Court Division of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of Bangladesh. Upon preliminary hearing, his Lordship, Mr. Justice Ahmed Sohel by an order dated 30.12.2025 was pleased to admit the said application.

Any person or persons having interest in the said application may appear either personally or through duly authorized Advocate on the date so fixed.

Copy of the said application may be obtained from the office of the undersigned on payment of the required costs.

Nirban Ahmed
Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh
House No.18/A (Ground Floor), Road No. 44, Gulshan 2, Dhaka 1212.

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF BANGLADESH
HIGH COURT DIVISION
(STATUTORY ORIGINAL JURISDICTION)
COMPANY MATTER NO. 2298 OF 2025
IN THE MATTER OF:
Zeeba Ahmed Khan alias Zeeba Amina Khan
Petitioner
-VERSUS-
Capita Building Products Ltd. and others
Respondents.

Notice is hereby given to all concerned that the Petitioner above-named has filed and moved an application under section 81(2) read with section 85(3) of the Companies Act, 1994 for condonation of delay in holding the Annual General Meeting of the abovementioned Respondent No. 01 Company before the High Court Division of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of Bangladesh. Upon preliminary hearing, his Lordship, Mr. Justice Ahmed Sohel by an order dated 30.12.2025 was pleased to admit the said application.

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Nirban Ahmed
Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh
House No.18/A (Ground Floor), Road No. 44, Gulshan 2, Dhaka 1212.

Old partisan continuity

FROM PAGE 3
While campaigning, Tasnim Jara has avoided large showdowns or rallies, instead choosing to engage directly with residents.

"My father and grandfather lived here. I grew up in these alleys and know the problems firsthand," she said.

Her priorities include resolving the gas crisis and waterlogging, upgrading Mugda Hospital into a "model service centre," and ensuring women's safety.

"If elected, I will set up a permanent office where residents can report problems, and we will track progress through a public dashboard. No file will be buried," she said.

Habibur Rashid, on the other hand, described himself as a "son of the area".

He said he has long shared the struggles of local residents. "Their pain is my pain," he said, pledging to empower women through technical education, family cards and entrepreneurship.

Calling power a "responsibility to serve," Habib urged voters to judge him by his track record.

Referring to his rivals as "associates," he told The Daily Star that he wanted to set an example of peaceful and harmonious politics, stressing the importance of cooperation even after the election.

He also warned against "conspiracies" and urged voters to cast their ballots on February 12.

Javed Rasin said his "Water Lily Bud" symbol has gained momentum with backing from the 11-party alliance.

He described the alliance with Jamaat-e-Islami as a "strategic partnership" to sustain the spirit of the July uprising and pursue reforms.

However, he alleged subtle intimidation, including torn banners and pressure on voters. "Despite informing the administration, no effective action has been taken," he said.

Other candidates include Shah Iftekhar Ahsan (Islami Andolok Bangladesh), Kazi Abdul Khair (Jatiya Party), Md Moniruzzaman (CPB), Nazma Akter (Gono Forum), Masud Hossain (Bangladesh Muslim League), Nahid Hasan Chowdhury Junaid (Insanity Biplob Bangladesh), Khandakar Mizanur Rahman (BSD), Shahin Khan (NPP) and Mohammad Shafiqullah Chowdhury (BNF).

Senior Secretary and SDG Coordinator, Lamiya Morshed, said, "We have received confirmation of close to 400 election observers so far, and we expect a few more countries to confirm the visits of their delegates very soon."

The Commonwealth Observer Group will be led by former president of Ghana Nana Akufo-Addo, joined by figures such as Jeffrey Salim Waheed, former deputy minister

16 countries sending Pro-people dev

FROM PAGE 3
Bhutan (2), the Maldives (2), Sri Lanka (1), the Philippines (2), Jordan (2), Iran (1), Georgia (2), Russia (2), Kyrgyzstan (2), Uzbekistan (1), and South Africa (2).

Notable participants include Mohammad Jalal Sikandar Sultan, chief election commissioner of Pakistan; and Deki Pema, chief election commissioner of Bhutan.

Senior Secretary and SDG Coordinator, Lamiya Morshed, said, "We have received confirmation of close to 400 election observers so far, and we expect a few more countries to confirm the visits of their delegates very soon."

Nearly 2,000 candidates, representing more than 50 political parties and independents, are contesting 300 parliamentary seats in the elections.

35,000 BGB

FROM PAGE 3
officer of Narayanganj Battalion (62 BGB), said BGB members would perform election duties in 17 upazilas covering Narayanganj, Munshiganj, Shariatpur, and parts of Dhaka district.

He said 11 base camps have been established under the jurisdiction of Narayanganj Battalion. To strengthen security during the election period, BGB has intensified surveillance in border areas and conducted regular election drills and equipment-based training for its personnel under the Dhaka Sector, Aralat said.

He also said drones would be used to monitor election-related activities in the area.

Considering the risk level of polling centres, BGB will operate both as mobile and static forces. Depending on the upazila, between two and five platoons will be deployed," he said.

A Quick Response Force will remain on standby to deal with any emergency situation, he added.

Separately, 12 platoons of BGB have been deployed in four upazilas. On this occasion,

Mahbub Alam Majumdar given ICTP Spirit of Salam Award

CITY DESK

Prof Mahbub Alam Majumdar, dean of the School of Data and Computational Sciences at BRAC University, has been awarded the Spirit of Salam Award 2026 by the Abdus Salam International Centre for Theoretical Physics, said a press release.

This prestigious international award honours individuals who exemplify the values and legacy of Nobel Laureate Professor Abdus Salam through exceptional contributions to science, education, and capacity building in the developing world.

The Spirit of Salam Award recognises a lifetime of service to advancing knowledge, mentoring young talent, and strengthening educational ecosystems.

Professor Mahbub Alam Majumdar's selection reflects his unwavering commitment to these ideals and his transformative impact on the education sector of Bangladesh.

OMS and TCB food distribution points in every neighbourhood, ensuring corruption-free and hassle-free access to cards and essential goods.

For waste management, Mizanur proposed proper segregation and disposal.

He also pledged to open school and college playgrounds and most public spaces for sports and recreation in the evenings and on holidays, excluding sensitive government installations, plant trees along rail tracks, and create small urban forests using Miyawaki method wherever space is available, with landowners' consent.

Other commitments include stopping garbage incineration, controlling pollution from factories, reducing dust from construction sites, preventing noise pollution, and strengthening dengue control, ensuring women's safety, free monthly medical camps in every ward, community oversight of clinics and hospitals, repairs to unsafe school buildings, establishment of public libraries, regular cultural programmes, and regulating street vendors and small shops instead of evicting them, among others.

Mizanur further pledged to fight in the parliament against projects that may harm the country, people and environment, oppose secret agreements, and work to ensure full transparency in the national budget.

Bangladesh elected

FROM PAGE 3

the President of the UN General Assembly and Chef de Cabinet, on behalf of the secretary-general were present and delivered statements emphasising the rule of the PBC. In a statement, Bangladesh delegation thanked members of the commission since its inception in 2005 and had earlier served the commission as chair in 2012 and 2022 as vice-chair in 2013 and 2023.

Bangladesh assumed charge yesterday as vice-chair during the first PBC meeting of its 20th session after a brief ceremony. On this occasion,

the President of the UN General Assembly and Chef de Cabinet, on behalf of the secretary-general were present and delivered statements emphasising the rule of the PBC. In a statement, Bangladesh delegation thanked members of the commission since its inception in 2005 and had earlier served the commission as chair in 2012 and 2022 as vice-chair in 2013 and 2023.

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On this occasion,

GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH DEPARTMENT OF MATHEMATICS, HEAT-ATF W3(a) PIN: 13186

UNIVERSITY OF RAJSHAHI, RAJSHAHI-6205

Ref No: RU-MATH-ATF-PIN-13186/31-2025

Date: 29/01/2026

e-Tender Notice (Open Tender Method)

E-Tenders are invited in the national e-GP portal for following procurement. Interested tenderers are requested to visit <https://www.eprocure.gov.bd> website for details.

Sl. No.	Tender ID	Ref. No & Package No.	Name of works	Last Selling Date and Time	Tender Closing Date and Time
01	1220782	RU-MATH-ATF-PIN-13186/31-2025	Renovation Work for Research Lab, SPM Office at Room No:426(B) Department of Mathematics, University of Rajshahi	16/02/2026	17/02/2026

This is an online tender, where only e-Tenders will accept in the National e-GP portal and on offline/hard copies will be accepted. The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP system portal have to be deposited online through any registered banks branches up to one hour before tender last selling time. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP system Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

G. Sami

Dr. Gour Chandra Paul

Professor, SPM

HEAT-ATF-W3a-PIN-13186

Department of Mathematics

University of Rajshahi-6205

GD-224

INTERNATIONAL

DHAKA SATURDAY JANUARY 31, 2026

MAGH 17, 1432 BS

The Daily Star

5

World must act to ease Gaza's 'dire' conditions

Says Red Cross chief; Israel kills three Palestinians, announces limited Rafah reopening

AFP, Geneva

The world must scale up efforts to alleviate the human suffering in Gaza, building on the momentum from the ceasefire's first phase, the head of the Red Cross said yesterday.

The US brokered ceasefire, which sought to halt the fighting between Israel and Hamas sparked by the group's October 2023 attack, has been in place for more than three months despite both sides accusing the other of repeated violations.

Earlier in January, Washington announced the truce had progressed to its second phase, intended to bring a definitive end to the war.



Firefighters work at the site of a private enterprise struck by an overnight Russian missile in Kharkiv, Ukraine, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS



"States must harness the momentum generated by the first phase of the agreement between Israel and Hamas to urgently improve the dire humanitarian conditions in Gaza," Mirjana Spoljaric, president of the International Committee of the Red Cross, said in a statement.

Meanwhile, the Israeli military said yesterday it launched overnight strikes at "eight terrorists" in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, killing three of them.

It said that further strikes were launched and added that "soldiers continue to conduct searches in the area in order to locate and eliminate all the terrorists".

Israel also announced that the crucial Rafah crossing between the Gaza Strip and Egypt would be reopened tomorrow, but only for the "limited movement of people".

UK has much to offer China Says PM Starmer, defying Trump's warning on Beijing ties

AFP, Shanghai

Visiting Prime Minister Keir Starmer said yesterday that Britain has a "huge amount to offer" China, after his bid to forge closer ties prompted warnings from US President Donald Trump.

The first visit to China by a British prime minister in eight years, Starmer's trip follows in the footsteps of other Western leaders looking to counter an increasingly volatile United States.

Leaders from France, Canada and Finland have flocked to Beijing

in recent weeks, recoiling from Trump's bid to seize Greenland and tariff threats against Nato allies.

Trump warned on Thursday it was "very dangerous" for Britain to be dealing with China. Asked about the comments yesterday, Beijing's foreign ministry said that "China is willing to strengthen cooperation with all countries in the spirit of mutual benefit and win-win results".

Starmer met top Chinese leaders, including President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang on Thursday, with both sides highlighting the need for closer ties.

Yesterday, Starmer told business representatives from Britain and China that both sides had "warmly engaged" and "made some real progress".

"The UK has got a huge amount to offer," he said in a short speech at the UK-China Business Forum at the Bank of China.

The meetings the previous day provided "just the level of engagement that we hoped for", Starmer said.

He signed a series of agreements on Thursday.

Dhaka-Beijing

FROM PAGE 12

State Guest House Jamuna, according to the Chief Adviser's Press Wing.

The delegation included senior Chinese academics, investors, and industry leaders from the biomedical, infrastructure, digital, and legal sectors.

Xin yuan Fu, a leading Chinese biomedical scientist and director of the West China School of Medicine at Sichuan University, praised Professor Yunus's vision and said he looked forward to working with Bangladeshi academics to help improve people's lives.

Andrew Zilong Wong, senior adviser to the board of directors of Walvax Biotechnology, and Yuqing Yao, managing director of Walvax Biotech (Singapore), also expressed interest in working with Bangladesh. Walvax has exported vaccines to at least 22 countries.

The delegation informed the chief adviser that they had engaged with Bangladeshi university students on artificial intelligence and digitalisation and expressed admiration for the talent and potential of the country's youth.

NASA eyes

FROM PAGE 12

In Florida, NASA has begun the final phase of preparations. Its 98-metre-tall Space Launch System (SLS) rocket, carrying the Orion spacecraft, has been moved from the Vehicle Assembly Building to Launch Pad 39B at the Kennedy Space Center. With the rocket now in position, teams will conduct a series of final checks, tests and a full dress rehearsal to simulate launch conditions.

NASA officials say the earliest possible launch date is February 6, 2026, with additional windows available later that month and into March and April.

The Artemis II crew includes NASA astronauts Reid Wiseman, who will serve as commander, Victor Glover as pilot, and Christina Koch, alongside Jeremy Hansen of the Canadian Space Agency. The astronauts have entered pre-launch quarantine in Houston as preparations continue.

Artemis II follows the uncrewed Artemis I mission, which launched in November 2022 and successfully orbited the Moon before returning to Earth after 25 days in space. If successful, Artemis II would be the first crewed mission to travel around the Moon since Apollo 17 in December 1972.

Niko ordered to pay \$42m against claim of \$1b

FROM PAGE 12

responsibility in the explosions that led to large-scale gas flaring.

"The claim was much bigger. We need to get the full verdict to know what was considered in the judgement to set the amount.

But it is clear that the ICSID found Niko guilty of their negligence in operating the gas field," Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Adviser Muhammad Fouzul Kabir Khan told The Daily Star.

According to a Petrobangla source, the tribunal awarded \$40 million for the loss of around 8 billion cubic feet of gas, and an additional \$2 million for environmental and other damages.

Officials from Petrobangla and Bapex said Bangladesh had sought a significantly higher amount of compensation at ICSID than what was initially claimed domestically, an issue that came up during the hearings. They

added that other legal considerations were also involved, making it difficult to comment definitively before reviewing the full ruling.

They also said that during the previous government's tenure, premature disclosure of information related to the verdict had created complications, including allegations of breaching ICSID's confidentiality. As a result, authorities are proceeding cautiously this time.

Petrobangla and Bapex officials said Niko caused losses amounting to several thousand crore taka, while substantial sums were spent on litigation over the years. Compared to these losses and legal costs, the compensation amount is not considered financially satisfactory.

The compensation amount is disappointing compared to the claim. Once the full verdict is received, it will be reviewed carefully. The total cost of litigation is also being assessed," said a senior government official involved in the proceedings, requesting anonymity.

Gas from the Tengratila field was supplied to Chhatak Cement Factory and Paper Mill after the discovery of gas there in 1959. The well was shut down due to water intrusion after extracting about 26.4 billion cubic feet of gas.

The field remained inactive for years before being handed over to Niko for exploration in 2003. During drilling operations, two major explosions occurred on January 7 and June 24, 2005.

The fires destroyed gas reserves in parts of the field and caused extensive damage to nearby infrastructure and assets. Petrobangla initially demanded Tk 7.46 billion in compensation from Niko, which the company refused to pay.

In response, Petrobangla filed a case in a local lower court in 2007 and

suspended payment of gas bills for Niko's Feni gas field. The High Court later ordered the seizure of all Niko assets in Bangladesh and annulled its contracts, a decision subsequently upheld by the Supreme Court.

In 2010, Niko filed two complaints at ICSID alleging non-payment of gas bills and compensation. In a 2014 ruling, ICSID directed Petrobangla to pay dues for gas from the Feni gas field. Subsequently, in 2016, Bangladesh initiated arbitration at ICSID, seeking \$118 million in compensation for Bapex and \$896 million for the government.

As the government works to increase domestic gas production, a development project proposal (DPP) has already been prepared for drilling new wells at the Chhatak gas field. Once the final ICSID verdict is received, Petrobangla officials said, the next steps will be taken after consulting legal experts.

48% see Tarique as next PM: poll

FROM PAGE 12

The sample size was 5,147 respondents, selected through random sampling from the combined panels of previous survey rounds.

Of those surveyed, 93.3 percent said they plan to vote in February. Among respondents who previously said they would vote, 96.1 percent maintained that intention, while 78.5 percent of those who had earlier said they would not vote now plan to participate.

The data indicate that BNP is consolidating its support, gaining disproportionately from previously undecided voters and Awami League supporters.

Of BNP's projected vote share, 26.6 percentage points come from voters who were earlier undecided or unwilling to disclose their preference.

Among the people who usually vote for AL, 32.9 percent now say they are likely to vote for BNP, while 13.2 percent favour Jamaat. However, 41.3 percent of AL supporters remain undecided.

The survey attributes a significant portion of BNP's

recent gains after Tarique's return home and the death of former prime minister Khaleda Zia -- events that appear to have mobilised undecided voters.

At the constituency level, 52.9 percent of respondents said a BNP candidate would win in their area if the polls were held tomorrow, while 23.8 percent said they could not say.

Public confidence in the administration of elections has improved. About 72.3 percent of respondents said they believe the government can organise a fair election. Confidence in impartial policing and local administration stood at 74.4 percent, while 82 percent said they feel safe about casting their votes.

A panel discussion was also held at the event, where Dhaka University's Development Studies Prof Asif M Shahan; Voice for Reform Joint Convener Fahim Mashroor; BRAIN's Executive Director Shafiqul Rahman, political analyst and BRAIN member Jyoti Rahman; and Innovation Consulting's Portfolio Director Taslimah Rahman spoke, among others.

বাংলাদেশ বিদ্যুৎ উন্নয়ন বোর্ড

Bangladesh Power Development Board
Directorate of Purchase
Biddut Bhaban (12th Floor)
1 Abdul Goni Road, Dhaka-1000



বাংলাদেশ

সংস্কৰণ ২০২৬

সংস্কৰণ নির্বাচন

দেশের চারিং

ভাগুড়ার ছাত্র

e-Tender Notice

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

SL No	Tender ID No.	Package No	Reference No.	Description of Goods/Works	Last Selling Date and time	Closing Date and time	Opening Date and time
1	1221747	EB-GRL-11 FY-25-26	27.11.0000, 304.26.125.26 Date, 29/01/2026	Supply of 12 M steel pole-350 daN-200 nos. & Supply of 12 M steel pole-450 daN-400 nos.	18-Feb 2026 17.00	19-Feb 2026 14.00	19-Feb 2026 14.00

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

To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required.

The fees for downloading the e-Tender Documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered bank branches.

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

For more details please contact to the PE's Support Desk (01768595879).

বিদ্যুৎ/জন-৬৭১(২)/১৯/০১/২৬

ৰেজিস্ট্রেশন
(Md. Nannu Miah)
ID No. 1-01304
Director
Directorate of Purchase
BPDB, Dhaka.

ভৰ্তি বিজ্ঞপ্তি

আর্মি নার্সিং কলেজে কুমিল্লা

ব্যাচেলর অব সার্কেল ইন নার্সিং কোর্সে ভৰ্তি বিজ্ঞপ্তি

২০২৫-২০২৬ শিক্ষাবৰ্ষে আর্মি নার্সিং কলেজে কুমিল্লা ১ম বর্ষে (১২তম বাচ) ০৪ (চার) বছর মেয়াদী ব্যাচেলর অব সার্কেল ইন নার্সিং (বি এসিসি ইন নার্সিং) কোর্সে ছাত্রী ভৰ্তির জন্য আবেদন আহ্বান কৰা যাচ্ছে।

বিদ্যুৎ পোর্টেল থেকে এসএসিসি/সমমান পরীক্ষায় উত্তীর্ণ রাইট প্রাপ্তি কুমিল্লা আবেদন কৰাতে পারবেন।

(১) ২০২১, ২০২২ অব্দে ব্যাচেলর ইন নার্সিং কোর্সে এসএসিসি/সমমান পরীক্ষায় এবং ২০২৩, ২০২৪ অব্দে ব্যাচেলর ইন নার্সিং কোর্সে এসএসিসি/সমমান পরীক্ষায় উত্তীর্ণ রাইট প্রাপ্তি কুমিল্লা আবেদন কৰাতে পারবেন।

(২) এসএসিসি/সমমান এবং এইচএসসি/সমমানের পরীক্ষা সমূহে প্রাপ্ত জিপিএ এবং মোগফল মুন্তম ৬.৫০ থাকতে হবে, তবে কোন পরীক্ষায় জিপিএ ৩.০০ এর কম হবে না। প্রাপ্তীকে এইচএসসি/সমমান পরীক্ষায় জীববিজ্ঞানে জিপিএ মুন্তম ২.৫০ থাকতে হবে।

ভৰ্তি প্রক্রিয়া সম্বন্ধে তারিখ ও সময়সূচি নিম্নরূপ:

আবেদন ক্ষমতা	০১ জুনোৱাৰি ২০২৬ হতে ০৫ মার্চ ২০২৬ পর্যন্ত।
আবেদন ক্ষমতা	০৫ মার্চ ২০২৬ দুপুর ১৪০০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত।
প্রবেশ সম্ভব তারিখ	০৮ মার্চ ২০২৬ হতে ১২ মার্চ ২০২৬ পর্যন্ত।
গীরিষ পরীক্ষা	১৪ মার্চ ২০২৬ (পৰিবার, সকাল ১১০০ ঘটিকা)।

বিজ্ঞপ্তি বিশেষ প্রযোজনে ভৰ্তি সম্ভব যাবতীয় কলেজে অধ্যাদেশ সম্মত হতে এক্ষেত্রে আবেদন ক্ষেত্রে প্রযোজন কৰা যাবে।

সময়: সকাল ০৯০০ টা হতে ১৪০০ টা পর্যন্ত (অন্তৰ্বার ও শনিবার এবং সরকারী ছুটির দিন ব্যাপৰ্য

Protect the referendum's integrity

Civil servants must remain neutral

That the government employees have been campaigning for a "Yes" vote in the upcoming referendum on the July charter, scheduled to be held alongside the 13th parliamentary election on February 12, in violation of the law is deeply concerning. Government advisers and senior officials have reportedly been actively promoting a "Yes" vote for the referendum, raising concerns about legality, neutrality, and the overall credibility of the process. Now the EC has clearly stated that government employees may inform the public about the referendum, but they must not campaign for a "Yes" or a "No" vote. The government must take cognisance of this.

According to Section 21 of the Referendum Ordinance, 2025, and Article 86 of the Representation of the People Order, 1972, any misuse of official position to influence the outcome of a referendum or election may constitute a punishable offence, carrying imprisonment of one to five years along with fines. Reportedly, the EC has issued letters to returning officers, cabinet secretaries, and secretaries of all ministries and divisions, reminding them of their legal obligations. Election officers, while on deputation under the EC during this period, are explicitly bound to prioritise electoral responsibilities over other duties. The EC, however, did not address the role of the advisers. Banners advocating a "Yes" vote are being displayed in government offices nationwide, and senior government advisers have publicly urged citizens to vote "Yes" in the referendum. When civil servants campaign for one side, it seriously undermines the credibility and fairness of the referendum process.

Understandably, a "Yes" vote in the referendum will open the door for an array of significant reforms. The new parliament, alongside its regular duties, would function as a constitutional reform council to oversee these changes. While proponents of the "Yes" campaign argue that there is no legal barrier to such advocacy, the EC's letter, grounded in the existing law, makes it clear that campaigning by civil servants would constitute a punishable offence. However, we have yet to learn of the government's clear position in response to the EC's letter.

We believe it would be unwise for the government to create any situation that renders the referendum controversial. It must ensure that the law is not violated by its advisers and senior officials, who must fully respect the EC's directives. The EC, for its part, must remain vigilant and ready to enforce the law decisively, sending a clear message that violations will not be tolerated. Only by keeping the civil servants neutral and the state machinery impartial can the referendum and the general election be conducted in a manner worthy of public trust.

Stop unnecessary C-sections

Ensure better labour care, rein in profiteering private facilities

We are deeply concerned by the reckless rise in births by Caesarean section in the country, even when there is no medical need for the surgeries to be performed. Last year alone, around 17 lakh children were born through unnecessary C-section surgeries, according to a recent seminar. Research further found that almost one in two children is born via C-section, as opposed to the global average of one in five children being delivered through surgery. A 2018 estimate by Save the Children suggests that over Tk 5,000 crore is lost every year to these unnecessary procedures.

The number of C section births has been allowed to rise exponentially over a number of years, mainly due to the absence of any meaningful government action to check it. In the meantime, private healthcare facilities have been able to count crores of taka in profits each year by performing unnecessary C-sections. At present, more than half of all births in Bangladesh happen surgically. While many institutions lack sufficient capable staff, emergency medical support and standard labour rooms, surgical delivery is also opted for (even by patients themselves in many cases) due to being less time-consuming than normal delivery. Additionally, patients' and families' lack of awareness regarding the best option for them is another barrier to preventing a C section where a normal delivery would be sufficient. According to research, eight or nine out of every 10 deliveries in Bangladesh's private hospitals are done via C-sections.

According to experts, unnecessary C-section birth could negatively impact a child's immunity and long-term health. Natural birth allows beneficial microbes or the mother's microbiome to be transferred to the newborn, and also allows for immediate skin-to-skin contact between mother and baby, which is recognised by the World Health Organization as a fundamental aspect of neonatal care.

It is up to the healthcare authorities to put a monitoring system in place to oversee the activities of private hospitals, as that is where the ratio of normal to C-section deliveries is the most dismal. Community-based campaigns must also be initiated to raise awareness against unnecessary C sections. Most importantly, healthcare facilities across public and private sectors must be bolstered to ensure that patients receive the best possible prenatal and postnatal care, while not being charged dubious amounts in hospital bills.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY



Soviet Union launches LUNA 9

On this day in 1966, the Soviet Union launched the uncrewed Luna 9, the first spacecraft to make a soft landing on the Moon.

EDITORIAL

Education needs decisive actions, not empty promises



BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

Dr Shamsad Mortuza
is professor of English at Dhaka University.

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

Days before the election, promises abound. The education sector has also received its quota of electoral promises. But one recent report reveals a significant lack of new thinking and structural imagination in preparing students for a world changed beyond recognition. The electoral pledges, summarised in the report, includes BNP's commitment to allocate five percent of GDP to education, promote research and knowledge centric education with a focus on the mother tongue, and emphasise learning a third language for the expanding job market; Jamaat-e-Islami's proposal for interest-free loans for meritorious students, scholarships to study abroad, and merger of three prominent women's colleges to form a national women's university; and NCP's promise to prioritise STEM, vocation, and skill development projects. Ironically, we still need to reiterate the constitutional right to education as an electoral slogan, despite nearly 55 years of independence.

Election slogans like "equal education across streams," "skills for the future," "research-based higher education," or "technical training for employment" lack credibility due to the failure of successive governments to establish education within a rights-based framework. While our constitution mentions a "uniform, mass-orientated and universal system of education" and free, compulsory schooling, education remains a "principle of state policy." In other words, the state is morally obligated but not legally accountable. The election manifestos do not address the deep structure that is responsible for social inequality.

Bangladesh, by default, has designed inequality in education through its multiple streams. Children are sorted into public, private, madrasa, English medium, or vocational groups mostly based on their socioeconomic conditions. From the very first years of schooling, they are exposed to different curricula, teacher quality, costs, and cultural capital. By the time they reach university, the concept of "equal opportunity" has already become a myth. The subheadings of "Education" in the electoral manifestos casually mention "uniformed standards," "foundational subjects," and "equal

dignity." They stop short of spelling out how learning outcomes will be equalised when teacher deployment, funding, assessment, and institutional incentives remain radically unequal.

Equity needs to be engineered in education so that the minimum learning standard in language, numeracy, science, and civic reasoning is attained. Reforming national pedagogy and assessment procedures is the only way to implement these changes.



VISUAL: SHAIKH SULTANA JAHAN BADHON

The pandemic has altered many of our long-held ideas and practices.

A national policy today must not overlook the damage done by the pandemic. We saw the controversial "auto-pass," shortened syllabi, diluted examinations, and prolonged institutional closures as pragmatic emergency responses. But their impacts are visible almost everywhere.

Those who obtained higher CGPA without demonstrating their competence are the ones who are at the forefront of student movements. We have led an entire generation to believe that examinations are negotiable and learning is elastic. When combined with our reliance on coaching centres, rote-driven curricula, and AI-prepared responses, we see a culture that demands or expects grades and certificates without mastering the required knowledge or acquiring the necessary skills. None of the political manifestos have mentioned any national learning recovery diagnostics. There is no roadmap for restoring

certification systems trusted by employers.

Currently, the expansion of education has resulted in a large number of "educated" young individuals being rejected by the "quality control" departments of the job market. Their frustration is our frustration. The electoral promises of jobs, stipends, loans, and allowances for graduates may offer short-term relief, but they do not show the intent to correct the system that generates unemployability.

The gap between promises and preparedness is the most visible in higher education. The popular pursuit of universities in every district has resulted in their proliferation by administrative decree. This "universitisation" has produced campuses with teachers without pedigree, researchers without orientation, laboratories without equipment, and degrees without depth. There is no labour market mapping to discern which areas of

specialisation and skills our students need for career mobility. The crisis of the seven colleges, along with the churn of National University affiliations, serves as a prime example of making superficial changes without addressing the underlying problems.

What we require from the new government is not the declaration of more buildings, but institutional clarity. We require universities to distinguish between research-intensive postgraduate institutions, teaching-focused undergraduate universities, and applied and vocational graduate institutes connected to regional labour markets.

The bedrock of the education system is the teacher. We cannot expect the promises of "world-class" universities to materialise with underpaid, overburdened, and under-supported teachers. We should prioritise a teacher's workforce strategy. The curriculum and assessment reforms mentioned earlier can only happen if there is transparent teacher recruitment, training, pay, accountability, and autonomy.

The key factor in all these developments is the availability of funds. The pledge of higher budget allocations is encouraging. We need to question the incoming government about the source of funding, its spending strategy, and the trade-offs involved. Inarguably, the most damaging aspect of Bangladesh's education governance is the absence of continuity. Policies are discarded, curricula rewritten, and institutions restructured to align with changes in the political make-up. These changes are not based on evidence. Students become the ultimate victims of such drastic changes. Future preparedness requires cross-party agreements on what will not change abruptly. Education needs insulation from short-term political cycles, not their amplification. We as a nation need to agree on foundational curricula, assessment standards, teacher recruitment systems, and institutional classifications.

The interim government's reform agenda conveniently sidelined education for one and a half years. But for a government riding on the desires of students, it should have ensured that a system is in place that prepares our students for the future. And the government that will swear in must be willing to invest in an ecosystem that addresses the underlying problems of our education sector. Our students do not need empty slogans. They need consistency. They need institutions that know their purpose, where teachers are supported and trusted, and curricula are aligned with the real world.

Can the new government get the renewables policy right?



Md. Razib
is research associate at South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (SANEM). He can be reached at mdrazib329@gmail.com.

MD. RAZIB

Bangladesh relies primarily on fossil fuels, especially coal and natural gas, to generate power. In addition to jeopardising the nation's long-term viability and harming the environment, this reliance leaves it vulnerable to fluctuations in the world's energy prices. The expansion of the renewable energy sector is challenged by high upfront prices and a lack of supportive regulations, despite notable advancements, especially in solar household systems and grid-connected solar projects. In this context, the government adopted the Renewable Energy Policy (REP) 2025 to facilitate a sustainable energy transition. Though this policy marks a strategic pivot towards sustainable energy, aligned with national plans such as the Integrated Energy and Power Master Plan (IEPMP), Delta Plan 2100, and international climate commitments under the Paris Agreement, it has several critical limitations.

The targets of the REP2025 are ambitious and unrealistic. The policy sets a goal of 20 percent of electricity generation from renewable sources

by 2030 and 30 percent by 2040. It also sets ambitious capacity targets of 6,145MW by 2030 and 17,470MW by 2041. In the REP2008, a modest target of 10 percent power by 2020 was set. That deadline came and went. As of September 2025, the country's installed renewable energy capacity was 1,636.5MW, or 5.22 percent of its total capacity. To meet the 2030 goal, the country must add 750MW annually. However, only 400 MW of utility-scale projects are under construction, and foreign investment remains limited due to policy instability. Even China, a global leader in renewables, has set a target of achieving 25 percent non-fossil fuel by 2030. This raises serious doubts about the feasibility of achieving similar targets, as Bangladesh lacks the financial resources, infrastructure, investment, and technological capacity compared to China.

The policy also does not clearly specify mechanisms for financing in the renewable energy sector. An assessment by the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA) reveals that Bangladesh will

require up to \$980 million annually to meet its renewables goal of 2030. And during the next decade, the country will need up to \$1.46 billion a year. In that case, we will require to increase the current annual investment flow of \$238 million by four to six times in the next 5-15 years.

Another big obstacle to renewable energy expansion is the continued high dominance of fossil fuel subsidies. Bangladesh allocates nearly \$4 billion in subsidies to the energy sector each year. Capacity payments to idle plants and fuel subsidies continue to consume a large share of public resources, leaving very little for renewable energy investment. Furthermore, currency instability, frequent regulatory changes, and the lack of reliable guarantees discourage many foreign investors from committing long-term capital. Domestic finance is also constrained as local banks offer short-term lending horizons, which are not well-suited for projects requiring financing over 15-20 years. Besides, the country faces a lack of strong bankable projects due to the absence of feasibility studies and unresolved issues around land or rooftop access.

The policy lacks clarity too. There is no strong approach to foreign direct investment (FDI). Achieving national energy goals requires a balanced mix of both FDI and domestic financing. Additionally, the incentive structure under the current policy is uneven and not inclusive enough. While companies implementing renewable energy projects are granted full income tax exemptions for 10 years

and partial exemptions for five years, solar panel user households get no incentives. In contrast, many countries provide direct financial support of up to 30 percent for rooftop solar panel installations. The absence of similar provisions limits the potential for decentralised renewable energy adoption in Bangladesh.

The country needs to set realistic and feasible electricity generation targets from renewables that are aligned with existing capacity, financing potential, and institutional readiness. The government should reduce taxes on components like solar panels, inverters, batteries, etc. It also needs to adopt a unified total tax incidence reduction strategy across sectors (solar, wind, biomass, nuclear) to improve affordability and attract investment. Encouraging grid-integrated solar irrigation pumps (SIPs) with subsidies for smaller farms, enabling energy export during off-peak times and revising the duty structure for electric vehicles are also vital. Feed-in tariff is another policy to accelerate domestic and foreign investment in renewable energy technologies by providing a tariff above the retail power rate.

Ultimately, REP2025 represents a vital strategic intent, but its success hinges on moving beyond ambitious rhetoric towards practical execution. To bridge the gap between five percent and 20 percent renewable capacity, the government must prioritise fiscal reforms, incentivise private and household investment, and overhaul the current financing infrastructure.

Oral history, 1971, and the danger of erasing memory



Tahsina Nasir
is a PhD student at Georgia State University in the US.

TAHSINA NASIR

On January 14, the Ministry of Liberation War Affairs quietly made a decision that should unsettle us. About 14,640 video interviews of surviving freedom fighters, recorded as part of a state funded project launched in 2022, were cancelled. As per the ministry's decision, the interviews will not be archived. The contractors will not be paid. And the entire project has been shelved, leaving question marks even on the 12,788 video recordings that had been previously accepted for preservation. The official explanation for this is familiar but deeply troubling: that the testimonies did not present the "accurate history" of the Liberation War. Apparently, there were multiple inconsistencies, and freedom fighters' experiences were not properly reflected. All this, we are told, could mislead the future generations.

In reality, what we are witnessing here is an act of silencing.

Bangladesh has never had a stable relationship with its past. Since 1971, the history of the war has been repeatedly edited, reshaped, amplified, or muted, often depending on who governs. Textbooks change. Emphasis shifts. Some figures rise, others fade. Certain narratives are foregrounded while others recede. Over time, this culture has encouraged the perception that history itself is provisional. What distinguishes the present moment, however, is not reinterpretation but removal. These interviews were not selectively archived, annotated, or contextualised; they were cancelled in their entirety. Such a step demands careful scrutiny, because once historical material is abandoned or destroyed, it may not be recovered.

First of all, the ministry's decision raises questions about evaluation processes

that go to the heart of historical integrity. In oral history, a project's credibility is inseparable from transparency. Decisions about evaluation and preservation must be grounded in clear methodological standards and expert consultation. The question is, did the ministry consult professional historians, archivists, or trained oral historians before cancelling the interviews and the project? Oral history is a specialised field with established ethical guidelines, including the principle of shared authority, which recognises that the stewardship of public memory must involve trained experts alongside institutions. The apparent absence of such consultation suggests a departure from this standard.

Equally important is the question of provenance. What were the qualifications of those serving on the subcommittee that assessed the interviews? What historiographical or methodological expertise did they bring to the evaluation of oral testimony? Media reports indicate the presence of freedom fighters on the subcommittee, but none with a public record of historiographical expertise, so it is difficult to determine whether the eventual decision rested on scholarly judgement or administrative discretion. Equally importantly, on what scholarly basis were the 14,640 interviews discarded? In professional historical practice, when limitations are identified in a primary source, the standard response is not destruction, but contextualisation through annotation, metadata, and interpretive framing. By opting for wholesale cancellation rather than nuanced review, the ministry has bypassed academic rigour in favour of archival erasure, setting a troubling precedent.

We must recognise that the Liberation War is not a distant past yet. It is still a living memory, ageing, fragile, and finite. Every year, more freedom fighters pass away. With them disappear stories that have never been written down, never archived, never professionally documented. Once lost, they are gone forever. Historians often speak of closing archives, points at which access to lived memory disappears permanently.

Peter Novick demonstrated that objectivity in history is not an attainable condition of neutrality, but an ethical aspiration that disciplines historical practice. A mature historical culture understands this. It does not demand a flawless or uniform recollection of the past; it demands an honest and methodologically sound engagement with it.

One freedom fighter might recall

connects historical scholarship with everyday citizens. History here largely remains confined to textbooks, state ceremonies, and official statements. Museums are limited, while archives are difficult to access. Oral testimonies rarely move beyond symbolic recognition. When people cannot encounter history as a living, contested process, it becomes easier to revise, simplify or erase it. Public history exists to bridge this gap, bringing scholarship into public space through archives, exhibitions, oral history projects, and digital platforms.

The importance of grounding history in lived experience has been powerfully articulated by Dipesh Chakrabarty, who argues that history loses ethical depth when it is reduced to abstract national narratives detached from everyday life. It thus becomes an instrument of authority rather than a space of inquiry. Oral history restores this ethical relationship by anchoring national narratives in memory, locality, and human experience. It does not dictate meaning. It invites engagement. It allows freedom fighters, witnesses, and ordinary people to remain active participants in the making of national memory.

So, if the interviews in question were methodologically weak, the solution was scholarly review, contextualisation and correction, not blanket cancellation. If there are inconsistencies, historians know how to annotate them. If memories conflict, that conflict itself is historically meaningful. If the contracting firm responsible for the interviews has failed to meet any condition or follow the prescribed criteria, the agreement could be revoked and replaced without summarily abandoning all interviews or the project itself. So, where do we go from here?

The authorities still have a choice. The witnesses are still here. The recordings may yet be recovered. Scholars can still be engaged and trusted for necessary follow-ups. But if Bangladesh wishes to secure a durable civic future rooted in proper historical awareness, it must begin listening to history in all its complexity. The question is no longer whether those recorded voices are comfortable, and consistent. The question is whether we can afford to lose them.



VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

Bangladesh seems to be standing at that edge now. Abandoning an entire oral history project at this moment is not just careless; it could be historically irreversible.

The ministry's justification rests on the belief that history must be tidy, consistent, and ideologically aligned in order to be valid. But history does not work that way, especially oral history which, by its very nature, captures contradiction. People remember events differently. Trauma can reshape memory. Fear, pride, regret, and silence all leave traces in it. These are not methodological flaws, but evidence of how history is lived and remembered over time. Modern historiography has long grappled with this tension. In *That Noble Dream*,

confusion instead of clarity. Another might speak of internal disagreements, regional neglect, or post-war disillusionment. Some testimonies may complicate heroic narratives. States that prioritise control over inquiry tend to find these voices uncomfortable. But silencing ambiguity does not strengthen history—it narrows it. When a state decides which memories are acceptable before historians can properly evaluate them, the boundary between scholarship and censorship collapses.

This episode also exposes a deeper structural weakness: the fragile state of public history in Bangladesh. Unlike many post-conflict societies, the country has failed to build a strong public history culture that

Why nutrition should be integrated into primary care



Dr Shah Mohammad Fahim
is a physician and associate scientist at the
International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease
Research, Bangladesh (icddr,b). He can be reached
at sj543@cornell.edu.

SHAH MOHAMMAD FAHIM

Bangladesh has made notable progress in improving many health outcomes. Yet, primary healthcare services remain insufficient in both rural and urban areas. The Health Sector Reform Commission submitted its report last year, recommending a constitutional amendment to recognise primary healthcare as a basic human right. Such a move would create a legal obligation to ensure access to and efficient delivery of primary care for all citizens. However, the report does not explicitly address the integration of nutrition into primary healthcare.

Poor nutrition is a major contributor to preventable diseases and is responsible for nearly half of all deaths among children under five years of age. Yet, nutrition is often inadequately addressed in healthcare settings, leading to slow progress towards achieving universal health coverage. Integrating nutrition into primary care offers the opportunity to improve diagnosis, promote health for all, and transform preventive care at the population level. It can also yield benefits by raising awareness, enabling early diagnosis, and initiating preventive measures earlier, leading to broader improvements in the health and well-being of the nation.

Integrating nutrition into primary care offers the opportunity to improve diagnosis, promote health for all, and transform preventive care at the population level. It can also yield benefits by raising awareness, enabling early diagnosis, and initiating preventive measures earlier, leading to broader improvements in the health and well-being of the nation.

settings where people may not otherwise seek care.

Bangladesh also faces a growing burden of chronic diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD). Nearly 23 percent women and almost 17 percent men in the country live with high blood pressure. Diabetes is also widespread, affecting 17 percent of women and 15 percent of men aged 18 years and above. Alarmingly, nearly one-third of the population suffers from NAFLD. Together, these diseases, increasingly linked to poor diets and nutrition,

and their complications, account for almost half of all adult deaths in the country. Primary care facilities should be equipped to screen for these illnesses using simple, cost-effective and validated diagnostic tools and medical devices.

One of the major challenges in primary care, especially in rural areas, is the shortage of doctors and nurses. Without trained clinicians, physical exams and proper diagnosis become difficult. The government must find ways to attract and retain physicians in hard-to-reach areas. Offering incentives, better job security, and contractual recruitment for hard-to-reach areas, along with safety measures to prevent workplace violence, could help in addressing the workforce shortages in primary care settings.

Nutrition is also about what people eat. Primary care facilities should routinely assess dietary intake. Digital tools that reflect local foods, recipes, and portion sizes could make this process faster and more accurate. Screening for food insecurity should also be part of this effort, since lack of access to food is also linked with increased risk of malnutrition, illness, and premature death.

Primary care can also strengthen existing programmes. Vitamin A supplementation, deworming, and other nutrition interventions can reach more children if they are delivered through primary care facilities. The country made notable progress in some of these areas, but primary care offers a way to address the remaining gaps.

Nutrition counselling and health education must become a core component of primary healthcare. Healthcare providers should be able to guide families on healthy diets, physical activity, and lifestyle choices, including the harms of consuming tobacco and alcohol. None of this will succeed without adequate training. Healthcare providers need skills not only in measurement and diagnosis, but also in counselling, behaviour change communication, and respectful care. With proper training, healthcare providers in primary care settings can act as a powerful frontline against malnutrition and its lifelong consequences.

Malnutrition and its adverse consequences are not inevitable. Integrating nutrition into primary care, with basic screening tools, point-of-care diagnostics, essential medicines and supplements, a trained workforce, and strong political commitment, can help ensure optimal growth in children, reduce the burden of anaemia, micronutrient deficiencies, and chronic diseases, prevent disability and premature deaths from nutrition-related non-communicable diseases, and ease the financial strain on families and health systems.

CROSSWORD

BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Play parts
- 5 Visibility lessener
- 9 Cut off
- 11 Printer need
- 12 Ship of 1492
- 13 Heart, e.g.
- 14 Words with pickle, stew or jam
- 15 Dessert tube
- 17 Packing plant
- 19 Fish eggs
- 20 Kick off
- 21 Diet no-no
- 22 Hit's counterpart
- 24 Mornings: Abbr.
- 26 Bath bars
- 29 Relaxing retreat
- 30 Choral composition
- 32 Southwestern bar
- 34 Fireplace item
- 35 Quartet doubled
- 36 Scottish lord
- 38 First odd prime
- 39 Devoured
- 40 Bulls or Bears

41 Final, for one

- DOWN
- 1 Jellied dish
- 2 Porcelains for dishes
- 3 Lease signer
- 4 Plopped down
- 5 Rhino feature
- 6 Soft wool
- 7 Fanatic
- 8 Bert's buddy
- 10 Indy autos
- 11 Theater prize
- 16 Craftsman
- 18 Collars
- 21 Accomplishment
- 23 Be generous
- 24 Cochise's people
- 25 Chanted word
- 27 Sense of taste
- 28 Gems
- 29 "Ivanhoe" writer
- 30 Refer to
- 31 Deal maker
- 33 Abound
- 37 Bowler or boater



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS



WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO
dsopinion@gmail.com.

Violence Against Women and Children in Bangladesh: A Call for Strategic Action

A roundtable titled "Violence Against Women and Children in Bangladesh: A Call for Strategic Action" was held on 07 December, 2025, at The Daily Star Centre, jointly organised by UNICEF, Plan International & The Daily Star. The dialogue brought together policymakers, frontline implementers, legal experts, civil society advocates, UN agencies and media to develop strategic and actionable recommendations for strengthening Bangladesh's protection systems and justice mechanisms to effectively prevent and address violence against women and children.



SHABNAAZ ZAHEREEN
Child Protection Specialist
UNICEF Bangladesh
(Keynote Presenter)

Our systems failed the 11-year-old victim of rape in Magura. Analysing this reveals critical gaps: families lack sensitisation, community protection mechanisms like Child Welfare Boards are non-functional, and social workers are not mandated for protection. Alarming data shows 86% of children aged 1-14 experience violent discipline, and 47.2% of girls are married before 18. Furthermore, 70% of women face intimate partner violence in their lifetime. While we have laws and structures like 102 specialised tribunals and the 109 helpline, implementation is weak. For instance, of over 5,600 sexual violence cases (2013-2024), only 2% reached a verdict. We need immediate strategic action: establish a Department of Children Affairs, amend the Child Marriage Restraint Act, and create a professional, community-based child protection workforce. A coordinated, multi-sectoral working group with clear accountability is essential to transform this systemic failure.



MOSTAFA MOSTAKUR RAHIM KHAN
Director (Programme)
Department of Social Services,
Ministry of Social Welfare

The creation of a dedicated Child Protection Wing within our department underscores our commitment. However, a major operational hurdle is the non-functionality of key committees. District and Upazila Child Welfare Boards rarely meet because their chairs: the DC and UNO, each oversee 150-200 committees. Our frontline is severely stretched: a single Union Social Worker manages over 54 social safety net programmes, including allowances and microcredit, leaving minimal capacity for proactive child protection. The CSPB project with UNICEF has shown progress in making committees functional. Our critical need is for dedicated child protection personnel at each tier. We have proposed creating specialised Child Protection Social Workers at the union level, a proposal currently with the Finance Ministry. Securing these positions is vital for a functional protection system.



DR. ABUL HASANAT
Joint Secretary and
District Judge
Law and Justice
Division, Ministry
of Law, Justice and
Parliamentary Affairs

The central problem is not a lack of laws but ineffective enforcement, fostering a culture of impunity. We have amended laws, creating special tribunals for child rape and new cyber provisions penalising the non-consensual sharing of intimate images with fines up to 10 lakh Taka. Yet, the conviction rate for violence against women remains around 15%. The systemic bottleneck is clear: Bangladesh has approximately one judge per 100,000 people, compared to 1:10,000 in the US. An overburdened police and judiciary cannot deliver timely, credible justice. Without adequate courts and specialised investigating agencies to properly gather and present evidence, justice is delayed and denied. Strengthening these institutions is non-negotiable for the rule of law to act as a genuine deterrent.



FARHANA YESMIN
Deputy Police
Commissioner
Women Support
and Investigation
Division, Dhaka
Metropolitan Police

From working in the Women Support and Investigation Division, our caseload shows a dangerous shift: nearly 80% of intimate partner violence cases now involve digital elements like blackmail using private photos. While our disposal rate for cases is good, systemic delays cripple



timely justice. Critical forensic and medical reports can take three months, as our female Investigating Officers must repeatedly plead with labs and doctors. This is unsustainable. Furthermore, the patriarchal mindset is entrenched within our own ranks. We must institutionalise gender-sensitisation and digital investigation training from the outset at the Sardah police academy. Empowering women financially is also crucial to reduce vulnerability. We require both a top-down policy approach and bottom-up social change to truly address this epidemic.



NATALIE
MCCAULEY
Chief - Child
Protection
UNICEF Bangladesh

The data is stark: nearly 9 out of 10 children in Bangladesh experience violent discipline over 40 million children monthly. Half of women aged 20-24 were child brides. Intimate partner violence remains extremely high across all divisions, costing an estimated 2.1% of GDP annually. Conversely, evidence shows every dollar invested in child protection yields a \$9-\$15 return. Our proven solution is the community-based Child Protection Hub model, which has driven a sharp reduction in violence and child marriage in implementation districts, while increasing trust from 5% to 65%. To scale this nationally requires minimal investment: just 0.001% of GDP. I urge the establishment of a national multi-stakeholder working group, a Department of Children Affairs, and sustained government funding to professionalise the workforce and expand these hubs.



SHARMIN AKTER
Superintendent of
Police
Police Headquarters

As part of the police headquarters, we are not idle. We have launched dedicated hotlines and a cyber support unit for women and children. Since 2021, we have trained 33,834 officers in child-friendly approaches and provided services in over a million instances. However, a major bottleneck remains in forensic evidence. The severe backlog at DNA labs means investigations into rape cases are routinely delayed, leaving Investigating Officers helpless. Beyond enforcement, the profound social stigma is devastating. The mother of the Magura victim prayed for her daughter's death, knowing society would not accept her. This reveals our collective failure. Sensitisation must start within our own families and communities, recognising every girl's safety as our personal responsibility.



SHAMIMA
PERVIN
Head of Gender
Unit
UNFPA

The data reveals a hidden crisis. While a 0.5% survey statistic might seem small, it translates to over 300,000 women and children currently experiencing violence. For married adolescents (15-19), 62% face intimate partner violence. Our systems are

failing them. In schools, mandated sexual harassment committees are non-functional due to inadequate training and unclear reporting mechanisms. The curriculum is another gap: less than 20% of the current health syllabus covers comprehensive sexuality education. While UNFPA runs skills-based programmes in 1,600 institutions, this is a drop in the ocean. We must mainstream this education; young people are already exposed to harmful content online. Consistent advocacy is needed to integrate these life-saving topics into the national curriculum.



REKHA SAHA
Legal Aid
Secretary
Bangladesh Mahila
Parishad

Our work at Bangladesh Mahila Parishad reveals a society cultivating violence. The mother of the Magura victim wishing for her daughter's death, fearing social ostracism more, is a searing indictment. We receive constant distress calls, even from young girls reporting violence by parents, showing a disturbing trend. The violence is changing, becoming more crude and pervasive across all ages and classes. A holistic, gender-sensitive support system is non-negotiable. A survivor needs integrated legal aid, medical care, trauma counselling, and shelter, not fragmented services. My specific recommendation is to fully activate the High Court directives on sexual harassment and enact a standalone law. All public servants in support roles must be mandatorily trained in gender sensitivity.



KAMRUN NAHAR
Programme
Manager
Naripokkho

Laws like the sexual harassment legislation exist only as drafts; we must materialise these. We have normalised this violence. Even proven frameworks fail: the Multi-Sectoral Programme on Violence Against Women ran for 24 years but was shelved once donor funding stopped, with no state accountability to sustain it. We must urgently review and update the National Action Plan 2018-2030, ensuring clear roles and budgetary commitments for every ministry involved. Furthermore, discriminatory laws like the Guardianship Act force women to endure domestic violence due to unequal rights. We need a functional, time-bound multi-sectoral forum with mandatory bi-monthly reviews to translate rhetoric into actionable, funded work.



DR. TANIA
HAQUE
Professor
Department of
Women and Gender
Studies, University of
Dhaka

Violence persists because we have cultivated a deep-seated tolerance for it. Data shows 76% of women face intimate partner violence, meaning it is routinely negotiated and justified within the home. Our solutions are misaligned. First, we lack a national knowledge base for evidence-based policymaking. We desperately need

a comprehensive family policy and parenting modules; the primary duty of care begins with families, yet we provide no guidance. Second, our segregated education systems require a curriculum overhaul. Beyond limited sexuality education, we must teach conflict resolution, ethics, and emotional literacy to dismantle aggression. Shockingly, 77% of youth now believe women shouldn't work if men earn. We must add respect and dignity to the developmental 'plate' alongside physical growth.



DEEN ISLAM
Member
Global Youth Cohort
- Plan International

As a youth representative, I see two critical avenues for change. First, we must leverage grassroots awareness. With over 130 million internet users, youth can use social media campaigns to spread crucial information on laws, services, and reporting mechanisms directly within communities. Many tolerate violence simply because they don't recognise it as a crime. Second, policy must be informed by ground realities. When formulating action, the government must conduct need assessments that meaningfully consult community-level youth and survivors. Their lived experience ensures policies are effective. Furthermore, we must ensure youth and women's representation in local union council meetings. Our collective voice and hyper-local activism are powerful tools to break the cycle of silence and violence.



SUMAIYA AKHTER
Peer Leader
Child Protection
Community Hub

As a peer leader in a Child Protection Hub, I get to see firsthand why violence goes unreported. Children face physical, mental, sexual, and cyber violence, child marriage, and forced labour. Yet, young victims consistently hide their suffering due to fear, shame, and societal pressure. They are terrified of perpetrator retaliation, feel intense shame about social judgement, and worry about burdening their families. A deep mistrust in the system leads them to believe they won't be believed, and they fear being blamed instead of the accused. Crucially, when the perpetrator is a close relative, even a father, the barrier to speaking up is insurmountable. We must create truly safe, believing, and blame-free channels for children to seek help.



FATEMA BEGUM
Parent

As a parent, I believe safety must begin with me. I must first be safe myself to protect my family. We must acknowledge that violence can originate from within our own homes, even from relatives. To prevent this, I am committed to building a friend-like, trusting relationship with my daughter so she feels no fear in confiding anything in me. I will educate my family, reject child marriage, and ensure my daughter completes her education. However, I cannot do this alone. We need concrete support. I urge community committees and government teams

to provide regular training sessions for parents like me. We need to learn how to stay safe so we can return to our neighbourhoods and share this knowledge, creating a wider circle of protection and awareness.



JENIA KABIR
SHUCHONA
Senior Reporter
Channel 24

As a senior reporter, I see media playing a pivotal yet flawed role. Coverage of violence is often sidelined, treated as 'off-track' feature stories rather than mainstream reporting. This must change. Furthermore, why are stories on women's rights or maternal health almost exclusively assigned to female journalists? Male journalists must also report on these issues; it is essential for normalising the conversation. Our reporting must also become more sensitive and ethical. Headlines that blame victims by detailing what they wore or why they were out at night are irresponsible and harmful. The focus must remain on the crime itself. We must move beyond reactive coverage of major incidents and consistently highlight the everyday violence that precedes them.



MOHAMMED
MAHEEN NEWAZ
CHOWDHURY
Director of
Programmes
Plan International
Bangladesh

A critical data point demands focus: in disaster-prone areas, which comprise most of Bangladesh, women face an 81% higher risk of violence. Climate change intensifies this vulnerability. While digital violence is rampant, digital solutions also offer hope. I strongly advocate for accelerating digital birth and marriage registration; this is a powerful tool to prevent child marriage and related abuse. Lasting change requires champions who push boundaries, not just routine work. Our experience shows engaging youth organisations is transformative. The government, police, and civil society should systematically involve the nationwide network of youth groups in this mission. The remarkable reduction in acid violence proves that with concerted, multi-sectoral effort, deep-rooted change is achievable.



TANJIM FERDOUS
In-Charge NGOs &
Foreign Missions
The Daily Star
(Moderator of the
Session)

Today's dialogue, convened under the National Child Protection Cluster, addresses a crisis at the heart of our progress. The evidence is stark: nearly half of our girls are married before 18, and violent discipline remains widespread. Most concerning is the justice gap: thousands of cases are reported, yet only a small fraction reach verdicts. Our goal is to move beyond discussion to identify actionable steps: strengthening legal and social systems, improving birth registration, and building a professional social service workforce. Crucially, we must centre the voices of children and adolescents in the solutions we design. This is a call for strategic, accountable action.

» Establish a dedicated Department of Children Affairs to serve as a single, accountable government body for coordinating all child protection policies.

» Professionalise and expand the national social service workforce by creating a dedicated cadre of government-trained child protection officers.

» Enact the long-pending Sexual Harassment Prevention law and amend the Child Marriage Restraint Act to remove legal loopholes and discriminatory provisions.

» Accelerate digital birth and marriage registration and modernise forensic evidence collection to prevent child marriage.

» Institute a time-bound, high-level Multi-Sectoral Working Group with mandatory bi-monthly reviews to ensure inter-ministerial coordination.

» Launch a sustained, youth-led national awareness campaign and reform media guidelines to shift harmful social norms.

NEWS

Boy killed in chemical drum explosion

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

A boy was killed and a workshop owner seriously injured after an empty drum that previously contained chemicals exploded in Ashuganupazila of Brahmanbaria yesterday.

The incident occurred around 11:45am at Loknath Workshop in Lalpur Bazar of the upazila.

The deceased -- Rayhan, 12, from Chanpur village in Raipura upazila, Narsingdi, worked at a nearby workshop in the area.

According to locals, the workshop owner, Loknath Das, was cutting an empty drum with a grinder machine when the explosion occurred. The drum had remained sealed for a long time, and flammable gas is believed to have accumulated inside it.

As the grinder was cutting through the drum, it exploded with a loud bang. At that moment, Rayhan was passing by the workshop carrying metal sheets. Shrapnel from the drum struck him in the head, leaving him critically injured.

He died on the way to Brahmanbaria General Hospital.

Loknath Das was admitted to the same hospital with serious injuries.

Md Saiful Alam Chowdhury, officer-in-charge of Ashuganji Police Station, said police visited the scene after receiving information. "The exact cause of the explosion is being investigated, and legal action is underway," he added.

Hasnat slams

FROM PAGE 2

Ahead of the February 12 election, the alliance held three public rallies yesterday in Feni, Laksham, and at Cumilla Town Hall, with Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman attending as chief guest.

Criticising the media, Hasnat said, "Dear media colleagues, it is deeply unfortunate that even after July, some media figures have not stopped acting as brokers."

He added, "I have seen reports written by agencies published directly by DBC, Ekattor, and Somoy TV. Ownership may have changed, but their character has not. We will once again bring you before the people's court, InshaAllah."

He accused the media of reserving all tough questions for NCP leaders, while showering praise on a particular party.

"All the world's questions are directed at us: Where does our income come from? Where do we buy our shirts? How are our political

programmes organised? These questions are for us, not for a certain political party," he said.

Turning to the administration, Hasnat said, "You do not need to serve any political party -- not Jamaat, BNP, or NCP. Your accountability is to be the people of Bangladesh. If you steal votes, conduct 'night-time elections,' or usurp the people's mandate, you will be accountable to your own children."

Addressing the police, he warned, "Earlier, senior officials used to secure their own positions. Do not allow yourselves to be exploited anymore. Stand for justice and fairness. The people of Bangladesh will stand by you."

Hasnat, however, said that the media and administration are essential to a happy, prosperous, and developed Bangladesh.

"We are not your enemies. We want your accountability to be people oriented, not party-oriented," he added.

Civil servants cannot push for 'yes/no'

FROM PAGE 12

Meanwhile, the people an opportunity to express their opinions on the changes that have taken place in the country since July 36. Some will vote 'yes', others 'no'. This decision rests solely with the voters," he said.

Referring to confusion in some areas, the secretary said the matter has now been clarified by the EC and urged all government officials and employees to strictly follow the directives.

For several days, government officials and machinery had been actively seeking support for a "yes" vote in the referendum on constitutional reforms outlined in the July Charter.

However, citing relevant laws, the EC on Thursday said government officials are not permitted to campaign for either "yes" or "no", warning that such activity would constitute a punishable offence.

In fact, Prof Riaz had said that from the first day after being elected, parliament would perform its normal functions, including forming a government, running the state and preparing the budget.

"Disinformation is circulating on Facebook regarding the referendum scheduled for February 12. Multiple posts claim that if the result is 'yes', the Yunus government will hand over power after six months," the press wing said in a statement posted on CA Press Wing Facts' verified Facebook page on Thursday night.

The claim was shared along with a photo card from Independent Television quoting Prof Ali Riaz, vice chairman of the National Consensus Commission, with the headline: "After the election, members of parliament will act as a Constituent Assembly for 180 days."

It also cited the July National Charter (Constitutional Reform) Implementation Order, 2025, which states that if the referendum result is "yes", parliament will

have a dual role, with elected representatives serving simultaneously as members of parliament and as members of the Constitutional Reform Council.

In other words, the statement said, the elected representatives, not the interim administration, will function as the government.

According to the order, once constitutional reform is completed within 180 working days from the start of the parliamentary session, the Constitutional Reform Council will be dissolved.

From then on, parliament will cease to have a dual role and elected members will function solely as MPs.

"There is no indication in the order that the interim government would remain in power for 180 days," the statement said, adding that it clearly refers only to the temporary dual role of parliament.

DHAKA SATURDAY JANUARY 31, 2026

MAGH 17, 1432 BS

The Daily Star

9

BNP-Jamaat rule

FROM PAGE 2

real development to the country," he said.

Claiming that Islami Andolan Bangladesh is the only party working for Shariah and Islam, Rezaul said, "In a country with 90 percent Muslims, only we are fighting for Shariah and Islam with the hand fan (Hatkakha) symbol. I have come to ask you to vote in favour of Shariah and Islam. Now the decision is yours. At least we will be able to say to Allah that we have delivered the message (dawah) to you."

Rezaul said BNP and Jamaat are now advocating the same system against which people had fought during the July uprising.

"Voting for them would not change the fate of the people or bring

12 hurt in pre-polls

FROM PAGE 2

around 7:00pm when the two groups confronted each other, triggering the clash.

Anu's close aide Md Tazul Islam alleged that Daudar's supporters were chanting provocative and offensive slogans in front of their office. He claimed their supporters only chased Daudar's men away and denied that any physical clash took place.

Daudar Mahmud could not be reached for comment as his phone was switched off.

Confirming the incident, Singra Police Station officer-in-charge Mohammad Abdun Nur said three people were injured, but no complaint had been filed with police yet.

[Our correspondents from Noakhali, Barishal and Pabna contributed to this report]

Persecutors

FROM PAGE 2

He claimed that under BNP rule, people of all faiths lived in safety, adding that the party's founder, the martyred President Ziaur Rahman, ensured religious freedom for all and recognised everyone living in Bangladesh as Bangladeshi, regardless of religion.

"We do not support ethnic, religious or racial divisions. We want everyone to live together as Bangladeshi," he said.

The meeting was chaired by Chandamoy Biswas Tilok, former general secretary of the Pekua upazila Bishwas Para Puja Udjapon Parishad.

Democratic League leader Oli Ahad.

Samira Azim (Cumilla-9) entered politics after the death of her father, former MP Akbarul Azim.

Akhter Sultana (Mymensingh-6) is the wife of ex-BNP MP Shamsuddin Ahmed.

Hasina Khan Chowdhury (Mymensingh-9) is married to former BNP MP Khurram Khan Chowdhury.

Antara Selima Huda (Dhaka-1) is the daughter of former minister Nazmul Huda.

A LONG, UNEVEN HISTORY

According to EC records, no women were elected in the first two parliamentary polls in 1973 and 1979. Five were elected in 1986 and four in 1988.

In 1991, 40 women contested and four won. In June 1996, 30 women ran and five were elected. In 2001, 38 contested and six won. In 2008, 59 women ran and 19 were elected. In 2014, 29 contested and 18 won. In 2018, 69 women contested and 22 won. In 2024, 99 women ran and 20 were elected.

The 2014 and 2024 elections were widely criticised as one-sided, with most opposition parties boycotting the polls and allegations of dummy candidates. The 2018 election, though contested, was marred by claims of ballot stuffing, intimidation and institutional failure.

Across decades, the pattern remains unchanged: women enter politics, but rarely on their own terms -- not as self-made actors, but as inheritors of political lineage, stepping into a system still guarded by men, where power is passed down like an heirloom rather than earned in the field.



Nilufa Begum collects paper and other recyclables from a garbage heap in Khulna. To earn a living, she gathers old paper, cartons, plastic, and other reusable materials from dustbins, roadside dumps, and vacant lots across the city every day. She sells them to scrap shops and earns around Tk 150-200 daily. The photo was taken in the Rupsha Notun Bazar area of Khulna yesterday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Promises to upgrade Noakhali, Cumilla to divisions
Pledges talks with India to tackle Feni's flood crisis
Assures 'dignified pay scale' for govt employees

minister. Only those with merit will be selected for such responsibilities.

"We want Bangladesh where even the child of a rickshaw puller, through the development of his or her talent, can one day become the prime minister. That is the Bangladesh we want to build."

Around 12:15pm, Shafiqur flew by helicopter from Feni to Noakhali, where he joined another rally organised by the II-party alliance at Zila School ground.

There, hinting at the BNP, he said, "Those in whose hands the people are not safe even before coming to power, and who are involved in extortion and other

Promises to upgrade Noakhali, Cumilla to divisions
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crimes, will make people even more insecure once they take office."

Reiterating his pledge to build a corruption- and extortion-free Bangladesh, he added, "We do not want the misrule of the last 15 and a half years to return to Bangladesh. That is why there will be two votes on the 12th. The first vote is for reforms, where 'yes' stands for freedom, 'no' for slavery."

Shafiqur also promised that if elected, the II-party alliance would upgrade Noakhali to a division, elevate Cumilla to a division, and take measures to prevent river erosion in Hatia, Companiganj, and Subarnachar.

He said Subarnachar would be upgraded to a

municipality in honour of the woman who was gang-raped on the night of the 11th national parliamentary election in Subarnachar, voting for a specific electoral symbol.

Describing Jamaat-e-Islami as the most persecuted political party in recent times, Shafiqur said, "We have been harassed with cases, killed and forcibly disappeared. We will not harass anyone with false cases like this... InshaAllah, they [Jamaat activists] will not do so in the future either."

In the afternoon, Shafiqur attended a third rally at Aradsa Samad Government High School in Lakshmpur district town.

Referring to local demands, he added, "Lakshmpur once had Asia's largest fish breeding centre. It was destroyed through theft and plunder. We will revive it."

Addressing a rally in Laksam, he said, "To build a fascism-free Bangladesh, people must choose those who have the courage to fight fascism. By the grace of Allah, Jamaat-e-Islami has that courage."

On the issue of government salaries, Shafiqur said it is difficult for government officials and employees to live with dignity on their salaries.

"As a result, they are compelled to resort to corruption... We will ensure a dignified pay scale for them."

At the day's final rally at Cumilla Town Hall ground, the Jamaat chief pledged that, if elected, Cumilla would be upgraded to a division and an airport built in the district.

Jamaat Nayeb-e-Ameer Syed Abdulla Mohammad Taher and Hasnat Abdullah, NCP leader and the II-party alliance candidate for Cumilla-4, among others, also addressed the rally.

Promises to upgrade Noakhali, Cumilla to divisions
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Assures 'dignified pay scale' for govt employees

including Jamaat-e-Islami, Islami Andolan Bangladesh, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, Khelafat Majlis, Bangladesh Islami Front, Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), Jonotar Dal, Bangladesh Sangskritik Mukti Jote, Bangladesh Congress, Jatiya Party (JP), Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, Islami Andolan, Bangladesh Nationalist Front and Bangladesh Jasad, have fielded only male candidates.

Election Commission data shows that women with family or marital ties to prominent political figures consistently fare better than those without such connections.

"The electoral process in Bangladesh remains deeply male dominated," said Jesmin Tuli, former additional secretary of the Election Commission and a member of the Electoral Reform Commission.

"In Bangladesh, most women leaders or members of parliament have risen through family influence. The number of women who have struggled up from the grassroots is very small. Very few female leaders have gradually built themselves up from university life through fieldwork," she told The Daily Star.

"Our social and family structures are also responsible. Parents in middle-class families generally do not want their daughters to enter politics. Politics has not yet become safe for women; in fact, it remains unsafe," she added.

The Representation of the People Order (RPO), 1972, requires political parties to reserve at least 33 percent of committee posts for women, including at the central level. Yet almost all parties have failed to meet this obligation. In 2021, the Election Commission extended the deadline to 2030.

At least 30 parties, including Jamaat-e-Islami, Islami Andolan Bangladesh, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, Khelafat Majlis, Bangladesh Islami Front, Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), Jonotar Dal, Bangladesh

enter politics through the support of their fathers or brothers are comparatively advantaged. Their families already have workers and networks. This ready-made base increases their chances of winning and makes survival in politics easier," she said.

FAMILY LINK

All 10 BNP women candidates have direct family or marital ties to senior party figures.

Organising Secretary Shamsa Obaid is contesting Faridpur-2. She is the daughter of former BNP secretary general and minister KM Obaidur Rahman.

"We haven't fielded [women candidates] this time; Inshallah, we'll do it in the next time," he said, adding that some of the other parties in the Jamaat-led alliance have nominated women.

Asked why Jamaat did not nominate any women, Jamaat Assistant Secretary General Ahsanul Mahboob Zubair said the party follows a grassroots-based selection process.

While men are guided by party instructions, women are given the freedom to decide whether to contest, considering family and personal circumstances.

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FICTION

LITTLE GREY



RAINER EBERT

Xiaohui is sitting on the concrete floor. He has been in this corner for as long as he can remember clearly. For some time, he had memories of another place, and of playing with his siblings, chasing them around tea bushes with their distinct sweet aroma that was most prominent in the early morning.

It is a winter day in a small town at the far eastern edge of the Himalaya, in the Chinese province of Yunnan. The province is known for its mild climate. Though snowy days are not uncommon, especially in January, if they do occur they are few. Some years go by without any snow reaching the ground at all. On this January day, temperatures are low, but not low enough for snow. It is cold, if one asks the people living here, or cool, if one were to ask people accustomed to harsher climates.

Xiaohui is in his usual place: the corner of the inner courtyard of a walled compound that includes a three-story house and a few sheds. To his left, there is the big gate that separates the courtyard from a small alley. The alley leads to the main road, where buses on their way to Qujing pass a few times a day. Qujing is home to more people than dozens of countries, and yet in China it is not a very big city. The most imposing part of the whole compound is the gate through which one enters. Its sheer size alone makes it an impressive structure. It is covered in gold-coloured ornaments in the forms of dragons, large Chinese letters, and elaborate patterns. The pillars that carry the gate are red and golden and

have wishes for prosperity and wealth written on them in red letters. No practical purpose is served by a gate this large and extravagant. If one was a burglar, one would simply climb one of the walls that extend from its sides and are noticeably lower. The gate was not chosen for reasons of security. It is the most visible feature from the vantage point of passersby, and what others think is important. After all, this small town is not so much a town as it is a village, and certain village norms are universal.

To Xiaohui's right, there is an open shed with a corrugated metal roof. The shed stores corn. Some of the corn is packed in red mesh bags, the rest is piled up loosely, waiting to be bagged, or fed to the animals of the household. Across the courtyard, a lone water buffalo rests on dried corn stalks and husks in an enclosure behind yet another wall. Entertainment is provided by geese and chicken who share the same space. The far end of the enclosure is formed by the wall of another shed, which houses two or three pigs. From time to time, their snouts can be seen peeking through the shed's little windows. Carefully laid out to dry on the concrete floor of the courtyard, there are different kinds of chilli peppers. One batch is green, two dark red, two earthy yellow, and several

batches are red. While food in Yunnan may not match the fiery intensity of the famed Sichuan cuisine, spice is a vital element of the local culinary identity.

Xiaohui is sitting on the concrete floor. He has been in this corner for as long as he can remember clearly. For some time, he had memories of another place, and of playing with his siblings, chasing them around tea bushes with their distinct sweet aroma that was most prominent in the early morning. These memories have since dissolved into a distant blur. It has been eight years, perhaps, more likely 10. His fur is grey in colour, and it is rugged and unkempt, like an old hairy carpet. The elements have done quite a bit of damage over the years. The colour, however, is neither a sign of time, nor of exposure to the forces of nature. Xiaohui has always been grey. In fact, that is how he got his name. In Chinese characters, the first character of his name means "little" and the second "grey" words that describe Xiaohui rather bluntly. Xiaohui himself prefers to think of his name as "little wisdom", in Pinyin, the transliteration of the characters becomes "Xiaohui", and he carries it with a certain sense of pride. Though he has not seen much of the village, let alone the world, every day he watches the people passing through

the gate and coming in and out of the house, and he rightly believes that this has allowed him to achieve some degree of wisdom. Observing people's actions tells you more about humans, and humanity, than listening to their words. It does not matter much that Xiaohui only understands fragments of their language.

At this moment, Xiaohui is watching a small boy in a winter jacket. The boy is holding a toy truck in his hands. He seems excited. He just got the truck from the oldest daughter of the house, his mother's cousin. She is visiting from Kunming, the capital and only "big city" of Yunnan. Kunming has a population larger than Sydney's, yet like many big cities in China, and unlike Sydney—it is mostly unheard of in other parts of the world. The boy is inspecting his new acquisition. He has figured out some of its functions already. Others are still a mystery. How can he extend the truck's loading ramp so that he can drive one of his other toy cars onto it? He has curated quite a collection, by specifically asking for a different kind of car whenever a relative comes to visit. The boy is one of rural China's tens of millions of "left-behind children," as they are called in Chinese. His parents have gone to a faraway city to work in a factory, leaving him in the care of his grandmother and extended family who remain in the village. It is one of the costs of the country's rapid economic rise.

The boy's grandmother is somewhere around the compound as well, busy like everyone in the village at this time of the year. A flurry of preparations has been underway for days now. The household is preparing for the upcoming Spring Festival, which marks the beginning of a new year on the traditional Chinese calendar and is China's most important holiday. It is tradition that families come together during this time. Hundreds of millions of people travel to their hometowns to celebrate, making this the largest annual human migration in the world. The Spring Festival is still a few weeks away, but the elder daughter and her sister, the only other sibling, have come home early to help with the preparations. Custom demands that the house be cleaned thoroughly, to clear away any bad luck and make room for the good things the New Year may bring. Xiaohui is amused to see the sister cleaning the window bars on the ground floor with much fervour. The courtyard is his territory and he knows it better than anybody else. He knows that the bars will again be covered by the dust that lies in a thin layer on top of the concrete before the Year of the Dragon comes to an end. All it takes is a

small gust of wind. Two red lanterns are installed on each side of the main door, as is custom too. Below the lanterns, banners are being affixed to the wall with red tape. They contain wishes for the New Year, the Year of the Snake, similar to the ones on the pillars of the gate. People here want what all people want: health, money, and generally a good life.

Xiaohui watches the cheerful bustle. His role in the household is simple: make noise if a stranger approaches the gate. He is getting old and cannot see very well anymore, but he can still count on his nose to distinguish between people he knows and strangers. The day before, an unfamiliar smell had alerted him to a newcomer who arrived with the two sisters. He did his duty. It should have become obvious quickly that the newcomer was a guest rather than a threat, but he kept making noise, as if to convince himself and the universe that he is still useful. The guest was brought to the kitchen across the courtyard. Food was served: rice, tofu, vegetables. Xiaohui watched the guest through the open door of the kitchen and noticed the focused strain on his face as he used chopsticks to clumsily navigate pieces of tofu and vegetable from the bowl to his mouth. He must have come from far.

When Xiaohui first got here, he would have tried to walk over to have a closer look at the newcomer, but now he just sits and observes from a distance. He understands the restrictions imposed by the chain connecting his collar to a short metal pole set into the ground. It allows him to make it about halfway across the courtyard. These days, he rarely leaves his corner. Looking at Xiaohui from the outside, one may be tempted to think of him as having resigned to his fate. He himself likes to think that he has merely gotten used to his circumstances. The chain has become his companion, in fact, and he can no longer imagine life without its faithful presence. The same holds true for the gate, the corn, the concrete floor. Calling Xiaohui happy would go too far, but for the most part, he is content.

This is the first of two parts of the short story "Little Grey."

Dr Rainer Ebert holds a PhD in philosophy from Rice University in Texas and is a research fellow in the Department of Philosophy, Practical and Systematic Theology at the University of South Africa. He has been visiting Bangladesh regularly for years. Reach him at rainerebert.com and on X@rainerebert.

REFLECTIONS

Bangladesh Theater Archives: Transforming history into a 40-year legacy

TUSAR TALUKDER

In a small room in 50 Purana Paltan line, shelves groan under the weight of posters, photographs, tickets, flyers, souvenirs, folders, books, and fading documents. Each item tells a story—of performances applauded and forgotten, of actors who once lit the stage, of movements that shaped the cultural conscience of a nation. This is the Bangladesh Theater Archives, a quiet yet powerful institution that has been safeguarding the memory of Bangladeshi theater for nearly four decades.

The Bangladesh Theater Archives began its journey in 1986, long before "archiving" became a familiar cultural practice in the country. It started simply—with theater posters. At the heart of this effort was Dr Babul Biswas, whose passion for the theatre and a sense of responsibility towards history pushed him to take on a task few could imagine sustaining alone. The idea was inspired by one legendary Indian dramatist Utpal Dutt, whose advice encouraged Biswas to collect and preserve theatrical materials systematically. What began as a personal initiative soon turned into a historic expedition—the first of its kind in Bangladesh. There was no institutional framework, no assured funding, only emotion, dedication, and an unshakeable belief that theater history must not be allowed to disappear.

The Archives survived its fragile early years through collective goodwill. Eminent actor, director, and playwright Mamunur Rashid played a pivotal mentoring role, guiding the collection of data and even offering space in his office at 26 Bangabandhu Avenue. Members of Aranyak Theater Group provided what could be called the "postnatal care" of the Archives, helping it grow beyond a solitary effort. Soon, prominent theatre personality Ramendu Majumdar and critic

Mofidul Haque extended their support and advice, recognising the cultural necessity of such an initiative. Over time, countless theatre activists, workers, and enthusiasts across the country contributed materials, information, and labour, transforming the Archives into a shared national endeavour.

For years, the initiative operated under various names—Poster Museum, Poster Gallery, Theater Museum, and even Babul Biswas' Collection. The shifting identities reflected its organic growth. Finally, in 2011, it was formally named Bangladesh Theater Archives—a title that acknowledged both its scope and national significance. By then, its mission had expanded far beyond posters. Souvenirs, tickets, handbills, brochures, books, still photographs, official

documents, and video recordings found their way into the collection. Today, the Archives hold more than one hundred thousand items—an unparalleled reservoir of theatrical history.

The Archives has become a lifeline for researchers, students, teachers, playwrights, and theatre practitioners. From undergraduate dissertations to doctoral research, its materials have supported countless academic works in Bangladesh and abroad. Notably, researchers pursuing PhDs on Bangladeshi drama are given access to data completely free of charge—a rare gesture in an age of commercialised knowledge. In this sense, Bangladesh Theater Archives is not merely a storage space; it is a living academic institution. It



Pictured are celebrated Bangladeshi playwright and actor Mamunur Rashid, the esteemed actor Utpal Dutt, his wife and renowned actress Shobha Sen, their daughter Bishnupriya Dutt, and Babul Biswas, the founder of the Bangladesh Theater Archives.



PHOTO: SHEKH MEHEDI MORSVED

embodies the spirit of Bangladesh's independence by asserting that cultural history belongs to the people.

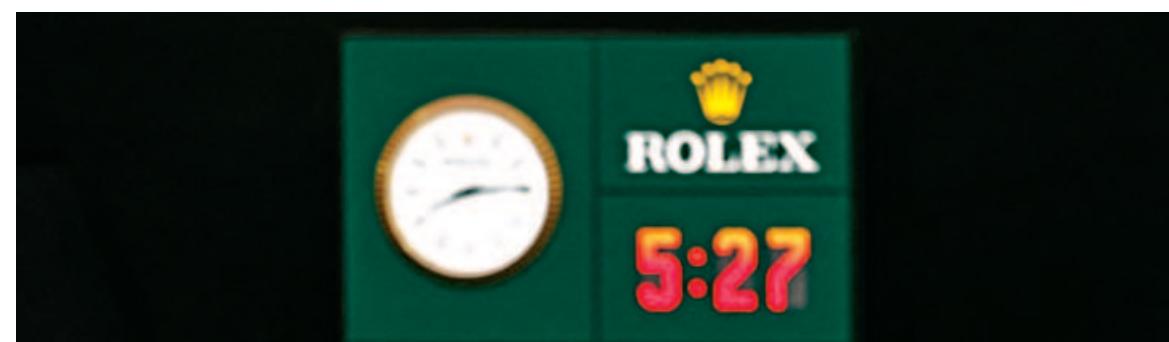
One of the most visible achievements of the Archives has been its exhibitions. Between 1988 and June 2025, it organised 52 exhibitions, both nationally and internationally. These exhibitions—sometimes focused on posters, sometimes on photographs or archival data—were inaugurated by distinguished theater personalities, academics, and civil servants. The first-ever theater poster exhibition in Bangladesh, "World Drama", took place in 1988 at Dhaka University, with Vice Chancellor Dr Abdul Mannan inaugurating the event. In 1989, another landmark exhibition organised by the Dhaka University Central Students Union (DUCSU) on World Theater Day at the university's TSC sparked tremendous enthusiasm. Supported by international cultural organisations and foreign embassies, it established Bangladesh Theater Archives as a prominent player on the global theater scene. Subsequent exhibitions in India, Japan, and the United States further

showcased that Bangladeshi theatre history resonates well beyond the country's borders.

Since 2020, renowned theatre translator Professor Abdus Selim has been actively engaged with the Bangladesh Theatre Archives, where he currently serves as president. Joining him is Dr Babul Biswas, the founder and current Secretary General of the institution. Together, through their unwavering commitment, they are propelling the institution forward at full speed.

As Bangladesh Theater Archives marks another anniversary, it stands as a testament to what sustained passion, collective effort, and cultural responsibility can achieve. In preserving the theatre's past, it safeguards the creative memory of the nation—and ensures that future generations will know not only how Bangladesh performed on stage, but who it was, and who it aspired to be.

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EPIC MELBOURNE MARATHONS

Djokovic sets up Alcaraz meet in final



Carlos Alcaraz survived cramp and a five-hour battle against Alexander Zverev's punishing first serve to reach his first Australian Open final, edging 6-4, 7-6(5), 6-7(3), 6-7(4), 7-5 under the sweltering Melbourne sun at the Rod Laver Arena yesterday. The 22-year-old Spaniard showed grit and precision, setting up a final with Novak Djokovic, who beat reigning two-time champion Jannik Sinner 3-6, 6-3, 4-6, 6-4, 6-4 in another marathon semifinal.

• The five-hour and 27-minute semifinal between Alcaraz and Zverev became the longest semifinal ever played at the tournament and the third-longest match overall.

• Alcaraz (22 years 258 days) is the youngest player in the Open Era to reach the Men's Singles Final at all four Grand Slams, surpassing Jim Courier (22 years 300 days). He is also the youngest to reach four consecutive Men's Singles Finals at Grand Slams,

breaking Jannik Sinner's record (23 years 318 days).

• The 38-year-old Djokovic became the oldest man to reach the Australian Open final in the professional era.

• 18 years after his first Melbourne crown, Djokovic will strive for a record-extending 11th against Alcaraz and the unprecedented 25th Grand Slam title in Sunday's final.

“Physically it was one of the most demanding matches I've played in my short career... I had to put my heart into the match.

Carlos Alcaraz

“It feels surreal to be honest playing over four hours. I was reminiscing in 2012 when I played Rafa (Nadal) in the final, that was six hours almost.

Novak Djokovic

JAHANARA ALLEGATIONS

Probe report due today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is set to receive the investigation report into allegations of misconduct in women's cricket raised by former national captain Jahanara Alam on Saturday, a member of the five-member inquiry committee confirmed yesterday.

The committee is chaired by Justice Tariq ul Hakim, former judge of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh.

"Tomorrow [Saturday] we will hand over our investigation report officially. I don't think we will be holding a press conference," Barrister Sarwat Siraj Shukla, senior advocate of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh and president of Bangladesh Women's Sports Association, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Maybe we will hand over the report to a BCB official with responsibility regarding this matter. We can't divulge the contents of the report at the moment."

BCB had twice deferred the submission of the committee's report. Initially formed as a three-member body, the inquiry was expanded to five members on November 12 last year. On December 2, the board announced that the report was expected by December 20. However, in a subsequent press release on December 21, the BCB said it had formally received Jahanara's complaint and granted the committee an extension until January 31.

BCB officials informed that the report is likely to be handed over to BCB president Aminul Islam. "Their work is finished and the report is expected to be submitted tomorrow [Saturday] or within two-three days," a BCB media committee official informed The Daily Star.

SAFF U-19 WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP

Priority is identifying talents, not trophy: Butler

SPORTS REPORTER

Reigning champions Bangladesh are all set to begin their title defence of the SAFF Under-19 Women's Championship today against Bhutan in the opening match of the four-team tournament at the Pokhara Sangasal Stadium in Nepal.

Since the inception of SAFF's women's youth level competition in 2018, Bangladesh have been crowned champions in five out of six editions and the girls in red and green will begin the seventh edition as the tournament favourites as well.

The girls only had a day's preparation in Pokhara before facing Bhutan, following their involvement in Bangladesh Women's Football League.

Despite the lack of preparation, the charges of English coach Peter Butler are considered favourites in today's match, having never lost to Bhutan in their previous five meetings in the youth championships, and netting four goals or more in all of those matches.

Butler viewed the championship as a development tournament and prioritised identifying players for the AFC Women's Asian Cup and AFC Women's Under-20 Championship



over bringing home the trophy.

"I haven't come here to win this trophy. It's not my main priority. My main priority is to identify and assess the young girls who have done extremely well, getting to their first Asian Cup Under-20," said Butler at a pre-tournament briefing in Pokhara.

The coach said his main objective was, "to assess them, identify the ones which actually could play a part in that tournament [AFC U-20 Championship] further down the track."

Captain Arpita Biswas is

optimistic of making it to the final and hopes to progress match by match.

"Though we could not get time to get prepared for the championship, our preparation is more or less good because we have been involved with the Women's Football League. Our plus point is that we have a good understanding among ourselves and our target is to win every match and reach the final," said Arpita.

India and Nepal are the other two competing teams. All four sides will face each other once and the top two teams will play the final on February 7.

Saikat, Sohel to officiate in T20 World Cup

STAR SPORTS DESK

Bangladesh cricket team may have been replaced by Scotland in the upcoming T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka, but two Bangladeshi umpires will be part of the umpiring panel for the 20-team tournament, scheduled to begin on February 7.

Sharfuddoula Ibne Shahid Saikat, the only elite panel umpire from Bangladesh, will be joined by Gazi Sohel in the 24-member umpiring panel to officiate 55 matches in the tournament.

Both umpires were expected to fly for Dubai last night before heading to the match venues in India and Sri Lanka.

A press release from the International Cricket Council disclosed the full list of umpires for the month-long tournament.

Kumar Dharmasena and Wayne Knights will be the on-field umpires for the opening match between Pakistan and the Netherlands at the Sinhalese Sports Club ground on February 7. The appointments for the Super Eight and knockout stages will be confirmed in due course.

Elsewhere on the opening day, Nitin Menon and Sam Nogański will be in the middle for the Group C clash between Scotland and the West Indies. India and USA match on the same day will be officiated by Paul Reiffel and Rod Tucker.



Bangladesh players celebrate after their thumping 90-run victory over Scotland in their Super Six match of the ongoing ICC Women's T20 World Cup Qualifiers in Nepal yesterday. Having already sealed a spot in the Women's T20 World Cup, scheduled to be held in June-July in England and Wales, the Nigar Sultana Joty-led side extended their winning run to four matches in the qualifiers, registering their third-biggest victory in terms of runs. The Tigresses will play their final qualifier match against the Netherlands tomorrow, hoping to clinch the qualifier title.

PHOTO: ICC

Ex-SL international to play for USA

REUTERS

Former Sri Lanka international Shehan Jayasuriya is set to debut for the United States in next month's Twenty20 World Cup, after the US named him in their 15-member squad for the global championship on Friday.

All-rounder Jayasuriya, 34, played 12 ODIs and 18 T20Is for Sri Lanka, and represented the country in the 2016 edition of the T20 World Cup, before announcing his retirement from all forms of cricket in the South-Asian nation in 2021.

The left-handed batter and right-arm spinner later relocated to the U.S. with his family and has since played in several franchise-based T20 leagues, including the Major League Cricket in the US.

BCB plans domestic tourney after WC miss

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is looking to organise a domestic tournament after Bangladesh missed out on the upcoming ICC Men's T20 World Cup, with a probable start date of February 5 under discussion.

The move follows talks between government officials and the board, a BCB official told The Daily Star.

Cricket came to a standstill after Bangladesh were replaced by Scotland in the T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka, slated to begin on February 7. There were no noticeable cricket activities in Mirpur following the developments. BCB officials initially suggested that the Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) schedule may be brought forward, but talks have now begun on an alternative tournament.

On Thursday, Youth and Sports Ministry secretary Mahbub Ul-Alam attended an event and addressed the media. During his interaction, he was asked whether players would be compensated after Bangladesh missed out on the World Cup due to security issues.

"We are certainly working on this matter [compensation]. While security is

"While security is our primary concern, we have discussed the financial aspects and are planning to organise an alternative tournament within the country... and within the timeframe of the World Cup. The tournament will include the players selected for the T20 squad, as well as other prominent cricketers in the country."

Mahbub Ul-Alam
Secretary of Youth and Sports Ministry

our primary concern, we have discussed the financial aspects and are planning to organise an alternative tournament within the country," Mahbub said, adding that the event will feature T20 squad members and other prominent players, "within the timeframe of the World Cup."

A BCB director informed The Daily

Star that "everything will be finalised" by February 1.

The tournament is expected to feature three teams, with matches likely to be held in Mirpur. "The tournament will likely take place before the BCL, with a probable date of February 5. It might go ahead after government talks with the BCB," an official said.

With national elections approaching, the BCL schedule is still awaiting affirmation and has been deferred for the time being, but the alternative tournament may go ahead following security clearances. BCB sources said that while the board are arranging the tournament, it is being organised outside the tournament committee department.

Meanwhile, national team players have been called for a fitness test on February 1.

"We will arrange all aspects relevant to fitness tests. Beep tests can also be held in Mirpur," a BCB official said.

Bangladesh's next international commitments are at home -- a three-match ODI series against Pakistan on March 12, 14, and 16, followed by a two-match Test series in May, scheduled around the Pakistan Super League.

What to WATCH

SONY SPORTS 1, 2, 5
Australian Open Women's singles final
Live from 2:30 pm
STAR SPORTS SELECT 1
Pakistan vs Australia 2nd T20I

ICC U-19 WC Bangladesh vs Zimbabwe
Live from 1:30 pm
T SPORTS
South Africa vs West Indies 3rd T20I
Live from 10:00 pm

Live from 5:30 pm
STAR SPORTS SELECT HD2
South Africa vs West Indies 3rd T20I
Live from 10:00 pm

REAL FACE MOURINHO'S BENFICA AGAIN

After delivering a thrilling finish to the Champions League league stage, Real Madrid and Benfica are set to lock horns once again after being drawn together in the playoff stage in Nyon, Switzerland, yesterday. A dramatic 98th-minute strike from Benfica goalkeeper Anatoliy Trubin in their 4-2 win over Real Madrid sealed the final playoff spot for the Portuguese club, managed by former Real Madrid boss Jose Mourinho. The goal also pushed Alvaro Arbeloa's Real Madrid out of the top eight, denying them direct qualification to the last 16. The playoff matchups are as follows:

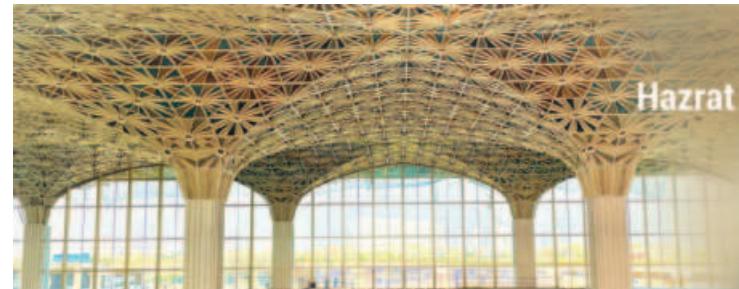
KNOCKOUT PHASE PLAYOFF DRAW



** Ties to be played on 17/18 & 24/25 February 2026



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CEMENT**



Dhaka-Beijing
co-op must
continue
Says Yunus

BSS, Dhaka

Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus has said Bangladesh-China cooperation must continue beyond his tenure.

"In a few weeks, I will be out of this office, and a new government will be formed, but the work between our two countries must go on," he said.

The chief adviser made the remarks when a delegation from the China-Bangladesh Partnership Forum met him on Wednesday at the

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1



Vendors occupy most of the road in front of the Karwan Bazar kitchen market, leaving little space for traffic and pedestrians. Illegal parking is adding to congestion in the already busy area. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

48% see Tarique as next PM: poll
23% expect Shafiqur, finds survey on 5,147 respondents

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nearly half of voters expect BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman to become Bangladesh's next prime minister, while a majority say they intend to vote for the BNP and its alliance, according to the report of a nationwide survey conducted ahead of the February 12 national election.

The survey found that 47.6 percent of respondents believe Tarique will be the future prime minister while 22.5 percent named Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman. Another 22.2 percent said they do not know who will emerge as the PM, indicating continued uncertainty.

Among voters who have already decided whom to support, BNP and its alliance are projected to get 52.8 percent of the votes, compared with 31 percent for Jamaat and its combine.

Among voters who have already decided whom to support, BNP and its alliance are projected to get 52.8 percent of the votes, compared with 31 percent for Jamaat and its combine.

A further 13.2 percent declined to reveal their preference.

The survey, titled "People's Election Pulse Survey, Round-3," was conducted by Innovision Consulting with support from Bangladesh Research Analysis and Information Network (BRAIN) and Voice for Reform.

Inovision Managing Director Md Rubaiyat Sarwar revealed the findings at an event at DBBL Bhaban yesterday afternoon.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 4



One power
can't solve
global crises

Says UN chief targeting
Trump, warns against
erosion of int'l law

REUTERS, United Nations

Global problems will not be solved by one power "calling the shots" or by splitting the world into rival spheres, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Thursday in comments directed at the United States and China.

Guterres spoke to reporters to mark the start of his 10th and final year in office. The UN Security Council will choose his successor later this year.

"Global problems will not be solved by one power calling the shots," said Guterres, later adding it was a reference to the United States. "Nor will they be solved by two powers carving the world into rival spheres of influence."

Diplomacy gains as US-Iran tensions rise

Iran FM in Turkey says Tehran ready for 'fair' talks as Trump eases strike threat

AGENCIES

President Tayyip Erdogan told his Iranian counterpart Masoud Pezeshkian in a call yesterday that Turkey was ready to play a facilitator role between Iran and the United States to ease the tensions between the two sides, the Turkish presidency said.

Iran's top diplomat Abbas Araghchi landed in Istanbul earlier in the day. He said Iran is prepared for the resumption of talks with the US, but they should be fair and not include Iran's defence capabilities.

US President Donald Trump said on Thursday he planned to speak with Iran, even as the US sent another warship to the Middle East and the Pentagon chief said the military would be ready to carry out whatever the president decided.

Trump -- who had previously warned time was "running out" for Tehran -- appeared to slightly pull back, saying: "We have a group headed out to a place called Iran, and hopefully we won't have to use it."

One of the main demands by the US to resume talks with Iran is curbing its missile programme, a senior Iranian official told Reuters last week. Iran rejects that demand.

"If negotiations are fair and on an equal footing, Iran is ready to participate in such talks," Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said in a press conference with his Turkish counterpart Hakan Fidan in Istanbul.

"We see that Israel is trying to persuade the US to launch a military attack on Iran... We hope the US administration will act with common sense and not allow this to happen," Fidan said.

Araghchi also said no talks between Tehran

and Washington were currently arranged, and reiterated that Tehran was ready for either negotiations or warfare.

As Washington dialled up its rhetoric and Iran issued stark threats, UN chief Antonio Guterres has called for nuclear negotiations to "avoid a crisis that could have devastating consequences in the region".

The EU's decision on Thursday to designate Iran's Revolutionary Guards (IRGC)

- Turkey ready to mediate between US and Iran: Erdogan
- Ready for nuke talks on 'equal footing': Iran FM
- US military destroyer docks at Israel's Eilat port
- Turkish FM urges US to resist Israeli pressure to strike Iran

as a terrorist organisation is a "major strategic mistake", Araghchi warned. The Iranian army also blasted the move as "irresponsible and spite driven" while Israel hailed it as "historic".

A US military destroyer has docked in the port of Eilat, Israel's ynet news website reported yesterday, citing the military.

The news website said the destroyer's arrival at the southern port, on the Gulf of Aqaba and near Israel's southern border crossings with Egypt and Jordan, was pre-planned and part of cooperation between the Israeli and US militaries.

REFERENDUM
Civil servants
cannot push
for 'yes/no'

Says official; CA press wing debunks interim's 6-month extension

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Following clarification by the Election Commission, Public Administration Ministry Senior Secretary Ehsanul Hoque yesterday said government officials and employees will not be allowed to campaign in favour of either a "yes" or "no" vote in the upcoming referendum.

He made the remarks at a meeting with officials of the Rajshahi divisional administration, chaired by Divisional Commissioner ANM Bazlur Rashid at Bazlur's office.

Ehsanul said the current government is non-partisan and has no candidate or political position in the election process.

"Our responsibility is solely to organise a free, fair, acceptable and neutral election. In line with the Election Commission's decision, no government official or employee will be allowed to campaign for either 'yes' or 'no' in the referendum," he said, adding that officials may only encourage voters to participate but must not take any position.

He said whether people want change or not will be decided entirely by the voters.

The government remains neutral. Those who win the election will form the government, while the referendum gives

SEE PAGE 9 COL 3

Star TECH CORNER



NASA eyes February 2026 for moon mission

MD ZAHIDUR RABBI

NASA is preparing to send four astronauts on a 10-day journey around the Moon in early 2026, a mission that would mark humanity's first crewed voyage beyond Earth's orbit in more than half a century.

The flight, known as Artemis II, is designed to take astronauts further into space than any humans have travelled before. While the mission will not land on the lunar surface, it is intended as a crucial step towards a future landing under the Artemis programme, which aims to land astronauts to the Moon later in the decade.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 3



Federal workers and community members gather outside the VA Harbour Healthcare System in New York City, US, on Thursday, during a vigil for Alex Patti, who was fatally shot by federal immigration agents attempting to detain him in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

PHOTO: REUTERS

ENERGY SECTOR
Ukraine ready to halt attacks if Russia does so
Says Zelensky; Trump asks Putin to suspend strikes on Kyiv until Feb 1

REUTERS, Kyiv

Ukraine is ready to reciprocate if Russia halts its attacks on the country's energy infrastructure that has plunged the capital Kyiv into cold, President Volodymyr Zelensky said yesterday, adding there was no formal truce between the two countries.

US President Donald Trump said on Thursday that Russian President Vladimir Putin had agreed not to fire on Kyiv for a week due to cold weather. The Kremlin said yesterday that President Putin had received a personal request from Donald Trump to halt strikes on Kyiv until February 1 in order to create a favourable environment for peace negotiations.

Temperatures in the Ukrainian capital is forecast to plunge as low as minus 26 degrees Celsius tomorrow.

Zelensky said the opportunity to de-escalate the conflict was proposed by the United States during trilateral peace talks in Abu Dhabi last weekend. He added that the date or location for a follow-up round of talks, currently scheduled for tomorrow in the United Arab Emirates, could change.

AS CITIES GROW, wildlife fights to survive

A new documentary puts Bangladesh's vanishing biodiversity in focus

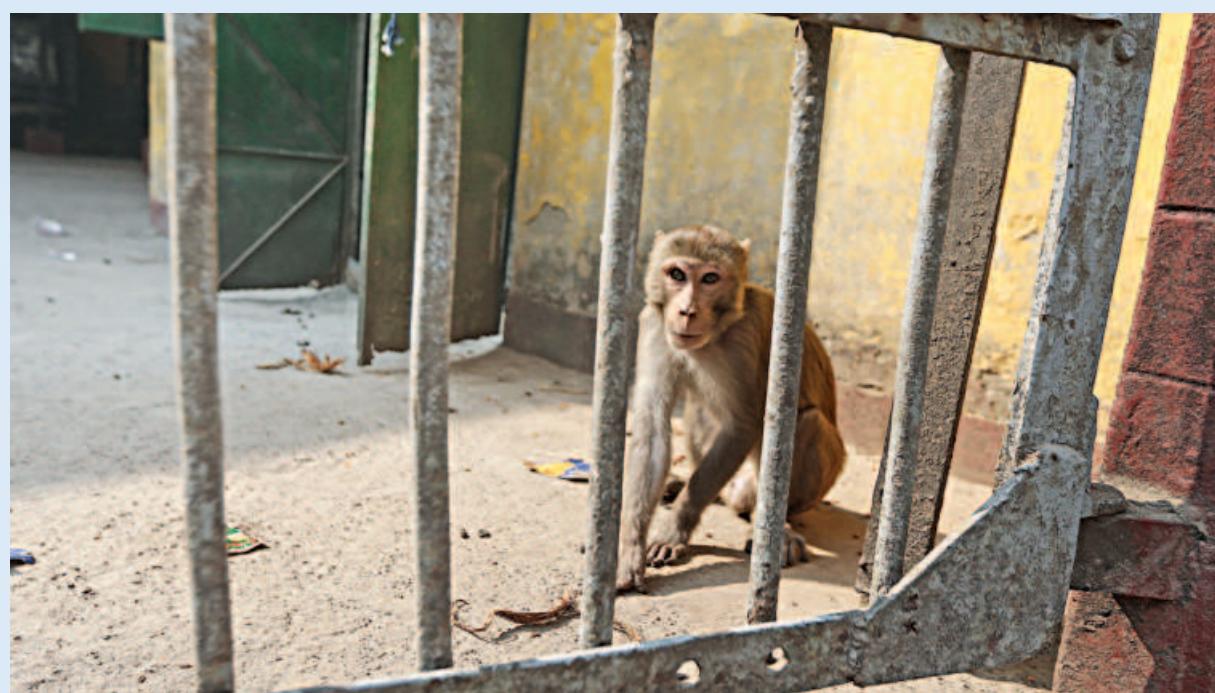
Despite being one of the most densely populated countries on earth, with a staggering 175 million people, Bangladesh still has wildlife. And some people want to protect the last fragments of wild Bangladesh.

RAFFAT BINTE RASHID

The January morning chill had given the narrow lane of Dinanath Sen Road in Gendaria a lazy and tranquil feel. It is home to Shadhana Aushodhalay, an herbal medicine store in old Dhaka. The building's longstanding tenants are a complex group of highly social Rhesus macaques, who pay the rent with their majestic camaraderie.

Without a care for the chaotic world around them, these creatures share Dhaka, our polluted, crowded megalopolis, with us humans, the selfish lot that rarely cares about the diversity of urban wildlife. Basking in the sun, it was quite surprising to see the frolicking monkeys, because the general perception among residents is that wildlife is scarce and poorly preserved.

That is true to an extent. Yet, interestingly, despite being one of the most densely populated countries on earth, with a staggering 175 million



endangered animals on earth, and the endangered masked finfoot, a bird once found in India and Thailand but now gone from those countries. Bangladesh is its last stronghold," says Nigel Alan Marven, the steadfast British naturalist and conservationist impassioned about wildlife in Bangladesh.

"The film highlights Bangladesh's rich biodiversity and the efforts of passionate locals protecting wildlife. It celebrates wildlife, acknowledges threats, and aims to inspire protection," Nigel says, reflecting on his experience of working with experts such as Prof Md Anwarul Islam, CEO of WildTeam and former professor and chairman of the Department of Zoology at Dhaka University.

Prof Anwar, one of the coordinators of the film, a Bangladesh-UK joint venture, is optimistic that Wild Bangladesh will promote ecotourism by raising awareness and building emotional connections between wildlife and local communities.

"Communities want to see tangible benefits from conserving wildlife, because nature becomes a low priority when people worry about the cost of living. Conserving wildlife benefits local people economically through ecotourism. The film will showcase the rich biodiversity of the country and tell success stories of how, by engaging communities, Bangladesh's wildlife and its habitats are conserved."

"In the Sundarbans, where there are reasonable populations of tigers, the Village Tiger Response Team's role in tiger conservation is one such story. The film will prove how 'seeing is believing' is fundamental for both wildlife conservation and ecotourism," says Anwarul Islam.

URBAN WILDLIFE
Twenty years ago, Dhaka boasted more wildlife than it does today. Mongooses, for one, were everywhere.

Versatile animals such as macaques, mongooses, flying foxes and other creatures are now barely hanging on. Porcupines still exist near the suburbs, but jungle cats, golden jackals and fishing cats can no longer survive in the city centre.

The loss of green spaces and road expansion have removed trees, hampering the existence of urban wildlife. The botanic gardens remain good habitats for birds such as orange-headed thrushes, owls and other colourful species. Fruit bats, or flying foxes, with wingspans of 1.5 metres, still roost there, even though roadside trees have been removed for road expansion. Golden

jackals survive on the outskirts, along with small pockets of mongooses and fruit bats, but their numbers are declining. Even adaptable creatures such as macaques are becoming increasingly rare.

There was once a rich population of elephants here, even twenty years ago, but now fewer than 500 remain. Habitat destruction and the refugee influx from Myanmar have worsened the situation. Bangladesh is doing a commendable job helping refugees, but forests are being cut down to accommodate them.

"There is, however, a sanctuary effort. A friend rescued an elephant from a circus; she's now 25 years old and living in tea plantations. The

sanctuary aims to take in elephants from circuses or from Dhaka so they can live in relative contentment. Collective action could protect them. It's possible, as shown by Singapore, where urban otters

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live in the city centre thanks to protected waterways," Nigel notes.

Protecting green spaces is key. If we do not protect them, Dhaka will become lifeless. The bottom line is that Dhaka must preserve its remaining gardens, greenery, green corridors, rough grasslands and patches of trees so that city animals can survive.

It used to be a city of parks, but as one of the fastest-growing megacities in the world, green spaces are disappearing. Bangladesh faces stiff challenges from refugees and climate change, particularly rising sea levels. These issues must also be considered.

ECOTOURISM AND ITS PROSPECTS
Ecotourism, though still largely untested, is becoming increasingly important in Bangladesh. With the documentary presenting the country's varied and colourful wildlife and creating awareness, ecotourism may bring positive benefits.

It helps people realise that wildlife is more valuable alive than dead and provides income opportunities. The

challenge, however, is that it must be managed carefully. If countries such as Costa Rica can show how successful ecotourism can be, it can work here too.

For tourists on short stays in Dhaka, the Botanical Garden can be a superb choice, with flying foxes hanging from trees and many bird species in the bamboo groves. The real potential of ecotourism, however, lies in Lawachara and Satchari National Parks, as well as the Sundarbans.

Forest reserves or preserved patches can charge entry fees for birdwatching and wildlife viewing. At least ten people Nigel knows have visited Bangladesh to see rare birds found nowhere else.

Young Bangladeshis are already guiding birdwatchers. Haris Deb Barma in Satchari, for example, earns his living as a bird guide, showing visitors species in the Satchari and Lawachara reserves.

"You can see Hoolock gibbons there. Bangladesh has ten species of primates, many of which are found in those parks. They are also excellent for birdwatching, with special ponds excavated so birds come to drink," Nigel notes.

Bangladeshis are working to protect turtles, stop overfishing and conserve forest patches with pangolins. Turtles are being reintroduced into the wild after being bred in captivity to boost populations. In Lawachara Reserve, rangers are being trained to protect rare species such as the elongated tortoise from poaching and trade.

"It was amazing to learn that most of the Sundarbans is in Bangladesh. I thought it was in India. We saw children singing about the Sundarbans and its importance. We filmed honey collection there. Infrastructure is a challenge. Foreigners visiting Rangamati or the Sundarbans need proper accommodation. In the Sundarbans, tourists stay on comfortable live aboard boats. There are nice hotels if you know where to look, especially with local experts like Professor Anwar," Nigel says, outlining an eco-visit to Bangladesh.

Mahfuz Russel, a passionate environmentalist and founder and executive director of the Pittachhara Forest and Biodiversity Conservation Initiative in East Khedachara, Matiranga, Khagrachhari, has been working to set up ecotourism initiatives to preserve rainforest patches. He is doing a formidable job of recovering and regenerating the habitat of Pittachhara Forest.

"Russel has valuable ideas about how ecotourism could develop in Bangladesh. The country lacks infrastructure now, but with strategically placed eco-lodges and accommodation, it could work well and contribute to habitat protection.

"There's still hope. The documentary celebrates wildlife. Of course, we touch on the problems animals face, but it's a starting point. Hopefully, people will watch it, realise what's still in the country, and do their utmost to protect it." Nigel remains optimistic.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



people, Bangladesh still has wildlife. And some people want to protect the last fragments of wild Bangladesh.

The people of Bangladesh need to value the importance of wildlife in its natural habitat. For the first time, an international documentary titled Wild Bangladesh, dedicated solely to the country's wildlife, is being produced, aiming to inspire ecotourism while promoting the protection of its rich biodiversity.

"People won't protect what they don't know about. One such consideration is protecting pangolins, one of the most critically

endangered animals on earth, and the endangered masked finfoot, a bird once found in India and Thailand but now gone from those countries. Bangladesh is its last stronghold," says Nigel Alan Marven, the steadfast British naturalist and conservationist impassioned about wildlife in Bangladesh.

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Those who remain invisible in Bangladesh's political imagination



Tea workers march in protest against the proposed economic zone on agricultural land at Chandpore Tea Garden in Habiganj, 2015.

PHOTO: PHILIP GAIN

PHILIP GAIN

The most invisible and unheard communities in Bangladesh include, among others, ethnic communities or adivasis, tea workers, Harijans (cleaners and sweepers), Rishis (cobblers), Kaiputras (a pig rearing community), Bedes (gypsies), Jaladas (a largely seafaring fisherfolk community concentrated in the coastal districts of Chattogram and Cox's Bazar), sex workers, Hijra or transgender persons, and Biharis. Together, these communities comprise around five million people.

These communities face acute discrimination, wage deprivation, hostility, indignity, and various other forms of human rights violations due to their religion, occupation, ethnic identity, culture, migration history, and geographic locations, among other factors. They are among the over 40 million people in Bangladesh who are multidimensionally poor or extremely poor. What is more troubling is that many of these communities are identified as "untouchables" or "Dalit."

When the interim government embarked on an ambitious reform agenda and began setting up commissions across different sectors with the stated aim of ending discrimination, the communities that suffer the most from social and economic injustice hoped that dedicated reform commissions would

be established to protect their interests.

However, to their deep disappointment, no such specific reform commission was formed, nor were any institutional initiatives taken to address their shared and distinct challenges. Now, with national polls knocking at the door, there is still no clear commitment from political parties towards these communities, who remain largely invisible and whose voices continue to go unheard.

Those of us who have worked closely with these communities for decades are in a position to raise concrete issues and concerns that political parties must take seriously. If political parties genuinely claim to represent the people and all citizens, they have a responsibility to do justice to the country's diversity by formally recognising these communities.

This requires clear commitments to constitutionally recognise ethnic communities as "Adivasi" and to ensure dignity and respect for other groups who, because of their occupations, religious identities, or social positioning, remain economically poor and socially and politically excluded.

Some communities are not only subjected to everyday discrimination within social and political culture but are also systematically exploited for the economic benefit of political and business interests. The most extreme examples include tea workers, whose current maximum daily cash wage

stands at Tk 187.43, and Harijans (city cleaners) in Sreemangal Municipality, whose monthly salary is Tk 1,000—up from Tk 500 until December 2024. Many other communities survive on similarly meagre incomes, living hand to mouth. Poverty, combined with the stigma attached to their work and identities, has trapped these groups in cycles of deprivation and exclusion across generations.

"The political parties are coming to us, but we want clear manifesto commitments to end wage deprivation and discrimination," says Rambhajan Kairi, a leading tea workers' union leader. "Tea communities and Harijans are entirely landless and deserve legal rights to the land they have lived on for generations." Tea workers also demand an end to routine violations of labour laws.

The main criticism of current Social Security Programmes (SSP) is that they remain largely nominal, with half or more of the budget benefiting the non-poor. Economist Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman argues that expanding budgets alone is insufficient; what matters is state commitment to combating corruption, ensuring efficient governance, and delivering justice, particularly in programme design and implementation. He stresses the need for targeted support for marginalised communities, women, the disabled, low-income occupational groups, and youth—issues that deserve serious

debate during election campaigns.

One of the most pressing concerns for completely landless and marginalised communities is access to khas (public) land. Bangladesh has an estimated three to four million acres of identified khas land, including agricultural, non-agricultural land and water bodies. Fair distribution of this land to the landless would be a crucial step towards securing entitlements and enabling pathways out of poverty. Yet only a small number of landless households receive khas land, while local elites, politicians and other influential groups benefit disproportionately. Despite its significance, the issue of khas land distribution is largely absent from election campaigns, and landless communities remain weakly positioned to claim their rights.

Equally urgent are long-standing land, forest and environmental issues affecting ethnic communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and other forested regions. These communities have received little meaningful attention from the interim government. It is striking that the July Charter makes no reference to "environment", "forest" or "climate change". The erosion of customary rights in forest areas dates

efforts were made to draft legislation to address this problem, including the proposed Anti-Discrimination Act, 2022, which was tabled in Parliament but never passed.

Although more than twenty international conventions and national laws exist to protect small ethnic groups, tea workers and other marginalised communities, implementation remains weak. Many public and private institutions lack clear guidance, while key laws—such as the Labour Act, 2006, and the State Acquisition and Tenancy Act, 1950—are frequently misused or violated. This has led to the loss of Adivasi land and the exclusion of communities not officially recognised as "Aborigines", allowing unlawful land transfers and leaving legal protections ineffective. These pressing realities, largely missing from public debate, must be directly addressed in election manifestos.

Bangladesh's 13th parliamentary election, scheduled for February 12, 2026 alongside a constitutional referendum, represents a critical moment in the country's democratic journey. The continued absence of concrete policies, commitments and implementation frameworks for the



Fishing boats of the Jaladas community at sea.

CREDIT: PHILIP GAIN

back to the British-era Act VII of 1865 and continues today, as communities steadily lose access to forest commons. They expect political parties to address these concerns in their election manifestos, but so far there has been little reassurance. Addressing these issues requires political courage and grounded engagement.

Discrimination remains a pervasive reality for many marginalised groups, stripping them of dignity and equal citizenship. Ending discrimination is essential to restoring their status as full and respected members of society. During the previous government,

protection of marginalised and socially excluded communities remains deeply concerning. These groups are still largely invisible in mainstream political discourse. Yet there is cautious hope that political parties will learn from past failures and take meaningful steps to recognise marginalised communities as citizens entitled to dignity, equality and full participation in public life.

Philip Gain is a researcher and director of the Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD). He can be reached at philip.gain@gmail.com.

Bound by dadan

How debt fuels forced labour in brick kilns



Rows of freshly moulded bricks dry under the open sky as chimneys belch smoke in the background—an everyday scene in Bangladesh's brick kilns. Behind this production landscape lies the hidden toil of workers bound by debt, forced to endure long hours, harsh conditions, and systemic exploitation to keep the kilns running.

PHOTO: STAR

fully comply with labour laws, particularly those concerning working hours and the prohibition of forced labour.

Pijuash Baulia Pintu, a human rights activist from Bangladesh's deltaic regions, explains that brick kiln labour is recruited through a cycle of perpetual debt, locally known as dadan (informal credit). Towards the end of the monsoon, during the lean months of July and August, dadan agents are commonly found in villages and local bazaars.

These agents target impoverished households by offering small loans—typically between Tk 2,000 and Tk 10,000—similar to those provided by mohajons (moneylenders). Faced with urgent financial crises and limited alternatives, many accept these loans.

Unable to repay the accumulating debt, borrowers are eventually compelled to migrate to brick kilns to work it off, effectively trapping them in an exploitative labour system.

In recent years, agricultural land in the deltaic regions has shrunk significantly due to saline water intrusion. As a result, many agricultural labourers, along with those affected by river erosion, floods, and droughts, are increasingly drawn into brick kiln work as a last resort.

Bappi Mondal, from Shyamnagar upazila in Satkhira, joined a brick kiln in Nabinagar, Savar, early in the season (September) under compulsion after taking an advance loan from a sardar.

Regardless of extreme cold or heat, work

started at the same time each day. "We are woken between 2:45 and 3:00 a.m. After working continuously until 7:00 a.m., we get only a 20-minute break to eat," he said. "Work then continues until around 11:00 a.m. or 12:30 p.m. We return home briefly, but work resumes again at around 1:00 p.m. and continues until 4:30 or 5:30 in the afternoon. By the time everything is finished, it is around 7:00 or 7:30 in the evening. Altogether, we work about 15–16 hours a day, with no weekly holidays."

Such hours are not exceptional but routine in brick kilns. Unable to endure the workload, Bappi fled after three months, midway through the season. As a result, he and his mother were subjected to abuse and violence because he failed to complete the six-month contract, despite having taken an advance of Tk 80,000.

Like Bappi, anyone who leaves before the season ends is required to repay double the loan amount; otherwise, they face abuse and inhuman treatment—an unwritten rule enforced in such cases.

Even when workers fall seriously ill, they are compelled to work. Those who attempt to escape are often caught by sardars, beaten, and sometimes tied with chains or ropes used for livestock. Workers are dragged back and assaulted with bricks, while owners usually remain silent. Most abuse is carried out by sardars, who are under contract to ensure uninterrupted production throughout the season.

Last year, Bappi lost his father to a heart attack after he could no longer endure the excessive workload in a brick kiln. In Bangladesh, there is no reliable survey of deaths in brick kilns, and accidents and fatalities are often concealed by owners.

Mud-made red bricks have long symbolised sustainable infrastructure, from building homes to megaprojects. Yet we rarely pause to consider the invisibilised labour system within brick-kiln manufacturing and the

human cost behind it: the brutal extraction of labour that reduces kiln workers to forced labourers, treated less as human beings and more as labouring machines. The dadan trap binds workers in ways that leave them unable to escape, compelling them to endure excessive and torturous work that often results in slow death through illness and chronic health complications.

Under the Constitution and existing labour laws, all forms of forced labour are prohibited and constitute criminal offences. However, the working hours and recruitment practices in most brick kilns clearly amount to forced labour, yet remain largely invisible. Why do these inhuman labour practices still persist? On this issue, labour law expert Advocate AKM Nasim stated: "The non-implementation of labour law provisions for brick manufacturing workers is widespread. Basic workers' rights, including the issuance of appointment letters, remain largely unimplemented. Workers are also reluctant to seek redress through legal channels such as DIFE (Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments) and labour courts, as these are neither convenient nor accessible to them. Despite the rights guaranteed by law, weak enforcement allows employers to engage workers on their own terms, disregarding legal requirements."

Taslima Akter, another labour rights activist, said that while bonded and forced labour are legally prohibited, such practices continue in less visible forms in brick kilns. Seasonal contracts, she added, effectively imprison workers, making the system inhumane and unacceptable. She called for stronger legal protections, targeted labour policies for informal-sector workers, and special task forces to dismantle exploitative labour contracts.

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The future of BENGAL DELTA



The Padma River, once a vibrant and vital watercourse, is now facing an alarming trend of gradual drying.

PHOTO: ASKER IBNE FIROZ

DIPEN BHATTACHARYA

The making of a delta

During the peak of the monsoon season, it takes the high Himalayan water only days to reach the Bay of Bengal; however, it is a different story for the sediment coming from those high places. It is the material from which the Bengal Delta has been built; some of the sediment will never reach the sea, and some will not only reach the sea but make its way down past the equator. The latter, almost 15% of the total sediment load, has helped to create the largest submarine fan in the world, the Bengal Fan, which stretches almost 3,000 kilometres south of the Bangladesh coastline. The ancient origin of the Fan, which can be traced to the Miocene Epoch more than 20 million years ago, also signals the initiation of the Bengal Delta on which the Padma River lies today.

But I want you to imagine a time long ago before the Miocene Epoch, almost 140 million years ago during the Cretaceous Period, when the

west-flowing rivers, thus forcing the course of the Ganges eastward. The paleo Ganges-Padma likely entered the Bengal Foredeep just north of the Rajmahal Hills in eastern Bihar, the route that it maintains even today. At that time, the sea was located southeast of the so-called hinge zone—the line where the Indian continental craton meets the oceanic crust. This hinge zone runs south from the Rajmahal Hills to the Shillong Plateau, passing through Kushtia, Pabna and Tangail, before connecting with the Dauki Fault in northern Mymensingh and Sylhet.

At the hinge zone, right under the upper Padma, the continental crust dives almost five kilometres downwards to meet the oceanic crust. At the same time, there is evidence that an ancient Brahmaputra River entered the Bengal Basin through the Sylhet Depression, east of the Shillong Plateau. It is only within the last few million years that the uplift of the Shillong Plateau forced the Brahmaputra to change its course towards the west. Both these paleo rivers emptied into a sea that bordered Sylhet and Mymensingh to the north, and Rajshahi to the west, bringing sediment onto the oceanic crust to establish the foundation of the Bengal Delta. It required more than 20 million years of intense sedimentation, over a deposition area of more than 100,000 square kilometres and up to a depth of 20 kilometres, to build the Delta. During this period, the land extended about 500 kilometres south from the Rangpur Saddle that separates the Bengal Foredeep from the Himalayan Foredeep.

About three million years ago, the Earth started to experience a regular ice-age cycle with periods between 100,000 and 150,000 years and interglacial intervals of 15,000 to 50,000 years. During the ice-age periods, the sea would retreat, and the rivers would cut gorges into the Delta and carry sediment directly to the ocean without depositing much on the land. It was only during the interglacial intervals that the Delta would grow through flooding and sedimentation. Since the last glacial maximum, about 18,000 years ago, the Delta has been in another growth stage.

What builds a delta? Rivers flooding their banks deliver sediment that keeps delta plains elevated above sea level. Over time, the weight of overlying sediments compresses the layers below, squeezing out water and causing the land to sink. This subsidence may also occur due to tectonic shifting of the underlying ocean crust and water withdrawal by humans. The sinking land allows floods to occur and fresh layers of sediment to be laid down; this mechanism keeps the delta plain always very close to sea-level height, even as deltas expand. During the last glacial maximum, the Bangladesh coastline was situated approximately two hundred kilometres south of the modern coastline. Since then, the sea has risen about 120 metres, submerging much of the land. After a series of advances and retreats, the modern Bengal Delta started to emerge about 7,000 years ago.

This history reveals a fundamental truth: a delta has an intrinsic relationship with sea-level rise. As contradictory as it may sound, it is during interglacial periods, when sea levels rise, that the Delta is replenished and expands. A delta can never rise very high above sea level. If it becomes too elevated, flooding stops and no new sediment is deposited. When excessive flooding raises the land, it subsequently sinks due to subsidence, and only the next major flood brings more sediment. Therefore,



Bathymetry of the Bay of Bengal showing the submarine Bengal Fan and the "Swatch of No Ground" submarine canyon.

the fundamental characteristic of a delta is to remain close to sea level.

Understanding the delta's nature helps us make sense of its history. There is considerable debate among specialists and non-specialists about whether the Hooghly, flowing through West Bengal, or the Padma is the original continuation of the Ganges. I think this debate misses the point that river avulsion is necessary to build a delta. The city of Kolkata and the modern confluence of the rivers Padma and Jamuna sit on ten kilometres of sediment deposition. This can only happen if the Padma changed its position hundreds, if not thousands, of times since the inception of the Delta.

The avulsion timescale of the major rivers in the Bengal Delta is about 2,000 years. This means a river like the Padma would fill its basin, with an extension of 150 kilometres to 200 kilometres, within a few thousand years before changing its course.

There is evidence that the main Ganges-Padma flow has diverted towards the east over the last 10,000 years, flowing through the Hooghly, Gorai and Arial Khan, and finally settling into the current Padma-Meghna flow. I would argue that for most of its existence, the Padma, after emerging through the Rajmahal Hills, flowed east (possibly through the Atrai Basin/Chalan Beel area) and then turned sharply south to meet a deep submarine canyon called the Swatch of No Ground. In this canyon, just 60 kilometres south of Dublar Char in the Sundarbans, the sea floor gradually drops from 20 metres to a depth of one kilometre over a distance of 100 kilometres, whereas the sea floor on the sides of the canyon remains high, dropping to a depth of approximately 200 metres over the same distance. It was during multiple ice-age periods in the last few million years that the Ganges-Padma river system carved out this deep canyon. These were periods when the sea retreated, exposing land a few hundred kilometres south of its current position. Currently, the Swatch canyon serves as a conduit for the transfer of coastal sediment towards the deep sea. But this ancient geological story is not over. The delta is still being built—and the question facing us today is whether it can survive what comes next.

The Delta's future
Water from five countries—India, Nepal, Bhutan, China and Bangladesh—covering 1.75 million square kilometres across the Himalayas and their foothills flows through the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna river system into the Bay of Bengal. Although this

multiple earthquakes, intensive land use, enhanced agricultural practices, and the restriction of sediment deposition caused by embankments.

Recent studies offer conflicting views on whether sedimentation can keep pace with sea-level rise. Some researchers have found that in the delta west of the Padma-Meghna estuary, sediment builds up at rates exceeding two centimetres per year—double the rate of local sea-level rise. Even accounting for land sinking, they conclude that accumulation reduces the risk of coastal flooding in the central lower Bengal Delta. After Cyclone Aila in 2009, when embankments failed, newly reconnected landscapes received tens of centimetres of sediment—decades' worth of normal buildup arriving in a single storm. Studies of the Padma-Meghna estuary suggest that for predicted sea-level rise of 60–100 centimetres over the next century, vertical accretion could keep pace. The pattern seems clear: where rivers meet tides, where embankments break and water flows free, the delta rebuilds itself.

Yet many experts remain sceptical. The sediment flux reaching coastal areas, they argue, may not be enough—particularly given sedimentation's variable nature, especially when dams built upstream restrict sediment flow, and in the face of accelerating sea-level projections. They call for extensive data collection on sedimentation, land sinking, river flow, and sea level to establish reliable patterns. Some climate models predict monsoon intensification that might enhance sedimentation, but this remains uncertain. What we do know is this: the delta is not a museum piece. It is still being formed, still reaching towards the sea. And for it to survive, sediment must flow unhindered from the Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal.

To understand what is at stake, we might look back to when humans first encountered this delta. About fifty thousand years ago, a band of humans left Africa, crossed the Red Sea, traced the Arabian Peninsula, and then followed the Indian coastline to stumble into the jungles of the Bengal Delta—a landscape vastly different from today's. They might have seen shal, garjan and mango trees, as well as Sumatran and Java rhinoceroses roaming near the wetlands bordering the Padma. The rhinos might have shared space with powerful aurochs, the ancestors of modern-day cattle. The humans might have seen giant-toothed stegodonts, the ancestors of modern-day elephants. Tigers were still not there, only beginning their entry onto this land from the north, from China. These ancient humans might have seen and heard the roaring Padma making its way into the Swatch of No Ground canyon. They had to cross it on their way to Australia.

That delta—volatile, powerful, indifferent to human presence—is the same delta we live on today. The delta they encountered is the same one that subsided, advanced and retreated, drowned and re-emerged. We can learn from the geological prehistory of the Bengal Delta how to help sediment keep pace with the rising sea. For that, we need to allow the rivers to do what they have always done: flood, meander, build. The delta asks only that we not stand in its way.

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This image, captured on 31 March 2020, shows the Ganges Delta—the world's largest river delta—spanning Bangladesh and India's West Bengal, shaped by the sediment-laden Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers, with the Ganges visible on the left, the Brahmaputra on the right, and the snow-covered Himalayas rising at the top of the frame.

supercontinent Gondwana, located south of the equator, broke apart. The evidence of this violent period, which gave rise to the Indian tectonic plate, can still be found in the Rajmahal basalt and andesite stones a few kilometres below the surface of northeastern Bangladesh. About fifty million years ago, the Indian plate, like a Viking funeral ship carrying the fossils of dinosaurs and other fauna and flora, drifted northward and started to collide with the Eurasian plate. Over time, the sediment from the Deccan Mountains built up a delta on its eastern margin, but the Himalaya Mountains had to rise for the initiation of the Bengal Delta and the formation of the Ganges-Padma-Meghna river system.

As the Indian plate pushed northward over millions of years, the Tibetan Plateau rose much higher above sea level, initiating an intense monsoon system. This, in turn, gave rise to numerous rivers that ran from the Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal and to the Arabian Sea. The Ganges initially possibly flowed westward into the Arabian Sea. During the Miocene Epoch, about 15 million years ago, the Aravalli Hills in western India impinged northwards to partition the Himalayan foreland into east- and

FARMING SUPERFOOD in the sea

From collecting washed-up seaweed to cultivating it, a small coastal experiment now supports 1,000 households in Cox's Bazar

For generations, ethnic communities in the southeastern regions have consumed seaweed for its nutritional and medicinal value. The practice of collecting seaweed is therefore not new. What is new is cultivating it as a livelihood.

MOKAMMEL SHUVO

Anwara Begum reads the sea much like others read a calendar. She knows what the tide will leave behind, where it will settle, and when to go looking. For years, that instinctive knowledge earned her money from collecting and selling seashells.

So, when she noticed something new at the Burmese Market in Cox's Bazar about 15 years ago, she recognised it instantly.

Thin, black, hair-like strands were being sold by Rakhine traders. The vermicelli-like seaweed was stacked beside jars of pickles and piles of dried fish. To many buyers, it was just another unfamiliar coastal ingredient.

But to Anwara, a local of Nuniachhara in the beach town, it was something she had seen countless times clinging to rocks along the Moheshkhali Channel during low tide.

The seaweed, used by the local Rakhine community in soups, curries and pickles, was coming from Myanmar. Anwara quickly realised the same marine plant was already washing up near her home.



At the time, she made her living collecting seashells from the shore and selling them at the Burmese Market, long known as a must-visit spot for tourists looking for showpieces and souvenirs to take home.

Seaweed was not then a part of Anwara's trade. But the demand was visible, and the resource cost nothing. She began gathering the black seaweed from the beach and selling it to the same Rakhine buyers.

What started as a small addition to her shell business would quietly grow into something much bigger in the

years that followed.

For generations, ethnic communities in the southeastern regions have consumed seaweed for its nutritional and medicinal value, using it as vegetables and salads. The practice of collecting seaweed is therefore not new. What is new is cultivating it as a livelihood.

ROPE OF HOPE

Anwara's shift from foraging to farming came unexpectedly.

A scientist from the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI), Mostaq Ahmed, approached her and several other coastal women with a proposal to cultivate seaweed on a commercial scale. At first, the idea was met with doubt.

"We did not know how to grow it," Anwara recalls. "We only knew how to collect it from the shore."

BARI stepped in with training, seedlings and simple tools, such as bamboo poles and 10-metre ropes. Farmers were taught how to plant seaweed underwater, how long to leave it in the water, and when to harvest.

Initially, two species were introduced -- black, hair-like *Gracilaria* and green, lettuce-like *Ulva*. The *Ulva* variety was brought from Japan due to strong market demand.

Farmers adapted quickly, learning to work with the seasons. From November, seaweed is cultivated along Nuniachhara beach for the next seven months. In winter, lower rainfall increases salinity and water clarity, creating ideal conditions for growth. Seaweed also grows naturally along the coast during this period and is used as seed for cultivation.

Around 500 farmers are now growing seaweeds under the programme of BARI. Another 500 cultivate seaweed across Cox's Bazar with support from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and several non-government organisations.

According to farmers, seaweed is grown mainly through long-line and floating raft methods.

In the long-line system, seedlings are tied every 20 centimetres along a rope, which is then secured with small poles and left floating in shallow water. In the raft system ropes are similarly hung from a bamboo raft and used to hang seedlings. Within

15 days, the first harvest is ready. Farmers can then harvest at least twice a month. Each green lettuce-like plant can weigh up to 400 grammes.

After harvesting, the seaweed is washed, cleaned and dried on the beach. Apart from planting and harvesting, the work requires little labour.

Anwara now cultivates both species and, due to her experience, produces more than most newcomers.

She sells her harvest not only in the local Rakhine market but also in ethnic communities at Lama and Alikadam in Bandarban. Each harvest brings her around Tk 3,000-Tk 4,000.

Mariam Begum, another early adopter, said interest continues to grow as the income potential becomes clearer.

In popularising the cultivation, BARI's role has been crucial. Since 2016, Mostaq Ahmed and his team have led experimental trials, gradually building confidence through training and demonstration.

Maksudul Haque, a research assistant at BARI, said they distributed 1,000 ropes last year and plan to distribute 2,000 this year. Each rope produces about two kilogrammes of *Ulva* a month.

Apart from income, the initiative has created a sustainable livelihood model, especially for women and marginalised coastal households.

FROM SHORELINE TO MARKET

Seaweed farming is now reshaping local trade as well as household incomes in Cox's Bazar.

Fresh black seaweed sells for about Tk 100 per kilogramme, while dried black fetches around Tk 300. Dried green seaweed, which has a higher demand, sells for about Tk 1,000 per kilogramme.

Farmers like Shafi Alam supply markets at Lama, Alikadam and Bandarban town. Others sell directly to hotels in Cox's Bazar. Traders, seeing the opportunity, have also entered the business. They buy directly from farmers and supply markets in Dhaka and Mymensingh.

Md Noman, owner of Messrs Alamgir Store in the beach town, purchased Tk 1.5 lakh worth of dried green seaweed last year and expects to buy more this season.

He supplies five-star hotels in Cox's Bazar and receives orders from



comes from aquaculture. China accounts for around

60 percent of global output, followed by Indonesia with 25 percent. The Republic of Korea and the Philippines together contribute about 9 percent, said FAO in its "Seaweed Trade and Market Potential" report.

Wild harvesting has remained largely unchanged at around 900,000 tonnes a year. Between 2021 and 2023, global exports reached 819,000 tonnes, valued at \$3.2 billion. Carrageenan accounted for nearly half of all trade, while edible seaweed made up roughly a third, according to the UN agency.

The edible seaweed trade is concentrated in East Asia, while developing countries supply most dried seaweed for industrial use.

In Bangladesh, seaweed grows naturally along the shores of Saint Martin's Island, Inani Beach and parts of the Cox's Bazar coast. With a 710-kilometre unbroken coastline and an expanded maritime territory of 118,813 square kilometres, Bangladesh sits on a resource that could reshape coastal economies if developed carefully.

BLUE ECONOMY, MOSTLY UNTAPPED

As seaweed cultivation spreads across the coastal communities, entrepreneurs are paying attention.

Lutfor Rahman, executive director of GreenTech Foundation Bangladesh, a non-profit organisation dedicated to promoting environmental sustainability and social responsibility, recently visited Nuniachhara to assess production capacity. "Returns from seaweed cultivation are enormous compared to most crops," he said. Industrial investment, he believes, could turn small farms into a scalable sector and open a new chapter in the blue economy.

The limits are practical. Seed supply is still tight, and farmers lack proper drying, storage and transport facilities to scale up production.

Anwara still works along the same stretch of coast. The sea dictates when she plants and when she harvests. What has changed is the return. What was once an uncertain day's earnings from shells has turned into a predictable income during the season.



PHOTOS: MOKAMMEL SHUVO